

Homer, *the slut*



Issue Ten

Contents

Coming Straight From The Heart	Andrew Muir	1-8
Focus On: <i>It's Alright Ma, (I'm Only Bleeding)</i>	Paula K.V. Radice	1-20
Across The Borderline	Bob Forryan	1-5
An American Tune	Richard Williams	1-2
Visions Of Johanna	Alain Blondot	1-9
Some Other Kinds Of Songs	John Siverns	1-3
Bits & Bobs (Including cuttings)	Andrew Muir/Pia Parviainen	1-38
A Review Of The Reviews	Mark Carter	1-3
The Two Dylans	Mike Jackson	1-8
Paul Williams Interview	Andrew Muir	1-6
Sweet Gift Of Gab	Letters	1-9
A Note On: Joan Baez	Michael Gray	1
From Behind A Burning Bush	J.R. Stokes	1-12
Cartoon History by Mark Carter	Subscribers' Insert	
Cartoons & Ads	Throughout	

J.R. Stokes and Mark Carter write for **Freewheelin'** and Bob Forryan and Mike Jackson write for **Judas**. These are privately circulated Dylan fanzines.

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The Warmline: On 071-385-1114, I update Dylan news and gossip (nb. It is "gossip" not "gospel") about twice a week. You can also leave any Dylan news after my message.

Compuserve: my e-mail address for compuserve is 100137,3715 - you can contact me via internet on 100137.3715@CompuServe.COM. I shall be passing The Warmline news on to the **Highway 61 Digest** and, possibly, other Dylan Bulletin Boards.

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Wed 21 July: Homer meets Dylan; one of them is impressed the other is impressive.

I'm at an important meeting, I rush back in late from lunch. I get a message that Alex, my brother-in-law, wants me to call him urgently. I gather it is something very urgent indeed. I have to go into the meeting as I'm already late. I reckon that it can only be one of two things: an illness in the family or something Dylan-related. If the former he surely would have said, I have to assume it is the latter and sit in a ferment of worry and nerves (I presume that Dylan is on telly or that some big news has broken) for the eternity of 100 minutes that follow.

The minute the meeting ends, I rush out to 'phone Alex. I'm more than stunned to hear that Dylan has been in Camden and that Alex has stood next to him. (Unable to speak but in the line of the video as Dylan walked backwards into a cafe.) One of Alex's colleagues even spoke to Bob & got an autograph with a lovely little personal message for Alex. Stunned, pleased, a bit jealous - all those feelings at once with the nagging question: *Could he still be there?*

Alex is still talking, of a song possibly called *Blood In My Eye*, of Dylan singing with a busker. Of the autograph he has. This is all too much. He goes. I 'phone Larry. General disbelief and astonishment later, Larry says he cannot possibly get there but will 'phone a friend in Camden to see what has happened/if anything is still happening. He tells me to call back in 20 minutes. Five minutes later I call him back. He hasn't got through to his friend. I ask him - very precisely - to tell me that there is no possibility that Dylan is still there and that I've to be sensible and go home. He exactly follows my instructions; I hang up the 'phone, stop the first taxi and ask the driver to take me to Camden.

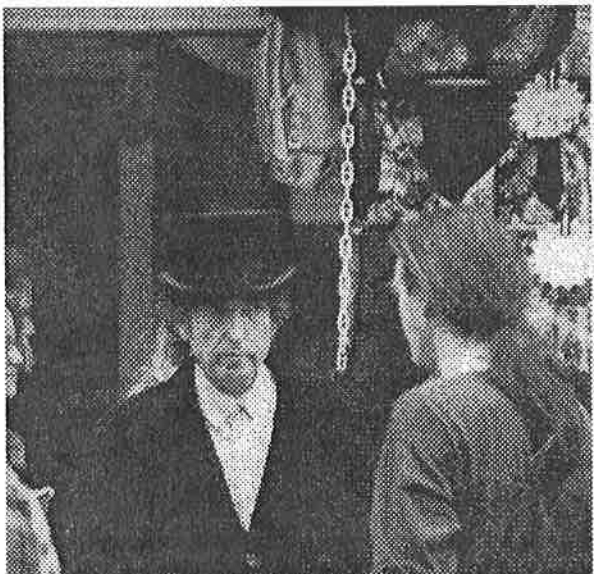
Within three minutes we hit a traffic jam. I gnaw at my fingers, fingernails, knuckles, wrists and arms, still the taxi crawls along. I have the bright idea of calling *Compendium Bookshop* who sell *Homer, the slut*. I tell the driver that I'll be back but must run & make a 'phone call; I have no worries that I'll catch him up. I think that I'd better appear cool and collected - after all Dylan probably left ages ago.

Hello, I supply you with Homer, the slut, a Dylan magazine, do you need any more copies?

Funny you should ring just now, he's sitting straight across the road at the window of a restaurant.....BRRRR!

I impress upon the driver that, traffic jam notwithstanding, I have to be in Camden High Street NOW. I expect he couldn't make out any of my words but he got the idea. Sooner than I'd thought possible, we were in Camden High Street.

I get the taxi to stop straight across from *Compendium Bookshop*. Sure enough there is a restaurant there, called *Flukes Cradle*. I walk in, for Chris from *Compendium* to have seen him Dylan would have had to have been in the room where I now stood.



The room was empty of Dylan, bereft of Bob.

I trudge across to *Compendium* to ask when he left, what they saw etc. They - kindly looking after my interests - grab me at the door and say:

He's still there, he's in the back now, having a meal.

Can I have a Homer, the slut?

Yes, but don't take the top one, it's dog-eared. Take two and bring one back signed.

On your bike!

I take two and go back across to *Flukes Cradle*. It is a very hot day but I'm beginning to sweat even more than that accounts for. My plan is simple - I'll go into the restaurant and sit as close to Dylan as possible, and ask for his autograph if there is a convenient opportunity as he leaves. I pass through the bar, thinking that above all I must be inconspicuous. I go into the restaurant and....OH MY GOD HE'S REALLY THERE! OK, I went in knowing he would be there but seeing him really there, like really him, really sitting there....too much! [I've read that in moments of shock or pain your body is

supposed to have a kind of automatic defence system; I've obviously been programmed wrongly as when I went into shock my body went onto the attack. Knees buckling, head spinning and heart attempting to smash through the ribs!]

He's wearing a top hat, sitting in profile, that nose, those curls; visions of Blackbushe and all that '78 meant to me seeing him live for the first time, visions of so many years before and after that. I stand stock still. I somehow remember that I am supposed to be inconspicuous.

Dylan's table was down a few stairs to the left. I go to sit at the nearest table to him on my level of the restaurant (a whole other level) and try to be cool. I pick up a menu, though I know I'll never swallow anything I order. The menu slips through my sweaty paws. I decide I'm too conspicuous so I move to the next nearest table which just happens to have a better view of our man. I realize I am, in fact, totally conspicuous as Dylan and his entourage are the only people in the restaurant apart from me. *Maybe I'm not supposed to be there?* I think and this thought prompts others that remind me I always said I'd never disturb him in this way and that I was acting very stupidly. I leave the restaurant and go back to the front bar.

I'm feeling pretty happy, seeing him so close is a big thrill.

I order a shandy. I sit down. I stand up. I sit down again. I move table. I decide on an alternate strategy. I could go downstairs again and ask someone if they could get Dylan to sign a *Homer*. This I do, whispering my request and stressing that I only want it if it will not unduly trouble Dylan.

Go and ask him yourself.

I glance up at Dylan, a mere four seats away:

No, I don't want to disturb him and anyway it isn't physically possible.

Ok, maybe

I'll be sitting in the bar if you manage to get it signed. Thanks a lot.

I sneak back out and wait. A few minutes - or eternity - pass. My *Homer* is returned, this person doesn't feel it is right for him to present it to Dylan. Fair enough I think. I'm happy enough and have remembered all the stories about him being pestered by fans. I'll just sit and watch him leave.

A few more minutes pass and someone comes over to me and says:

Go now! Now's a good time.

I stand up, hesitate, look doubtful.

You'll never have a better chance in your life, go now.

I go. Back in the restaurant only Dylan's table now occupied. The furthest away table; Dylan, naturally, the most difficult person to get near to. To get to him I'll have to push past someone I don't recognize, then Dave Stewart.¹

If I'd thought that my heart was pounding before - and, hey, it was - it was doing something else altogether this time. There were four young looking people at the table; three on the far side, one nearest me then next to him Dave Stewart and next to him, Himself. Looking absolutely gorgeous but you know what they say about "an aura around him"? Well, I'd always thought that was nonsense - or, rather, a projection of our feelings. I was wrong. The aura is almost tangible. My legs are threatening to give way before my rib cage. I try to detach my tongue from the roof of my mouth and my jaw from the floor.

At this moment there is a babble of conversation in the room. Dave Stewart is facing Dylan - who is staring straight ahead in profile (and *what* a profile) - asking questions quite forcibly. I cannot make the questions out due to the talk amongst the others. Dylan is not responding at all. I push past the first person between me and Bob.

¹ I have returned to the restaurant since, and this is, in fact, incorrect. I could have walked right around the lower level of the restaurant and entered right at Dylan's seat. At the time I never realized this.



A silence falls around the table with the exception of Dave Stewart's drumming questions. I cannot make out the words because my heart is now beating so hard that my ears are drumming louder. I try my pen for the last time - but I'd tried it once too many times and it ran out - luckily I'd brought eight with me, so I fished out my seventh last. I'm now standing right beside Dave Stewart's chair. Dylan is within arm's reach.

The movement in getting **Homer** and the working pen out alerts Dave Stewart to the fact that there is someone behind him and that everything has gone quiet. He stops talking and looks around and up at me. His look is marvellous: it says "Oh no not another one of these Dylan nutters". (In a kindly way however, later I admire his ready acceptance of himself as a mere pop star beside someone who is a real Star.) He moves his chair slightly, I help him move it a little more. I am now standing right beside Bob Dylan.

There is total silence.

Dylan just keeps staring ahead, not reacting to the sudden silence or anything. This lasts for 7 zillion aeons, or about two seconds in real time.

Well this is it, after eighteen years of interest - some have called it obsessional - in the Man, I'm at the point many of us have thought about. What am I going to say? I have no idea. Staying alive is only barely within my grasp at this moment. Thinking stopped some time ago. I tear my tongue from the roof of my mouth.

Excuse me, Mr. Dylan.

I squeak.

HE MOVES - and how - the head swivels round in an instant, he stares into my face (or, at least, the rivers of sweat where my face should be) and says² interrogatively

Yeeeah?

I am dead. It is not a pleasant feeling. I want my mummy and daddy. I want the ground to swallow me up and never let me out again.

I am reborn and mysteriously function

I hold out a copy of **Homer** issue 9. I force the Sahara Desert above my chin to respond; the sand becomes a torrent of burbling water. Something along the following lines pours out:

Could you please sign this? Of course, it doesn't matter if you don't and I'm very sorry for disturbing you, I realize it is a stupid thing to do, and it has been great being this close to you and I'll leave now.

See, I told you I'd lost control. I don't know how much of this he made out, possibly *Please* and *sign* or possibly he just guessed what the pen and magazine were for!

Yea, sure..

He took the magazine in his left hand and the pen in his right I was pleased to see. However, the pen was upside-down! A tale flashed through my mind of someone asking for his autograph who didn't have a pen and his devastating response....maybe if he tries to sign it now he'll get annoyed. Oh No...

Fate, however, intervened. Or perhaps it was the whole point of the suggestion that I 'go in now' (if so I owe that gentleman so much I could never, ever repay him). Dylan laid the magazine down and jabbed a finger - beautiful finger - at the embroidery on the jacket sleeve pictured on the front cover:

That's it, that's the jacket I'm talking about

They'd been arguing/discussing that very jacket????! Someone says from the far side of the table:

Well, that's it then, it's Hammersmith

²"Says" is the wrong word but the correct one doesn't exist so it'll have to do.

Homer, the slut



Issue Nine

I answered, without taking my eyes of Dylan's right hand which was signing the front cover of **Homer** at that very moment. (In a very small voice:)

Actually it is Belfast. But, hey, if you guys want it to be Hammersmith, then Hammersmith it is.

I take the signed copy from Himself and slither backwards out the room. I am aware of acute physical pain. But the thought resounds that IT HAS HAPPENED.

I sit in the bar again. Stunning. Staring at **Homer**. More stunning. Slowly the brain tries to re-establish a modicum of control. "Sit where he'll have to pass you on the way out" it urges. I do. I get crafty, I get a table where they'll have to pass in single file as they approach the door. I take away the second seat and wedge myself into a perfect viewing position as they leave the restaurant. I place the signed **Homer** by my right hand and lay the other one on the table in such a manner that anyone looking as they passed would have to see it.

Another few zillion years (2 minutes) later they start to leave. Stewart and some of the others (three, I think) are talking quite animatedly and, gesticulating over to me, one says something along the lines of:

Oh yes they still do, look at that lad over there

They all laugh, in a friendly fashion, I keep my eyes glued straight ahead waiting for You Know Who. However, attracted by the laughter the next person out - a young American - stops at my table (thereby blocking the passageway, so I have another hero) and, pointing to the unsigned **Homer**, asks

Do you subscribe to all of these?

Yes, and, actually, I run this one.

Really, how?

Well I type it up on computer and I've a photocopier at home...

As those last three words came out, every sensory input in my being went into overdrive again. Dylan had majestically walked up the stairs and was now heading straight for my table. Do not believe he is 5' 7", this man is at least 95 feet not including the top hat.

He rests one hand on the table and lifts **Homer** from the young man's hands. The youngster backs off a little, Dylan moves in. I self-liquidize.

Dylan starts reading the inside cover page. He says something about the warmline number and laughs and then flicks a few pages sometimes pausing to read. There's a smile, a grunt, an "uh-huh". Some of my senses are still working, I realize that behind me everyone has left except Dylan and the youngster who first stopped at my table. He is shifting his feet as though to leave, Dylan is still reading but I feel he is about to go:

Please take it Bob.³ And thanks for a great year..

Yeah.

(Heard it a million times before' voice.)

He is still standing reading.

Did you write this?

I have no idea what page he is on. Remember I am sitting down, wedged in, he is right ahead and above me. I can see the front and back page and HIM. Having written virtually none of **Issue Nine**, I answer anyway:

No, I edit it...it's not a very good issue anyway Bob...⁴

He raises an eyebrow and flicks a few more pages, keeps on reading. Suddenly he realizes it is time to go, very regretfully he says:

This is eh, uh, really interesting but you know I just don't have time ...

Please take it, Bob, take it with you...

He leans towards me with a look that says: "There's a puddle on this chair and it is trying to speak to me but I don't know what it is burbling".

Thankfully the young man translates:

He's trying to tell you it is yours to take, Bob.

(How come he said that so easily, I wonder)

Bob, still pretty close, in a very surprised voice:

Really? I can take this one?

Utter panic, his face is now too close for its own safety. I gasp/scream/whisper whatever:

Nothing would give me greater pleasure in life.....

He - Bob FUCKING Dylan - puts the hand with Homer (his left) toward my right shoulder and his right hand squeezes my left shoulder as he leans forward and says gratefully:

Hey, that's great....

I am now beyond death, beyond rebirth, beyond Nirvana. I am also almost completely incapable of movement. However, Dylan is still nearby so I manage to get up and follow him to the car waiting outside.

I notice Dylan is still being generous with his time, a denim-clad man is shaking his hand and they are exchanging greetings. I notice too that Dave Stewart is in the back of the car videoing everything. But mostly I notice Dylan and how friendly he's being and how people are drawn to him and, finally, something which even he may never understand, how even the ordinary things he does do not lessen the aura, the mystique - whatever you want to call it. He has been nothing but friendly since I've been in Camden and by all reports from throughout the day. He is doing normal things, but he is set apart. I never believed such a thing possible; but he just doesn't walk and talk like anybody else. He is Bob Dylan. (The clothes at Camden certainly aided this feeling but, honest, he is *stately*.)

³I think I called him Bob from now on, but I cannot in truth remember.

⁴Why did I say that? Maybe I thought he'd read a nasty comment? More likely I think it was just another "blurt". You may think I'm handling this very badly - and you'd be correct - but wait till you try it. I contend that the wittiest, most informed mind ever would gibber in the Presence. So what chance did I have? At least I hadn't fainted or vomited; both of which were distinct possibilities.

He walks around the back of the car and goes in the far-side back seat. (They let him walk near the cars? - dear Christ, I wouldn't.) He is waving to people on the street, unfortunately this brings too many people across the road, they press against the car, staring in at him. He opens the **Homer** and buries his face in it as the car speeds away.

I have a feeling that I will never be able to describe the way the fear, pain, hesitation, wonderment changes to an unbelievable rush of adrenalin..

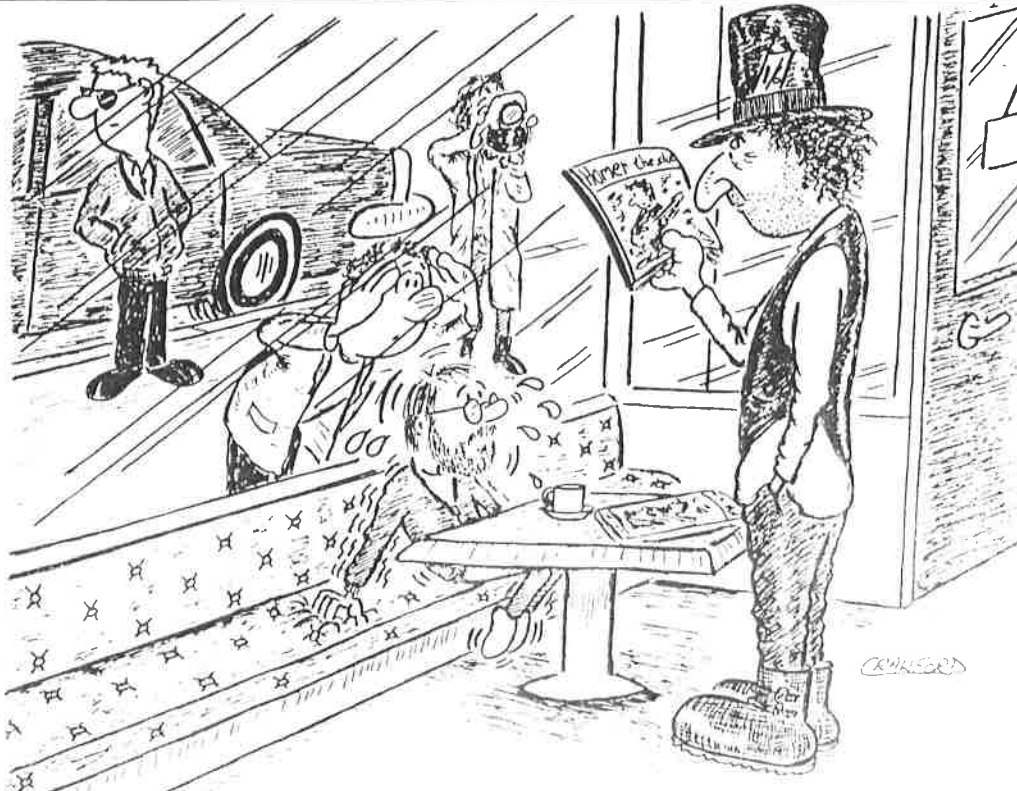
I want to tell everybody in the world what happened. I could start at **Compendium** and Alex's office and thank them at the same time. I ran across the road to **Compendium**. In my delirium I had forgotten such things as traffic. It was coming straight for me. Screeching brakes, burning rubber. Chaotic hubbub. My hero from the entourage shouting:

Hey watch the cars!!!

I spin round in the middle of the road and yell back:

What the Hell does it matter now?!





TOP HAT + TOP THAT!

JUST SAY

BEFORE.....

NO

AFTER.....

LIFE IS WONDERFUL, AND I'M SO GLAD TO BE ALIVE UNDERNEATH THIS SKY OF BLUE!



I SPOKE TO HIM.....WHIMPER.....
I.....I SPOKE TO HIM.....
I SPOKE TO HIM.....WHINE.....
OH GOD.....I SPOKE TO HIM.....
WHINE.....I SPOKE TO HIM.....I SPOKE TO HIM.....



FOR ANDY (HEREAFTER KNOWN AS 'THE LUCKY SOD'), ALL GOOD THINGS COME TO HE WHO WANTS. © M. CARTER. * 26.7.93.

MEETING BOB DYLAN:
IT CAN REALLY SCREW YOU UP

IT'S ALRIGHT MA, (I'm Only Bleeding)

Introduction :

Welcome to the second *Focus-On*-under-new-management, dealing with a very weighty subject indeed, **"It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)"**. There's certainly been plenty written about it down the years, as you'll see below. I'd like to thank Carl Ewens for sending in his own reactions to the song.

Ged Keilty has sent in a personal response to **"Where Are You Tonight"** (the subject of *Focus On* in issue 9), for which I am also grateful, and which is reprinted below.

In issue 11, the subject under discussion will be **"Chimes of Freedom"**, about which, somewhat surprisingly (in my humble opinion), there seems to have been rather less written. Contributions (or any obscure source materials) will therefore be especially eagerly received.

PAULA K.V. RADICE

IT'S ALRIGHT, MA (I'M ONLY BLEEDING) FIRST PUBLISHED ISSUE 10 HOMER, THE SLUT

"It's Alright, Ma" is one of Dylan's timeless, untouchable songs, one of those that stands unmarked and undimmed by the passage of time. Near on thirty years after it first machine-gunned off Dylan's tongue, the song's edges still glint hard and bright. It continues to dazzle in live performance, hitting home hard, as it has always done, to powerful effect - as several of the pieces below testify (especially Ben Fong-Torres' piece describing the impact the song had on hard-bitten rock journalists when it was revived in concert in 1974). Dylan has always sung **"It's Alright, Ma"** with commitment and care. Recently one commentator (Larry Jaffee in *High Times*, in an article reprinted in part in *Isis* No.49) considered that in the Madison Square Garden Tribute show in 1992 "we saw ... Dylan's greatest live performance of **"It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)"**, in which he made every word count..." And it's a perennial favourite with Dylan's fans: when polled in 1982, *The Telegraph's* subscribers placed it second in popularity only to **"Visions of Johanna"** (and tied second with **"Like A Rolling Stone"**).

Even the brilliance of the rest of **Bringing It All Back Home** could not, and still cannot, obscure the near-uniqueness of **"It's Alright, Ma"** as a piece of work. That it is encountered as one of four long, weighty, ground-breaking acoustic songs - all beautifully written and performed - on the second side of the album only makes it the more remarkable, especially when you consider the circumstances under which it was recorded. As several of the awed commentators (see Paul Williams, for example) below point out, the twenty-three-year-old Dylan taped **"Mr. Tambourine Man"**, **"It's Alright, Ma"** and **"Gates of Eden"** straight off, without pausing, word-perfect and devastating through almost nineteen minutes of compacted imagery. As Paul Williams puts it, the three songs left Dylan *"in one breath, easily the greatest breath drawn by an American artist since Ginsberg and Kerouac exhaled "Howl" and On the Road a decade earlier"*. As a performance, it's staggering.

Among these companion giants, **"It's Alright, Ma"** stands - for me - head and shoulders above anything else Dylan had written up to that point. Medium and message work in perfect accord: hearing it for the first time, one can only marvel as the language flashes its pin-sharp images by. Blink and you might miss something. Many of the aphorisms coined here are among the best known of Dylan's creations:

... he not busy being born is busy dying

Money doesn't talk, it swears

... even the President of the United States

Sometimes must have

To stand naked.

As with **"Subterranean Homesick Blues"**, part of the impact of the language lies with the speed and dexterity with which it is manipulated by brain and voice. The tongue-twisting verses (skipping reels of rhyme?), interspersed with rather more deliberate-sounding refrains, pile the images up, insistent, unstoppable, breathtaking. Internal rhymes occur with startling frequency:

*For them that must obey authority
That they do not respect in any degree
Who despise their jobs, their destinies
Speak jealously of them that are free
Do what they do just to be
Nothing more than something
They invest in.*

Where "Subterranean Homesick Blues" uses the velocity of its language to great comic effect, **"It's Alright, Ma"** - while dealing with many of the same themes of alienation, of "outsiderness" - restricts itself to flashes of biting irony. The rolling, mounting rhymes are staccato, angry, condemnatory. The simple, repeated guitar phrase, heard before the first verse and punctuating the song, warns that a serious statement is on the way even before the lyrics hit. The message, too, is in the voice, used significantly differently here to how it is employed in **"Gates of Eden"** or **"Mr. Tambourine Man"**. In both of those, Dylan's voice launches confidently and determinedly in: here, despite the anguish of the word pictures, Dylan's voice is curiously dead-pan and distanced at the beginning of the song. The effect is of numbing weariness and cynicism, of a man worn out by battle, which of course is also the message of the lyrics. The very first word is one of ultimate negativity ("darkness" - in the same sense as in "where black is the colour and none is the number"), and unnaturalness ("at the break of noon", also reminiscent of "she can take the dark out of the nighttime, and paint the daytime black"). Even the sun and moon, the forces of natural light, are defeated by this overwhelming negativity: human creations ("the silver spoon ... the child's balloon") don't stand a chance. Immediately we are thrown the startling statement,

*To understand you know too soon
There is no sense in trying.*

In the context of the first verse of this song, the battle is apparently lost for us even before we can attempt to join it.

Naturally enough, though, it's not that simple. Why would we need an eight minute song to tell us not to bother, it's all over (baby blue)? Although using dramatically enhanced perception, Dylan is revisiting in **"It's Alright, Ma"** a landscape he's painted before, most notably in **"Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie"**. The two pieces have much in common. In both, rolling, intuitively-felt but intelligently constructed language vividly portrays the powerlessness of individuals within societies that are materially and politically diseased, and the spiritual despair that ensues. While both act as condemnation of a specific society (the United States) at a specific moment in time (the 1950s and 1960s), they also both act as dissectors of the human condition, describing starkly the isolation and loneliness at the heart of human experience:

*And to yourself you sometimes say
"I never knew it was gonna be this way
Why didn't they tell me the day I was born?"*

How are the sensitive and nonconformist to find a place in an insensitive and intolerant universe? How can they survive the onslaughts of advertising, the mass media, political pressure, education, tradition, money, militarism? Some passages in **"Last Thoughts"** ring with pre-echoes of **"It's Alright, Ma"**:

*You need something to open your eyes
You need something to make it known
That it's you and no-one else that owns
That spot that yer standing, that space that yer sitting
That the world ain't got you beat ...
... That's what you need, man, and you need it bad
And yer trouble is you know it too good
'Cause you look and you start getting the chills ...*

For a younger, more naive Dylan, the "something special" he needed ("the hope that yer seekin'") was still available, in "the church of your choice" or in Brooklyn State Hospital:

*You'll find God in the church of your choice
You'll find Woody Guthrie in Brooklyn State Hospital.
And although it's only my opinion
I may be right or wrong
You'll find them both in the Grand Canyon
At sundown.*

An older (or younger, according to "My Back Pages"?) and wiser writer could find no such pat prescriptions. Organized religion had disintegrated to "*flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark*", and preachers preaching of Hell ("*evil fates*"); those who would seek a solution to society's ills in song (like Guthrie and Dylan himself) are no more sacred:

*While one who sings with his tongue on fire
Gargles in the rat race choir
Bent out of shape by society's pliers
Cares not to come up any higher
But rather get you down in the hole
That he's in.*

Salvation through idols had, of course, already been jettisoned as a possibility by Dylan: "*Woody Guthrie was my last idol ...*"

But all is not lost. If Guthrie taught Dylan "*that men are men, shatterin' even himself as an idol*" (11 Outlined Epitaphs), there was another allied lesson, one that Dylan had fully absorbed by the time of *Bringing It All Back Home*, and one that he could use in "*It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)*" to redeem himself (and by implication his listening audience, identifying themselves so strongly with the song). The message evolves through its succeeding refrains, amidst all the bitterness and blood:

It's alright, Ma, I'm only sighing.

It's alright, Ma, I can make it.

I got nothing, Ma, to live up to.

But it's alright, Ma, if I can't please him.

It's alright, Ma, it's life and life only.

Dylan's mastery is such that he successfully confounds all of our expectations. The verses pile up the disgust and pain ... and yet the sheer acts of comprehending and articulating the turmoil act finally to conquer it, to create something capable of survival. Life is only life, and death is the only honesty (and we were to discover later that it's Not the End). It is a deep irony, that in the process of defining the chaos, the human will suffering its ravages and sensing its own powerlessness can create afresh (the theme at the heart of "*It's All Over Now, Baby Blue*") and emerge triumphant, and it's an irony that lies at the heart of Dylan's most emotionally successful songs (see, for example, John Bauldie's conclusion about "*Blind Willie McTell*", where the overwhelming sense of decay and approaching Armageddon are redeemed by the very beauty and skill of the song itself. How can we despair when such human art is possible?) Whilst I understand the viewpoint of those who have seen in "*It's Alright, Ma*" only bleakness and despair (Hubert Saal, for example, in *Newsweek* in 1968 summed the song up as "unrelieved pessimism"), I'm happy to be able to say that for me the final message of the song is positive. First and foremost, the very worst that life can throw at us must be faced, fearlessly and honestly, if we're to have any hope of dealing with it. A strong sense of self (as opposed to "selfishness", which is an altogether different kettle of fish) lies at the core of survival: if knowledge is power, self-knowledge is the most potent force of all. Intuition and insight, Dylan's twin voices of truth, are more than a match for loneliness. Isolation can be seen as just another word for freedom:

*lonely? ah yes
but it is the flowers an' the mirrors
of flowers that now meet my
loneliness
an' mine shall be a strong loneliness
dissolvin' deep
t' the depths of my freedom
an' that, then, shall
remain my song.*

(11 Outlined Epitaphs)

*"This is called "It's Alright Ma, It's Life and Life Only, Ho Ho Ho".
Dylan, in concert, England 1965.*

SAN FRANCISCO PRESS CONFERENCE

December 1965

Question : What did you think about your song "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)"? It happens to be my favourite one.

Dylan : God bless you son. I haven't heard it for a long time. I couldn't even sing it for you, probably.

P.WILLIAMS

Performing Artist: The Music of Bob Dylan Vol. 1

Daniel Kramer, who took some amazing photographs at these sessions, reports that Dylan tried to record "Mr. Tambourine Man", wasn't satisfied and went on to something else .. and that the next day "announced that he didn't want the engineering booth to goof - that these were long numbers and he didn't want to do them more than once", and proceeded to record the final versions of "Mr. Tambourine Man", "It's Alright, Ma" and "Gates of Eden" in a single take, with no playback between songs! No further evidence is needed that Dylan works in the studio like a stage performer, not like a person making a record. It is as though all three songs came out of him in one breath, easily the greatest breath drawn by an American artist since Ginsberg and Kerouac exhaled *Howl* and *On the Road* a decade earlier.

I've been sitting here picking up the needle on my phonograph, so I can hear these three songs in their recorded order, letting myself receive them not as three songs but as one performance. I find it difficult to get past awe at what Dylan has accomplished here. I'm equally distracted by a great affection for each song, each line ...

And how does he sustain the extraordinary tone of intimacy with the listener that is expressed in very different ways in each of these three songs, never breaking the mood at any point, never confusing his persona in one song with the ones he adopts in the others ("Mr. Tambourine Man", "It's Alright, Ma" and "Gates of Eden", while recognizably products of the same genius, seem to be paintings rendered with three entirely different palettes, each one made up of textures and colors never to be repeated in the other works), even while singing all three songs consecutively, almost non-stop? And how does he manage to gallop through them so freely, with such spontaneity and style, without ever flubbing a word?

I imagine that if Dylan could reach back to the experience and answer these questions based on what he felt at the time, the answer to all of them would be that he was, at that moment in the recording studio, a bridge, connecting a felt listener on one side, a presence Dylan is giving to, with another presence on the other side, something with no name except perhaps "truth" or "song" or "Mr. Tambourine Man", from whom Dylan is receiving. A metaphysician might say the performances were being received from Dylan's "higher self". We all have a higher self, according to this description of reality; the artist's achievement lies in being in touch with it and being able to share it. And Dylan's achievement here and at many moments in his career is the generosity, the totality, with which he shares it: not just a taste or a summation but the entire felt experience of being in touch with a deeper, less compromising, more encompassing truth, translated into a medium simple enough to be broadcast over the airwaves and mass-produced for sale in record stores, and subtle enough to retain its essential richness and complexity and mystery, even when played on a cheap phonograph or listened to by an entirely unschooled ear. Great art - I think of Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" - always has an obvious quality, and without sacrificing any depth of complexity is at least theoretically able to offer nourishment to anyone.

The key to "It's Alright, Ma" is again in the album notes: "*I am about t sketch You a picture of what goes on around here sometimes...my poems are written in a rhythm of unpoetic distortion/divided by pierced ears. false eyelashes/subtracted by people constantly torturing each other with a melodic purring line of descriptive hollowness.*" Just as "Mr. Tambourine Man" is thematically related to Dylan's 10th and 11th "Outlined Epitaphs" from late 1963, "It's Alright, Ma" expands on an issue raised in the 4th "Epitaph" ("*Jim Jim/Where is our party?*"): the possibility that the most important (and least articulated) political issue of our times is that we are all being fed a false picture of reality, and it's coming at us from every direction. Dylan has made an amazing leap here: he has moved from embracing a particular position in identifiable causes through a period of apparent rejection against "politics" (the *Another Side* songs) to becoming perhaps the leading articulator of a whole new kind of politics, the struggle of new and in many cases unformed worldviews against the rigidity of old, entrenched concepts (and the mechanisms that enforce those

concepts). This movement was already underway when the album was recorded, but just barely - the Free Speech Movement was taking form at the Berkeley campus of the University of California at roughly the same time that Dylan was writing "It's Alright, Ma". Dylan lashes out at the enemy ("Moloch" in Ginsberg's 1956 poem "Howl") directly in songs like "It's Alright, Ma" and "Maggie's Farm", and indirectly in all his work starting in 1964 and over the next several years, by refusing to be bound by anyone's concepts of what forms songs and music and popular expression should take. He was a leader by example; he inspired his contemporaries to break new ground in everything they did, whether related to art or politics or communications or careers; he was as much or more than any other single person identified with a continuing shift in mass attitudes that characterized the cultural, political and personal changes of the 1960s in America and Europe and Australia and Japan. To a large extent he backed into this role, as an unplanned side-effect of "sketching You a picture of what goes on around here sometimes"; but he was also fulfilling a promise he'd implied in the 4th "Epitaph", when he asked, "where is the party that sets a respected road for all of those like me who cry "I am raginly against absolutely everything that wants t force nature t be unnatural (be it human or otherwise) an I am violently for absolutely everything that will fight those forces (be them human or otherwise"?".

"It's Alright, Ma" achieves its tremendously successful portrait of an alienated individual identifying the characteristics of the world around him and thus declaring his freedom from its "rules", not with words alone but by creating a compelling sound, a driving rhythm and a unique, ominous melodic tone that are essential in causing the listener to feel the words rather than receive them as ideas. Ironically, this song, which Dylan performs unaccompanied on the "folk side" of his half-folk, half-electric fifth album, is more of a rock and roll performance than anything else on the record, and owes its success to basic rock and roll techniques and values: penetrate with the rhythm and the sound, and let them start hearing the words after they're already hooked on the way the song feels. The primary communicative impact is again through the continuing emergence of isolated phrases into the listener's consciousness: "It is not he or she or them or it that you belong to"; "...flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark/it's easy to see without looking too far/that not much is really sacred". And it's worth noting that while the song is in one sense a catalog of horrors, it is not pessimistic or downbeat (and certainly not lacking in humor); rather it seems to speak of the individual's power to see through all this, endure it, survive it, and ultimately perhaps prevail against it.

R. RINZLER

Bob Dylan. The Illustrated Record

"It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" carries on this theme of desperation, bad craziness, alienation, isolation. Dylan seems to be having a really hard time: sighing, crying, dying. Nobody knows and nobody cares and nobody understands. The descending chord progressions are so gloomy, so doomy, so saturated with suffering. Such a grim seven-and-a-half minute dirge, this nightmarish "thought-dream"! Like a lot of cuts on this album, it is not exactly fun to hear. He's hanging by a thread, but he *will* survive. "It's Alright, Ma, it's life and life only". Life is nearly, but not quite impossible. I'm bleeding, but I can make it, he says: aloof, isolated, outside, hardened to the craziness and suffering and despair around him, for which he seems to express some self-protective contempt. Again, there are some memorable lines, including:

*The hollow horn plays wasted words
Proves to warn
That he not busy being born
Is busy dying.*

And it's all directed at Ma, like so many of his desperate, deepest songs.

M. GROSS

Bob Dylan: An Illustrated History

On the next to last day of recording, Dylan laid down three of the four solo tracks that would comprise the second side of the disk, playing "Mr. Tambourine Man", "Gates of Eden" and "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" straight through without a playback. He told the engineers he didn't want to play the songs more than once. What you hear is what you get.

Dylan wrote that "They" would kill him if they knew what he was thinking in "It's Alright, Ma". He set down there a number of the presumptions from which he wrote and would write for the rest of the time he'd spend at the hurricane center of the rock world. First, there was without question a "They" out there, and regardless of how They did it, They'd do it to you if they got the chance. Sometimes, insidiously, They and you were the same. Second, Dylan's thoughts, and by extension the thoughts of his listeners, were different, dangerous, possibly revolutionary in their very nature. They were thoughts based on a clearly perceptual process, and a far wider range of possibility. Thoughts that met no standards, and would not, in fact, consider the existence of standards. Thoughts that would bring down the wrath of the gods if revealed to Them. Romantic thoughts. *Dangerous* thoughts.

B. FONG-TORRES

(in Knockin' on Dylan's Door)

On opening night [of the 1974 tour] ... the audience was getting a lesson. Dylan could still sing the "message" songs, and, like the best of poetry, they were proving timeless ... [Then] he hit a high point: "It's Alright, Ma", the crowd exploding after the lines: "*Goodness hides behind its gates, but even the President of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked*". The reading was powerful, the feeling, again, *deja vu*, the people responding once more, as if one song, one singer, could make a difference.

But even if I, for one, never saw Dylan as a messiah, idol, prophet, leader, or even a particularly great singer, I must admit, as have other journalists (whose style it is not to confess such things) that Dylan has touched me. And the nerve that was hit ties somehow back to the Sixties. During the second show in the Chicago Stadium, near the end of "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)", it hit. It wasn't the song, a simple enough affair over an even simpler acoustic guitar run, that did it. For me, Dylan made a statement through a tone he was painting with his bitter-truth voice, a feeling of knowing resignation, the uplift deriving from the knowledge that There was a guy who had seen it all, saw through it, and...well, had a way of phrasing it, of condensing it down.

I watched this still-small, still-vulnerable figure, behind his guitar, looking up and bawling, "*I got nothing, Ma, to live up to*", and I shivered and thought of my older brother Barry, a probation officer and community worker murdered in the summer of 1972, in the midst of the gang wars of Chinatown. He left a mother and father who cannot stop mourning, and when "It's Alright, Ma" pulsed through the verse:

*While them that what they cannot see
With a killer's pride, security
It blows the mind most bitterly
For them that think death's honesty
Won't fall upon them naturally
Life sometimes
Must get lonely*

I found myself wiping away tears with an index finger and thinking something towards Barry, something excusably maudlin like: "Can you see? Bob Dylan, someone you heard and liked a lot, is here.

Later, talking with reporters from *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*, I learned that they, too, had had the chills. And in the next city, Jon Takiff - "Philadelphia's Mr. Cynical", the publicist for the Spectrum rock auditorium dubbed him - would walk away from the press box and tell me that "Like a Rolling Stone" had made him cry. And all the lofty articles I'd read about Dylan, all the burdensome books, suddenly meant very little. I'd have to meet the guy for myself.

[Bill] Graham has by now heard "It's Alright, Ma" five times, and each time "*Even the President of the United States must have to stand naked*" gets the biggest reaction of any line in the concert.

"Tell you what I'd like to try", says Graham. "When Bob hits that line, how about switching to reds from overhead" - Graham sweeps a huge left arm out and down - "blues from the sides, and white spotlights directly onto him." Bruce agrees to give it a try. And as corny as the idea sounds, it'll work, the colours spread out far enough apart to be subtle. It is not, to be sure, a Unites States flag lit up by a thousand light bulbs.

L.K. TRUSCOTT IV

The Village Voice article, **Bob Dylan Comes Back From the Edge** (reprinted in *Knockin' on Dylan's Door*)

"**It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)**" was done [in New York in 1974] with lovely, hypnotic speed, sung up and out and proud and sane. It seemed that Dylan had hit a stride, that he had found his voice, a way to cope with standing naked before 20,000 pairs of eyes. "**It's Alright, Ma**" was markedly different from the original, but for the first time all night I had the sense that the song had grown, not shrunk. Dylan's comfort came through nobly, he dropped his tough front, and even in the clipped clip way he ran down the words one could feel him feeling his way, wringing the song, and himself, almost dry. He must have felt good, because he swaggered a bit when he took his bows, lifting his hands in a triumphant wave.

M. GRAY

Song and Dance Man

Dylan also took [Chuck] Berry's manipulation of objects and the details and adman phrases that surround them. There are plenty of equivalents of that "*souped up ... cherry-red '53*" in Dylan's rock songs: and for, example, in **4th Time Around** and **It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)**.

1965 was far more hectic and found Dylan's use of language in a far greater state of flux.

At one end, we have **It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)**, which is merely a more circumspect reworking, in tone and area of theme, of, say, **Only A Pawn In Their Game**, yet merges this old approach to new language. Part of the song's impact is thereby its very patchiness - the way it keeps wowing from one sort of articulation to another. Thus Dylan makes even transitional experiment work for him not just as a way forward but as a procedure in its own right and for its own sake.

One minute the listener hears of

*Advertising signs that con you
into thinking you're the one
that can do what's never been done
that can win what's never been won
Meantime life, outside, goes on
all around you*

- all absolutely straightforward. Not so this:

*Temptation's page flies out the door
You follow, find yourself at war,
watch waterfalls of pity roar ...*

The struggle towards a figurative language keeps bursting through in such flashes as this, though varying, naturally, in its effectiveness in local contexts. The image that takes us to the edge of the waterfall, to the juxtaposition of "pity" and "roar" is only one of many "deepening-points" in the song: it is felicitous and abrasive in a way more inward than we would have expected from the earlier social-commentary songs. It is more real than the mirror of his older "realist" songs.

This veering away from mere external (political) generalization goes hand in hand with a paradoxical change in external attitude. It appears (though not for the first time: **North Country Blues**, **The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll** and others all have their personalized moments) along with a more resigned, accepting posture:

*It's all right, Ma, I can make it ...
It's all right, Ma, It's life and life only*

and along with a more savage and jaundiced vision of what he bitterly calls "people's games":

*Disillusioned words like bullets bark
as human gods aim for their mark
Made everything from toy guns that spark
to flesh-coloured Christs that glow in the dark
It's easy to see without looking too far
that not much
is really sacred*

All of these changes seem to me to stem from Dylan's discarding of an anger that was the child of *optimism* - an indignation (as, for instance, we meet it in **Masters of War**) which could only be sustained so long as the belief in enlightened-congressmen-about-to-heed-the-call could itself be sustained. Dylan's graduation from the **Masters of War** approach towards real poetry - the poetry of real experience - can in this way be seen as prompted not by a change in political *belief*, nor by a *rejection* of politics (which is the same thing) but a change in *assessment* of his political vision. To put it over-simply, Dylan became a serious artist when profound political pessimism set in. The spectre of pessimism showed up pamphleteering songs as pitifully inadequate and rather silly:

*While one who sings with his tongue on fire
gargles in the rat-race choir -
bent out of shape by society's pliers ...*

It's Alright Ma is not the last of Dylan's protest songs, but it is the last in which the vestiges of the old attitude remain - the last of the type wherein anger (and anger of the sort that pleads for help from Senator Fulbright) replaces analysis with accusation: and, like **My Back Pages**, it specifically abdicates the protest function.

A. SCADUTO

Bob Dylan

... **Gates of Eden**, **It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleedin')**, and **Mr. Tambourine Man**; each of them personal visions from the mind of a popular poet, some of them difficult for an audience to understand at first hearing ... The new songs, differing in quality, in texture, in color, were still all of a piece in stressing personal freedom as man's basic reason for being. And personal freedom meant liberation from all the cultural hangups imposed by the authoritarians, all the societal structures that deny truth and create walls between us all.

J. LANDAU

John Wesley Harding (in C. MCGREGOR : **Bob Dylan: The Early Years, A Retrospective**)

Bringing It All Back Home had the electrified sound. But, interestingly, with the exception of one cut, they were all blues. I think it reasonable to say that a very strong side of Dylan had already recognized the ultimate vacuity of the previous stances. The blues side of this album was another attempt to de-escalate. However, de-escalate or not, Dylan has never been able to get too far away from high seriousness. Consequently we got side two, which contains some of Dylan's best serious songs previous to **John Wesley Harding**. The two particularly arresting numbers were "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "It's Alright, Ma", both notable because they clearly take Dylan beyond the one dimension of his earlier seriousness. The multilevelness and diversity of imagery of "Mr. Tambourine Man" is comparatively innovative. The simplicity of Dylan's requests, the lack of uptightness and the artistic perspective with which this song was both written and performed, the fact that the Byrds could do it justice by it in the cynical, unmelodramatic style, all this points up the fact that this song is a break with Dylan's chain of dialectical myth, his polarizing tendencies. "It's Alright, Ma" does exactly the opposite. It is the ultimate statement of the earlier myth, only this time the depth of Dylan's vision created a reality that transcends the purely mythical quality of something like "Chimes of Freedom". The polarity is there but voiced so honestly and with such brilliance and sense of awareness of where both Dylan and this country are at, that the song is totally credible. Hence, on **Bringing It All Back Home**, we get the ultimate dialectic within a dialectic: Dylan himself has become polarized between an aesthetically brilliant statement of what all his past work has led to, and an aesthetically brilliant attempt to transcend the limitations of the self-created myth.

S. GOLDBERG

Dylan and the Poetry of Salvation (in C. MCGREGOR : Bob Dylan: The Early Years, A Retrospective)

It was at this point that Dylan was preparing to become an artist in the Zen sense; he was searching for the courage to release his grasp on the layers of distinctions that give us meaning, but, by virtue of their inevitably setting us apart from the life-flow, preclude our salvation. All such distinctions, from petty jealousies and arbitrary cultural values to the massive, but ultimately irrelevant, confusions engendered by psychological problems, all the endless repetitions that those without faith grasp in order to avoid their own existence - all of these had to be released. The strength, the faith, necessary for this release was to be a major theme of Dylan's for the next three years ... Having summed up the courage to deal with his vision, Dylan is now able to expose the myriad confusions which offer us security at the expense of freedom. His declaration (in "It's Alright, Ma") that "*I got nothing, Ma, to live up to*" is a rejection of others' inevitably futile attempts to impose a source of meaning on him. This line has been misinterpreted, I believe, as a condemnation of a society without values (Values which are relative and irrelevant to ultimate meaning) by some and used as a basis for psychological criticism of Dylan's work by others. This latter approach may conceivably offer some interesting insights, both of the obvious possible psychoanalytic correlates of the mystical experience and of Dylan's own compelling psychological perceptions. As Walter Kaufman would say, these are merely different snapshots of the same journey. However, Dylan's vision is particularly fragile and one must take care not to destroy it with a lethal reductionism.

R.J. GLEASON

The Children's Crusade (reprinted in C. MCGREGOR : Bob Dylan: The Early Years, A Retrospective)

Bob Dylan is a major voice in the entertainment world, greater than Sinatra in his prime and far greater than any other in his generation.

But Dylan's voice is unique, not alone in how it sounds (though it has grown fuller in recent years and acquired resonance, it is still far from the usual standard of good voice even in unorthodox popular song) but for what it is that he is saying.

With hit recordings blaring forth from every radio, with his songs being sung by individual vocalists and played by rock'n'roll groups everywhere, Dylan is telling the American audience (and through that audience telling the world) that it is better to make love than to make war, that the only loyalty is to oneself ("*it is not he or she or them or it that you belong to*"), that politics are irrelevant ("*you say nothin's perfect and i tell you again that there are no politics*"), that the leadership cult of the Great Society is a fraud ("*don't follow leaders, watch the parkin' meters*"), that the old fashioned virtues of hard work and thrift and a clean tongue are obsolete ("*money doesn't talk it swears; obscenity who really cares*").

He is saying, in short, that the entire system, built upon Aristotelian logic, and upon a series of economic systems from Hobbes to Marx, does not work.

And mirabile dictu *what* he is saying, is getting an unbelievably intense reaction from a generation thirsting for answers other than those in the college text books.

When he was told of high school students studying his lyrics, Dylan asked quickly if the lyrics were old songs or the new ones. "If it's the old ones, I feel a little guilty about it. They should use the new ones, like "**Desolation Row**". I know I'm not accepted by the professors in the universities and it used to bother me, but I know I have nothin' to live up to" (an unconscious or conscious quote of one of his own lines in "**It's Alright, Ma**").

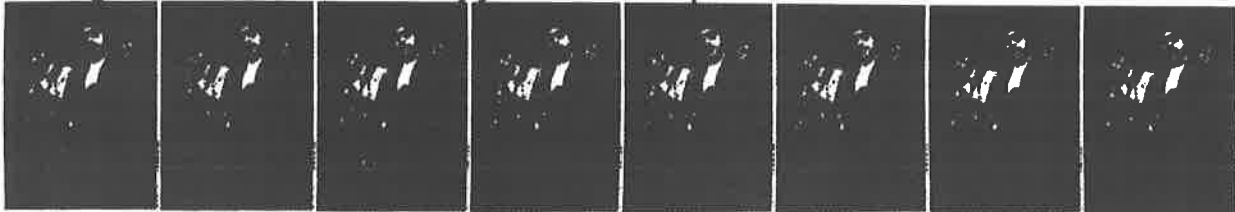
Dylan's Doomsday poems, his apocryphal visions of the world, thunder against injustice and sing out in defense of "*the confused, accused, misused, strung out ones and worse an for every hung up person in the whole wide universe*". They include the just quoted "**Chimes of Freedom**" as well as "**It's Alright, Ma**", that bitter attack on the American Dream, a kind of verse reprise of "**A Walk on the Wild Side**", with its ringing lines, "*make everything from toy guns that spark to flesh-colored Christs that glow in the dark. It's easy to see without looking too far that not much is really sacred*" and "*even the President of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked*" ... "You have to vomit up everything you know. I did that, I vomited it all up, and then went out and saw it all again", Dylan told a poet ...

W. MELLERS**A Darker Shade of Pale: A Backdrop to Bob Dylan**

If such songs [on *Another Side of Bob Dylan*] are regarded as transitional, Dylan's second period proper can be said to begin in the following year, 1965, with *Bringing It All Back Home*. Whereas his first phase had been a kind of anti-litany, exorcising the devil in an incantory, even at times unmusical, cawing style, raucous and rancid, the evolution from protest to ambiguous acceptance is also a move towards lyricism and music. *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)* is a turning point. Basically, it is a talkin' number in which the words, building incrementally with complex internal rhymes, devastatingly comment on the hypocrisies of (especially modern) civilisation. There is a mixture of narration and preaching but both, perhaps continuing from the apocalyptic numbers, have a somewhat hallucinatory quality. The analysis of social ills is no longer merely from the outside:

*My eyes collide head on with stuffed graveyards,
False gods, I scuff
At pettiness which plays so rough
Walk upside down inside handcuffs
Kick my legs to crash it off.*

But when Dylan reaches the refrain and tells his mother and us that he can make it, the music breaks into a pentatonic roulade that is at least more lyrical than the previous talk. Over a rudimentary guitar ostinato the pentatonic falling third is augmented on "*It's all right, ma*". The effect of this unchanging refrain grows stronger through the slowly exfoliating stanzas, getting the better of both the nagging and the talk. The music amplifies the words: despite the horrors abroad, the bleeding and sighing and dying, *it is all right*, and the mother figure can be addressed comically yet without contempt.



There are more negroid elements in this song than in most of the others so far discussed. Out of black rhythmic flexibility and ambiguous blue thirds comes the hint of a new world, embracing a reality within as well as without the mind. Given that white had to absorb black in order to attain to adulthood and that blacks are popularly supposed to be closer to instinctual sources than ego- and intellect-bound whites, it is not surprising that the merging of white with black idiom in Dylan's songs should initiate his exploration of the inner life of dream and nightmare.

K.W. DOMMETT

in *Birmingham Evening Post* 6/5/65 (as reprinted in C.COOPER and K.MARSH : *The Circus is in Town*. England 1965)

The first half [of the 5/5/65 show] was given over to what may be called his "protest" songs. "*The Gates of Eden*", an intense parable of the visionary perfection was followed after the intrusion of the evening, the beaty "*If You Gotta Go Go Now*" (one cannot always guarantee the accuracy of these titles) by the bitterly ironic "*It's Alright, Ma*" which in a way typifies the whole attitude of those who are Dylan disciples - "*I've got nothing ma, to live up to*". Suffice it to say that this boy, he really is no more, has the poet's power to open our eyes and make us think of our little world anew.

J. HINCHEY**Bob Dylan's Slow Train**

... That "*good foot forward*" [in "*Gonna Change My Way of Thinking*"] is the most innocuous image of the song, but it is really the key to the whole enterprise. It locates a "way" of thinking along the path opened up by decisive action ... These "*stripes*", like Hester Prynne's scarlet "A", are both the wounds inflicted upon us

by others and the recuperative stitchings of our freshly fashioned freedom, and the ejaculated (grammatically and otherwise!) "*blood and water flowing through the land*" is perhaps best glossed by lines from Dylan's earliest song in this mode, "*It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)*", which is also notable for its hyperbolic footwork:

*... I scuff
At pettiness which plays so rough
Walk upside down inside handcuffs
Kick my legs to crash them off
Say "Alright, I've had enough,
What else can you show me?"*

The image from *Gonna Change* is more provokingly insistent upon its regenerative power, but the main force of both passages (indeed, both songs) is to restore an edge of real moral wit to the Christian injunction to turn the other cheek. What such a gesture says to the oppressor amounts to something like this: "Thanks, I needed that, if only to find out where I am, which, it seems, is here with you; so now that, listening to this, you know where you are is with me, what are you going to do next?" The regenerative wit of this is to transform a relationship of mutual bondage (of the oppressor to his self-definition in terms of his effort to manhandle his victim to a self-definition in terms of his effort to get even) into a relationship of mutual freedom. And since all Dylan means to look out for here is his own inward freedom, the crucial point is that he can't recover his own except as he also gives back to his oppressors the freedom they have forfeited in setting out to get him.

N. DE SOMOGYI

Jokemen and Thieves. Bob Dylan and the Ballad Tradition.

It is constantly remarkable that Dylan's manipulation of conventional images that bestrew the early ballads charges his songs with such philosophical and poetic powers ... To revert from balladic content to balladic style, however, the technique of imagery Dylan has made his own may usefully be compared to the film technique of montage. Consider the following from 1964:

*Darkness at the break of noon
Shadows even the silver spoon
The handmade blade, the child's balloon
Eclipses both the sun and moon.*
(*"It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)*", 1964

Here, Biblical allusion to the Crucifixion (with a passing nod at *King Lear's* tempest-tossed Fool: "I'll go to bed at noon") stands in apposition to the cliché of material advantage ("the silver spoon"), the roundness of whose image and sound is repeated in the "child's balloon" which is itself threatened by the sharp rhyme of a "handmade blade" - the silver spoon's metal counterpart. The montage of effect produced therefore erects a tension between spiritual and material value, and between violence and innocence. As a whole, the song presents a stream of these luminously apprehended vignettes of "situation", but their presentation is a form of "ne plus ultra" of balladic technique. Gerould's commentary on a stanza from the traditional "*Kemp Owyne*" (Child, 34A) could equally well be applied to Dylan's song:

Everything is foreshortened, that is to say,
in order to bring into sharp focus the crucial
scene ...

The difference lies in Dylan's departure from dramatic narrative: the song delivers not so much a story, but an implicit situation, or series of situations, but one is never sure of the "crucial scene" despite the "sharp focus" of individual glimpses:

*To understand you know too soon
There's no sense in trying.*

*"You fail to understand", he said,
"Why must you even try?"*

(*"Drifter's Escape"*)

"It's Alright, Ma" steers a dangerous path between what Dylan defines as the action of a ballad ("It can unfold to you") and the action of his pieces on John Wesley Harding ("you have to think about it after you hear it, that's what takes up the time"). A deliberate obscurantism results from the course the song ambiguously takes: "I wasn't ready to make it simple".

T.DOWLEY AND B.DUNNAGE

Bob Dylan: From a Hard Rain to a Slow Train

"It's Alright, Ma" contains more direct protest, with Dylan using surreal images to express anger at those he sees as having but no conscience. Echoes of The Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" are here too:

*Advertising signs they con you
into thinking you're the one*

While lines like

*Old lady judges watch people in pairs
Limited in sex, they dare
To push fake morals, insult and stare*

condemn those who claim to know better. They are followed by possibly the most devastating line in the history of pop, here deliberately understated:

Whilst money doesn't talk, it swears

Dylan's cynicism has always had better ammunition and better targets than most:

*Whilst others they don't hate nothing at all
Except hatred.*

Perhaps Dylan had H.G. Wells' comments in mind when he wrote the now familiar line,

He not busy being born is busy dying.

(Wells, when ill in bed, was heard to remark to a visitor, "Can't you see I'm busy dying?") The line was taken up by President Carter during his campaign for the United States presidency, in 1976, when he spoke of Dylan as "my friend, Bob". Ironically, this song also had some harsh words to say about the presidency - words that took on a new significance when performed in 1974 at the time of the Watergate scandal surrounding Richard Nixon. (**Before the Flood** records the audience response at one particular concert.)

J. HERDMAN

Voice Without Restraint

When setting out his songs on the page Dylan does nevertheless pay attention to the needs of the eye in making sense of the words. Sometimes he will transfer a phrase from its true position in the aural pattern so as to make a sense unit of a line. This happens several times in "It's Alright, Ma", for example in the second verse:

*Pointed threats, they bluff with scorn
Suicide remarks are torn
From the fool's gold mouthpiece
The hollow horn plays wasted words ...*

As sung, "The hollow horn" forms a rhythmic continuum with the preceding line, which tends to break up the meaning; printed like this, it is both easier to follow the sense and to savour the image of "the fool's gold mouthpiece" which otherwise tends to be submerged in the general flood of words. (The end rhyme of "horn" with "torn" is naturally lost to the eye, but it is strong enough anyway for this not to matter.)

It does sometimes happen like this, that the music and words interact in such a way as to make it difficult to follow the sense. This does not matter much in the earlier Dylan, where a great deal of the excitement of the lyrics lies in the sudden stab of reality, often of psychological recognition, out of the proximity and obscurity of the images - such moments are usually carefully constructed so as to allow the maximum impact. In the later work, however, where the poetry is more conscious and defined, such "clashes of interest" can operate, as we shall see, to the disadvantage of the latter ...

Dylan alters his songs in many different ways ... Sometimes it is the music which has changed. The versions of the 1974 tour, preserved in *Before the Flood* ... gave us a raging, full-blooded "It's Alright, Ma", far removed from the tight, restrained intensity of the acoustic rendering ...

E.THOMSON

"Struck By the Sounds Before the Sun", in THOMSON (ed.) : *Conclusions on the Wall: New Essays on Bob Dylan*

"It's Alright, Ma" and "Ballad of a Thin Man" can be coupled together. In their monodic declaration (which, in classical terminology, might be likened to *recitative* or *sprechsang*), they derive from the talking blues but have developed well beyond it ... The vocal line of "It's Alright, Ma" consists almost entirely of a reiterated E; only at the capping words ("*Dying...crying*") does Dylan sing a minor third, first rising and then falling. (Some scholars consider the minor third to be the most significant interval of traditional Jewish music). The "whining" sound of the motif is perfect word-painting, and from this germ, the final couplet develops.

These two elements - the monody and the minor third - are also essential to the melody of "Ballad of a Thin Man". Both songs share a similar descending chromatic contour. In "It's Alright, Ma", it's a bass line (which supports altered E minor and C major chords) and in "Ballad of a Thin Man", the figure is disguised within the texture, so obscuring the tonality.

S.TURNER

"A Different Set of Rules", in E.THOMSON (ed.) : *Conclusions on the Wall: New Essays on Bob Dylan*

In both "Masters of War" and "Quit Your Lowdown Ways", Dylan seems specifically to disallow any forgiveness in the Christian sense of Christ's power to redeem ... There's no doubt that his conscience delineated right and wrong and that his instinct informed him of the need for final judgement. But existentialism, humanism and Zen gave him no reason to believe these things. In fact, they seemed to negate it. By the time *Another Side* of came around, he was starting to lay off the judgement and the social criticism ... This is the moral position for which Dylan is best known and loved. It's the one where "*The law can't touch her at all*", the one where you "*know too much too argue or to judge*". It's a position of salvation, of transcendence above categories of good and evil ... But of course, Dylan *did* still judge. He judged those who he believed to be trying to make him conform to a code ... "It's Alright, Ma" was a catalogue of enemies of the free moral spirit - preachers, teachers, presidents and advertizers, to name but four. Rules, however, were for the wise and foolish. Dylan, on the other hand, had nothing to live up to. There were no morals for *him* to break.

S.PICKERING

Bob Dylan Approximately

The Psalmist asked: "Who can express the mighty acts of the Lord/Or make all His praise to be heard?" (Psalms 106:2). Dylan has provided one possible answer: "So don't fear" the "foreign sound" which will come to one's consciousness ("It's Alright, Ma"). We turn to the voice with silence and hope, the former the language of the soul, the latter that of the spoken word. "The preparations of the heart are man's", it is said, "But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:1) ...

[Chicago, 1974 tour]... "IT'S ALRIGHT, MA" ... mysticism ...reality ...false gods ...affirmation of life ...We all have to stand naked sometimes ... Dylan's voice pleading, angry, insisting ... "temptation's page" ..."waterfalls of pity" ...How people have been used as investments ... "as human gods aim for their mark" ... "But it's

alright, Ma, it's life and life *only*" ... Audience on its feet ... Dylan bows ... nods to those in the balconies sitting behind the stage ... Thousands of matches and lighters illuminating the stadium ... Dylan has been gone almost ten minutes, but his presence looms in our hearts ... A young girl near me is openly crying ... A young Hassidic Jew, with flowing ear-locks and round black hat, is laughing and smiling, nodding to me, raising a clenched fist ... The applause building in torrents, like rain tapping, then pounding on a tin roof ... the matches and lighters still flickering ...

B.CARTWRIGHT

The Bible in the Lyrics of Bob Dylan

Another form that Dylan's moral approach to the Bible takes is in his use of the Bible's wise sayings. At least since the days of Solomon wisdom has been a popular form of biblical teaching. Such wise sayings may take the form of a perceptive moral observation or, often, a sage proverb about human nature. Prior to his religious conversion Dylan was possibly best known for his classic aphorisms endlessly quoted. Some reflect occasional biblical influence such as his lines from "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" suggested by John 3:3:

*That he not busy being born
Is busy dying.*

... That Bob Dylan had a more than common familiarity with both the Old and New Testaments during this folk culture period is apparent .. Some of this biblical knowledge was clearly derivative, having come to him through motion pictures, novels, or other folk songs ... In the opening of "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)"

Darkness at the break of noon

might be taken from Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon* instead of Amos or Jeremiah.

B.SARLIN

Turn It Up! I Can't Hear the Words

The guidance [Dylan] offers is really not directive; Dylan is beyond that here. Instead, he tries to talk to his audience about methods for survival on the streets they must know in order to escape a system that would narrow their lives.

This brotherly relationship is important to understand. It is the key to the fanatical devotion of Dylan's audience. At a time when leadership was scarce and many young people saw themselves facing a void Dylan was *there* with his hints on survival. The lessons were never in the heavy-handed language of academe, but ironic, impressionistic, imaginative, and they were sympathetic to his brothers and sisters. He is saying: the situation we're all in is a mess, and we may not be able to fix it, but we can learn to exist without being crushed by it. Literally no one else had either the balls or the insight to tell it this way, and Dylan is to much of his audience still their only leader, even if the man is reluctant to take on the responsibility.

... *With Bringing It All Back Home*, he leaves logic and begins to skirt the edge of madness. The songs become longer, more abstract, and infinitely more powerful.

Dylan is an admirer of Rimbaud, and the first signs of the French poet's influence appear in this album. No longer satisfied with literalness, Dylan leaps into the void. A lesser man might have been overwhelmed by what he perceived once his blinders were off, but Dylan had the intelligence and the courage to confront his nightmares. This kind of courage is a rare and dangerous gift, and Dylan nearly destroyed himself on the journey to his own soul.

Not only did he survive, but he sent back messages - perceptions unmatched by any of his contemporaries for their intensity, insight and grandeur.

The beginnings of this flight from surface reality are on this album in two songs, "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" and "The Gates of Eden".

The first song is Dylan's final declaration of independence from the expectations of others. "I have no one to live up to," he sings. It is also an indictment of the alternatives available to him. The song is bitter, yet sad. Dylan seems almost sorry that he must pursue this new path, and he reassures his listeners that he is not mad, only tired of the paths they would have him follow.

D.DOWNING

Future Rock

Dylan's vision of human society as a vast tragi-comic fairground, a timeless self-sustaining relativistic system, has both a negative and a positive aspect to it. "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" is a good example of the underlying ambiguity. It can be heard as an epic hymn to resignation -

*To understand you know too soon
There is no sense in trying.*

In the light of Dylan's earlier political songs this can only be seen as the triumph of disillusion and despair. "The flesh-coloured Christs that glow in the dark" ironically taunt a society devoid of any real spirituality. The dull hammering of the guitar between verses only seems to emphasize the futility of seeking change; the choruses - "it's only people's games you got to dodge", "I got nothing, Ma, to live up to" - sound like the hounded crusader in search of a personal solution, as the only option left open to him.

In the light of Dylan's later work, though, the song seems very different. Life is only meaningless to those who seek meaning. Zen Buddhism, in which Dylan grew interested around this period, does not so seek. The song begins with a neat inversion of the famous Zen poem-line - "at midnight, the bright sun"; the line "there is no sense in trying" could have been taken from a Zen primer. Not because things do not change, but because "trying" in itself embodies that split in the mind between thought and expression, which the Zen experience seeks to heal, and so restore the individual his natural spontaneity. A Zen Buddhist would find the society portrayed in "It's Alright, Ma" just as distasteful, but would not "try" to change "it" in the conventional sense. To change it you would have to be a part of it; to be part of it would prevent you from changing it.

That the song can be interpreted in either of these two ways with equal validity is a measure of the honesty contained in the pictures Dylan was painting. But these negative and positive aspects to the reality he was exploring did not always co-exist within the same song ...

T.O'GRADY

"The Prince" (in E.THOMSON and D.GUTMAN (eds.) : The Dylan Companion)

Bob Dylan grew up in Hibbing, Minnesota, during the Truman and Eisenhower years, a time of cold war certainties, deep parochial resentment and moral simplicities. Hamlet grew up in the court of Elsinore. His life too was governed by certainties - the wondrously subtle and seemingly everlasting hierarchies of the court, the glory and rightness of kingship. But then, in America, came presidents like Johnson and Nixon, napalm-dropping generals, judges who would go easy on the likes of William Zanzinger, patriots who murdered Medgar Evers. And, in Denmark, a murderer became king. What gives both Dylan and Hamlet their extraordinary vividness is the sense that they have awakened from a long illusion, that the world they had known has become manifestly insane, that they are looking upon it as it has never been looked on before. What they have awakened to is uncertainty. There is no Garden of Eden of Peace and Love to replace what has been lost, no political or religious orthodoxy with which to stem the chaos. In their way they have nothing, and therefore nothing to lose, they are invisible, and ultimately have no secrets to conceal, they are out on the street with no way back, alone and naked in an impossibly varied universe.

It is an awakening such as this which is depicted in the song "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)". In it there is the decaying world of "fake morals", "false gods", where "the masters make the rules" and "not much/ls really sacred" and "money doesn't talk it swears", along with the discovery that:

"You lose yourself, you reappear" and "suddenly find you got nothing to fear", that "it is not he or she or them or it/That you belong to", that "life outside goes on/All around you", that "he not busy being born/Is busy dying" and that, in the end, "it's life and life only". There are too in this song the lines,

*For them that think death's honesty
Won't fall upon them naturally,
Life sometimes
Must get lonely.*

Death is the only certainty, the final equaliser.

R.SHELTON

No Direction Home

"IT'S ALRIGHT, MA (I'M ONLY BLEEDING)": The title's sly play on "That's All Right, Mama", the Arthur "Big Boy" Cradup song that became Presley's first single. I once mentioned the similarity of titles to Bob. Dylan mordantly replied "Yeah, they are the same sort of song". "It's Alright, Ma" is the ultimate protest song, demolishing so many myths and social evils.

I find "It's Alright, Ma" more sad than angry. He seems to be talking simultaneously to a generation of parents and would-be parents. Measure the growth of two years' writing since "Times Changing". Try transcribing one verse and you see the plummeting drive that pushes him along as if he had to get it all said before time runs out. This song, Bill King wrote, "is to capitalism what Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* is to communism..." The setting is again horrific, where the Koestler-like setting for a new crucifixion, "Darkness at the break of noon", eclipses everything into dark shadows. Then, the attack on lifelessness, on succumbing to despair: "he not busy being born/Is busy dying". Perhaps the biggest ambiguity is the shifting point of view. Is the singer speaking of himself, or describing the plight of the listener? Besides several misspelled or poorly transcribed words, the folio and *The Bob Dylan Song Book* omitted verses four and five, forty-five lines. Note his late changes in *Words and Drawings*.

"It's Alright, Ma" disputes that Dylan had become socially unconscious. He moved his protest here to a higher level, to polemize the human condition. In a remarkable verse, Dylan previews the sexual revolution that didn't erupt until years later. He lashes out at the "Old lady judges" he knew so well in Hibbing. The fierce defence of security, he knows, is no insurance against death. His targets have widened to include advertising, propaganda, obscenity, false gods and goals. Despite his anger, he accepts lies and malaise as part of life, tempering an outraged snort into sadness. Implicitly, he sees that the flaws of life are beyond good and evil. This is almost a spoken poem, like Ginsberg's "Howl". In fact, an excellent melodic, rhythmic base provides hammer strokes for nailing down a steel spike. Repetition of certain phrases heightens dramatic impact, builds tension.

C.HEYLIN

Behind the Shades

"It's Alright, Ma" is an epic that dwarves even "Gates of Eden". If, as seems likely, he wrote it that August in Woodstock, he must have worked hard and long on the structure of the song. Its fifteen verses and five slightly different refrains provide an impressive catalogue of social ills. For "It's Alright, Ma" was far more of a finger-pointin' song than anything on *The Times They Are a-Changin'*. Adopting the apocalyptic tradition he so skilfully used on "The Times They Are a-Changin'" and "Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall", he produced a damning roster of American society's malaises, including perhaps more memorable aphorisms than any other popular song - "Money doesn't talk it swears"; "He not busy being born is busy dying" etc. If fans felt that Dylan had abandoned the realms of social relevance, "It's Alright, Ma" reminded them that the topical song was only one way of writing about contemporary America, and that his new, more surreal approach might be a more appropriate way of dealing with the kaleidoscopic nature of the mid-sixties.

T.RILEY
Hard Rain - A Dylan Commentary

Part of *Bringing It All Back Home's* coherence lies in the way these songs talk to one another from different sides of the same vinyl, making the connections between electric and acoustic material all the more synergistic. At fifteen verses, the dark, ambulatory psychological matrix of "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" is the intense acoustic complement to the run-on slapstick of "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream", and it makes about as much emotional sense. Snagged by a sour, pinched guitar riff, the song has an acerbic tinge, like the vicious retort of someone who is angrily shaking off maternal encumbrance - and Dylan sings the title rejoinders in mock self-pity. If "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" is about the meaninglessness of historical fact, "It's Alright, Ma" is about the futility of philosophy. It's like a phantasmic bad-luck charm, and it bypasses logic so persuasively you're tempted to buy into the song's nihilistic certainties. Like "Gates of Eden", it comes close to expressing the dream life of Dylan's audience, only this time through circuitous emotional flashes instead of highfalutin surrealistic language.

The verses build in patterns of three towards a terse three-line refrain that works like a deflating punch line; it's a list song with summations so inconclusive that they only pry more frustrations from what they follow.

Dylan has gotten so good at exploiting his own song forms that sifting through these shards of psychotic displacement becomes another chance to drop-kick the odd glimmer of truth: "Money doesn't talk, it swears/Obscenity, who really cares?"

Verse twelve may be the best expression of Dylan's obsession with the Madison Avenue's mass coercion towards sameness:

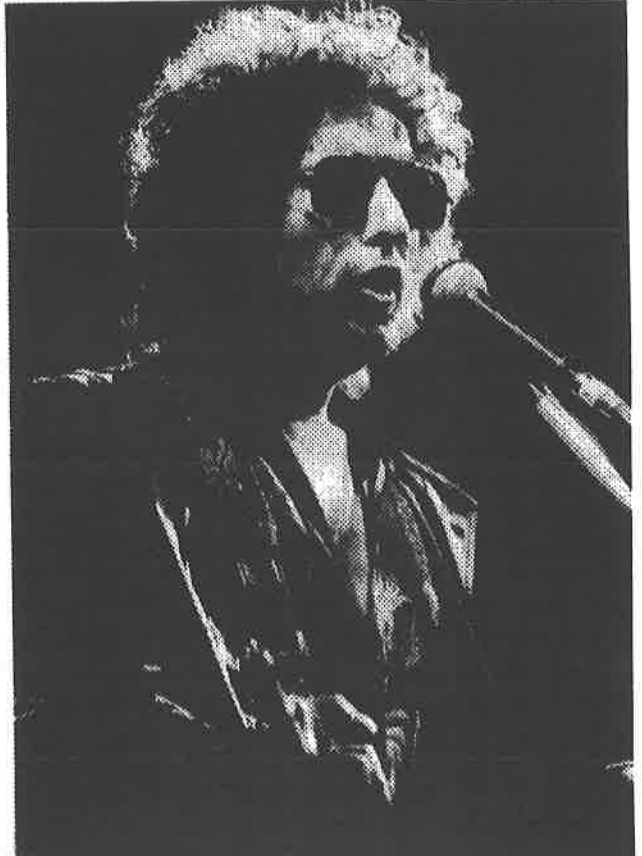
*While one who sings with his tongue on fire
Gargles in the rat race choir*

Part of what steers "It's Alright, Ma" is Dylan's angered determination to expose the hypocrisy that induces such mass-media inebriation; and part of what keeps these crap-shoot images afloat is their very potency as seductive illusion. It's less an indictment of the system than a coil of imagery that spells out how the system hangs itself with the rope it's so proud of.

B.SPITZ
Bob Dylan - A Biography

... The remaining three songs - "Gates of Eden", "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)", and "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" - were equally impressive, if not as pop-orientated as "Mr Tambourine Man". Unlike his previous compositions, which were mostly topical, Bob concentrated on the poetry in each line, stretching his already superb command of imagist verse into the abstract and beyond. "Gates of Eden" and "It's Alright, Ma" extended his experimentation with strobe-like flashes of imagery, however brooding and cynical, into epic-length extrapolations on the human condition. Part sermon, part free-form rap, all three songs were heavily moralistic. Their message was the whole world's a mess. THEY fucked up, now WE have to live with it. All fifteen verses of "It's Alright, Ma" careen along the precipice of Armageddon, plucked from the brink of despair only by the witty refrain, "But it's alright, Ma..."

Bob unloaded on whatever was bugging him at the time - organized religion, phony advertising, the rat race, our antiquated court system. His belligerence respected none of the establishment icons. He was pissed off at conventional society and its platitudes ...



IT'S NOT ALRIGHT MA BY CARL EWENS

It occurred to me when I decided to try to analyse this song, that I had always unconsciously avoided fully understanding the import of the feelings behind it. Really studying it in depth brought home to me many things about Dylan's perspective on the world (as a young man) that I had never before completely come to terms with. The song is deadly serious, for a start: any humour, if you can call it that, is not so much black as sick. It is a song about futility and pain, of course, but to state that sounds a little glib, because there is such confusion and real suffering in every verse, that the feeling of the song is likely to give you a very real sense of alienation and sheer terror if you let it. I felt a little bit as if each verse was a larger and larger wave of fear and that if I let them keep coming at me in the fullness of their intensity, I would surely drown in them.

That the song should open with a line recalling a famous work of literature which dealt with repression and imprisonment (Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*) throws us into the song's tempestuous themes at the deep end. In that book, Koestler recounts, semi-autobiographically his experience of being persecuted and incarcerated under an Eastern European totalitarian regime. In referring to this work, if this is what Dylan was doing, we are immediately in the area of political corruption, a subject which had gnawed at Dylan right from his earliest folk days, and which he makes sure we take into account from the very first line of this, possibly the most overtly political of all his lyrics. It is as if he is saying here that the darkness of political corruption is the first thing that one must consider in approaching the subject, and that this dark oppression is quick to set in (it arrives at the 'break of noon') - power corrupts, as the saying goes, and complete power corrupts completely.

The next few lines of the song show how power of the sort that sets itself up as the final arbiter of good and evil shows no mercy to those even with money or background (*shadows even the silver spoon*), and that allied with violence *the handmade blade* it is simply unstoppable. He shows this by remarking that the blade, along with 'a child's balloon' can blot out the sun and moon, such is their significance. Here, I assume the child's balloon to be a reference to the effortlessness of the whole charade, or even the effortlessness with which we are taken in by pleasures proffered by those with power, or perhaps by the world in general. Ending the first verse with the couplet about there being 'no sense in trying', opens up another can of worms: moral responsibility. Can we really do nothing about all the senseless brutality and stupidity that goes on around us?

The complications and complexities of life in general begin to build up with an ominous certainty from here on in; we will be scornfully threatened although this may be only a bluff, but when the fool suggests suicide as a way out, this should only serve as a warning to us to live life to the full. If we give in to any of the many temptations, we will undergo ordeals which will only fill us with regrets and recriminations ('waterfalls of pity'), but don't bother to moan because you won't be heard. Dylan concludes the first chorus by pointing out that his sighs are hardly worth the effort, it's a 'foreign sound', i.e. most people just get on with it and couldn't care less. It is tempting to suggest that the 'Ma' figure to whom the song is addressed is none other than Mother Nature, because there is the possibility that Dylan saw all of the craziness around him in society and the music business as aspects of nature, or at least human nature. I mention this because he sometimes appears to sneer at the 'Ma' character whilst at other times he seems more respectful to her or at least resigned to her influence on things. Some commentators go much further and often attribute Dylan's songwriting to a 'muse', and invoke the idea of a Goddess figure in Dylan's poetry. If this is the case, then at this stage of his career he seems to have been beginning to learn that his Muse or Goddess could also be 'nature's beast' to which he referred in a much later song (*Dark Eyes*; 1985).

In the next three stanzas Dylan is juxtaposing good and bad advice and other sentiments he has no doubt heard being expressed time and time again. Some people are optimistic, some are pessimistic but it is the huge sense of utter futility about the fantastic catalogue of opinions that comes through most strongly in these lines, the sense of being at a loss, of having heard it all before. Set against the disillusionment and cynicism of those who hate everything are others who Dylan characterises as 'human gods', which is an odd way of describing what appears to be nothing more than the advertising and merchandising community. In one sense the businessmen and women who set out to make money at all costs irrespective of the 'sacred' and the effects their products might have in society do set themselves up as gods of a kind - they are largely invisible or inconspicuous, but wield immense power from behind the scenes! Next, there is the suggestion that everyone has something to hide, or that no-one dares to tell the whole truth, neither preachers, teachers or presidents...but Dylan ends this tirade by pointing out that secretly everyone knows the rules, but that each person plays a different game. Finally, there is a very weary and not too convincing *I can make it* thrown in at the end and it really is difficult to tell whether this is defiance or defeat.

The third three-stanza verse throws yet more corruption at us to begin with advertising lies that entice us to pay for unattainable goals, caught in the maelstrom of day to day existence. Swallowed up by all the chicanery, suddenly the narrator finds himself in a hiatus where he is seemingly seduced by another person's claim to have 'found' him. The next line, *a question in your nerves is lit, but you know that there is no answer fit*, is really the central point and axis of the song: how do we stave-off the creeping sense of the futility of our actions, in the face of our helplessness? How do we achieve a sense of freedom, when we always appear to be beholder to somebody, in somebody else's power, or even their property? Dylan then suggests that he is beyond all this, that he has seen through all the cons, and that he has rejected everything. The problem then appears to be, but what am I left with? Notably, Dylan doesn't even bother to consider this problem, for, surely, this would mean having to accept something.

In the fourth verse, having put aside the search for any meaning in all the futile suffering around him Dylan goes on to outline the reasons why he feels no guilt at the possibility of disappointing people, or exploding their preconceptions and people who live lives they must conform, fitting and 'Social Clubs' and criticise others who they all they hypocritically say people they attack person is dead). Whilst the *in the rat race choir* has the fact that the person's really makes the image bent out of shape too, series of metaphors. And wants to, not seeing his *the hole that he's in*. A thrown out at the end of all is not seeking to 'put fault' have fallen so low down; on Dylan's part since his point out this persons is being played. He has with those who accept and, encourage acceptance of The blind are, as usual,



expectations. These are don't really enjoy, who feel neatly into political factions either slavishly idolise or see as outsiders. And to cap *God bless him* to the same (especially probably after the line about someone *gargling* some semblance of humour, tongue is said to be 'on fire' somewhat sickening to me, deformed, this is an ugly the poor fool, we are told, own plight, drag us *down into* curious type of disclaimer is this however, that the singer on anyone because they this, however, is mere hubris whole intention has been to complicity in the game that most certainly 'put fault' both earlier with those who society's norms and dogmas. leading the blind.

But in the kingdom of the blind...Dylan finally, in the last verse, for all the world like a one-eyed king, spits out yet more bile in the direction of stuffy old-fashioned moralists, who, he implies, are merely jealous of the young (and their sixties-style free-love, presumably). Here, I feel Dylan really does sound like an 'angry young man' railing against middle-aged, middle-class standards. He next decries Mammon and seems to convey the impression that he is angry about both obscenity and propaganda, although these lines can be read in such a way as to support the use of obscenity, since most of the propaganda of his and our time would weigh against it. Part of the problem for Dylan with the people he is attacking, is, it has to be said, their need for security above all else; for this is what makes them live what he sees as such wretched lives. He feels they must be lonely indeed when they reflect that they have wasted their lives, perhaps anticipating something of the 'mid-life-crisis' syndrome that has gripped America in recent years

In the very last stanza, we reach the deepest fear and horror, Dylan ponders death and 'false gods' who beckon him at every turn, and bemoans the petty games that he has to deal with day in day out. But even in the 'stuffed graveyards' he is defiant, and produces a startling image of an escapeologist (one thinks of Houdini) maybe wrestling with chains, the chains of mortality and futility, the handcuffs of fear and loathing, finally either giving up or managing to discard his bondage momentarily, just long enough to gesture rudely at the gods and say *alright, what else can you show me*. The last image of the martyr's death scenario (for that is what it is) cannot help but foreshadow Dylan's later conversion to Christianity and subsequent faith - for how long could the man go on having such terrible visions of the shortcomings of *life and life only*?

Just a note for new readers, here: the last Focus On spotlighted Where Are You Tonight?(Journey Through Dark Heat) and the overwhelming feedback that Paula received by that is reprinted below. Thanks, Ged, for saving the day - I'm terrified Paula quits her role! Any thoughts on what you've read about It's Alright Ma, (I'm Only Bleeding) will be gratefully received as, of course, will any pieces on Chimes Of Freedom.

GED KEILTY WHERE ARE YOU TONIGHT?(JOURNEY THROUGH DARK HEAT)

I was on a train travelling across the country, travelling from one woman to another, travelling on a lovely, summer afternoon, travelling with the words of someone else's journey through dark heat in my mind.

I was 20 and thought that if the words of this song did not quite epitomise the whole of human experience, then they summarised everything there is to know about love, or, at least, my limited and underfed knowledge of love.

Yes, there was a woman I longed to touch, who I was missing so much, and who was drifting. Yes, sacrifice was today's code of the road, and, yes, if you reminded me I would be happy to show you the scars. And if you pushed me I probably would agree that my story was one that nobody could write, that the truth was indeed too obscure, too profound, too pure, and that somehow horseplay and disease was killing me by degrees. What a load of pretentious nonsense!

This is the sort of trap I would let myself fall into during my first years of listening to Dylan. Instead of allowing his songs to liberate me, I let them confine me - confine my feelings to the limits of his rhyming couplets. Instead of using his voice of experience to endlessly widen the horizons of possibility I used his words to strictly proscribe the limits I would live within. Instead of following his crucial advice, "Trust Yourself" I believed if I trusted Bob Dylan I would find the only way that would prove true in the end. Well, I was only 20 and you're allowed to be daft when you're 20. I said that!

Street Legal remains my favourite album. *Where Are You Tonight?* is still a song I'd use to support any argument about Dylan's prowess as a songwriter. But a song to live by in the nineties? A song which outlines the whole of human experience and ambition? A song which really tells it like it is? Give yourself a treat, get out your copy of *Street Legal* and give yourself a blast of *New Pony*.

Oh No! Not Another Bob Dylan List!!

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*You may think you know the music of Bob Dylan, but if you haven't heard **Across The Borderline** from the 1986 tour, you may be missing the heart of the man.*

(Paul Williams - *Performing Artist Vol.2.*)

Dylan's use of **Across The Borderline** in concert, beginning in 1986, is unsurprising, but worthy of note. It's a song in which the co-authors, Ry Cooder and John Hiatt, explore themes and territories long familiar to the hard-bitten Dylan follower. It's a song which Dylan can almost claim to have made his own in recent years, certainly for those of us who only know it from "live" tapes and not via any studio version. It is easy to agree with Paul Williams' view on this one: to perceive the song as peculiarly special to Dylan. A perception which you might feel is enhanced by the sensitivity which Dylan always appears to apply to its performance, also by its significance at Seville '91 and, most of all, from the chronological relevance of its initial incorporation into the Dylan canon in February of 1986. You may get an inkling of what I mean by the latter point if you have read an earlier piece on **Dark Eyes** which appeared in **Homer** No. 8. I want to try and discuss this "cover" song in the context of its landscape, its place in the structure of Dylan's 1986 concerts, and its themes.

ZONES OF FEELING, PROVINCES OF THE SOUL.

A particular geographical territory is evoked in **Across The Borderline**. This is nothing new for Dylan. A stunning example from his own work is 1975's **Isis**, a song which sets a story, essentially a quest, against a series of physical locations:

*the wild unknown country
a high place of darkness and light
we set out that night for the cold in the north
we rode through the canyons, through the devilish cold
The pyramids all embedded in ice*

and, ultimately

there in the meadow where the creek used to rise

This is an unusually dramatic example, but Dylan has often used images of nature's wilderness-places to symbolise the soul's struggles against (or within) a hostile environment. it's an old technique and Dylan has made much of it.

The back-cloth of much of Dylan's art is an arid or barren landscape - a wasteland of the mind. Nature is not seen as "green" or beautiful, rather it is harsh, unyielding, a testing-ground for the human spirit. And we respond to this act of creation, despite the fact that few of us living modern urban lives will ever experience such elemental zones at first hand.

My guess is that Dylan knows this will be so, knows that we have been conditioned to respond more emotionally to this sort of symbolism than if it were more modern, more urban, more urbane. It may be that the reason we so readily respond is partly cultural and partly hereditary. On a cultural level it is something we imbibe from childhood in the films and books we are exposed to. On another level it may be some primeval echo of the past permeating our life's blood - traces of our primitive ancestors. For these reasons, Dylan's stories, visions and prophecies can use ancient imagery to provide road maps for the soul.

If you care to take a look at the front cover of **under the red sky** or the inner sleeve of **Infidels** you may also see these as possessing symbolic coherence. Both feature Dylan squatting on stony ground in an open, barren landscape. One I know is Israel, the other I'm not sure about but could easily be a southern state of the U.S.A. - near the borderline? They could as easily be the same location. Were it not for his clothes it could almost be the same photo session. What is it about dry, parched and sterile landscapes that they drew him twice? What do they say to you? What do they say to me? Surely there is something scriptural about them, something elemental, something apocalyptic, something essentially Dylanesque?

There must be hundreds of supporting examples you could choose from Dylan's work. I don't have a Dylan concordance, so forgive me if you are able to offer more representative items than the following:-

.....I've stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains.....
When blackness was a virtue and the road was full of mud.....
I came in from the wilderness, a creature void of form.....
From the poverty shacks, he looks from the cracks to the tracks.....
Past the Aztec ruins and the ghosts of our people.....
I was lyin' down in the reeds without any oxygen.....
I saw you in the wilderness among the men.....

Why have I spent so much time discussing Dylan's use of landscape? Because I want to lead you to the Borderline, *that hollow place where martyrs weep and angels play with sin.*

Borderlines seem to hold an allegorical significance for Dylan. Even back in 1966 he said *there's only one place in the world where people understand me - it's somewhere in Texas along the Mexican border.* This may have been tongue-in-cheek at the time, but there have been an awful lot of references to the Tex-Mex border since then. It sure does fit. Perhaps this fascination for borderlines was intensified by living so much on the edge in 1966. Again, we should ask what is it? What is it about borders - about living near the line, about the dangers, fears, temptations, apprehensions of crossing the line? Surely it's something embedded in the human psyche? We are territorial creatures, we mark out our territories like any animal. Most of us feel insecure once we move off our home ground. Over the border is another country - here be dragons, monsters, spirits, the great and terrifying unknown. Only hoboes, minstrels and other "wanderers by trade" cross borders with equanimity. Once you cross the parched wasteland or the misty river that symbolises the border, you may never return. *One more cup of coffee 'fore I go - to the valley below.*

As with landscapes there are any number of borderline quotes you could come up with:-

.....*The howling beast on the borderline which separated you from me.....*
*Where the winds hit heavy on the borderline.....*
*But you ain't goin' to cross the line, I guess it must be up to me.....*
*On the northern border of Texas where I crossed the line.....*

BOB DYLAN AND DEATH

I believe that somewhere between 1981 and 1985, Bob Dylan experienced a crisis of faith, lost the sense of being "chosen" by God. The story of his conversion suggests that he would have felt "chosen" and this would have been emphasised by his Jewish roots. Al Kooper claims, rather presumptuously, that "little by little I knocked the christianity out of him". Just who the hell does he think he is? I don't believe any human being could have that much influence on Dylan. But whatever the reasons for the change, it clearly occurred, and it must be a terrible thing to still believe in God but to doubt that He believes in you. But this is the position in which I believe that 1986 found Dylan, and these concerts confirm for me the message of **Dark Eyes**.

Paul Williams wrote on **Bob Dylan And Death** in *The Telegraph* 31. At the time I thought it was the most wonderful and intuitively insightful thing I had ever read on Dylan. I was swept away by it. I listened to the 1986 and 1988 tapes he recommended, concentrating particularly on **Across The Borderline**, **Man Of Constant Sorrow**, **Lonelome Town** etc. But now I'm not so sure. Williams has this ability to carry you away just as he is carried away. And there is certainly a school of non-thought that says you can't understand Dylan solely by applying your mind to his performances/lyrics. And, of course, they are right. But that doesn't mean you have to switch your mind off, and neither should I have done this when I read Williams.

I've written before about the two-way process - the interaction between performer and listener. What perhaps I need to re-emphasise here is that such interaction is not static. So the emotions, thoughts, experiences that I passed through when listening to **Freewheelin'** in 1964 cannot be the same ones I pass through when I listen to the same album in 1992. For one thing, I am a very different person from the young man who listened to his only Bob Dylan LP on a mono Bush "record-player" way back then. I cannot divorce all that I have experienced in the last 28 years from my listening today. Nor can I off-load all the listening to, and reading about, Dylan that I have done in the interim. Although it's also true to say that every time I hear **Freewheelin'** my experiences are informed and affected by the memory of that very first hearing and, presumably subconsciously, by all the other times I have heard the album since then. I don't wish to sound too post-modernist, but no single hearing can ever take place in a vacuum. Sorry if I've laboured this point, but what I'm leading up to is that much criticism/discussion of Dylan seems to assume some sort of steady-state on the part of the listener. Perhaps it would be too complicated to do otherwise. It readily

accepts that Dylan as a performer-in-motion is in a constant state of flux - eternally re-inventing himself, a man called Alias; but then forgets that, though none of us transform our lives to the degree that Dylan does, nonetheless we are also a-changin'. There can be no true, definitive, once and for all interpretation of any song or performance. I say this because (a) I think it is self-evidently true and it behoves us all to retain a sense of perspective and not get too partisan about our individual interpretations (my support for Michael Gray's views on, say, **Desolation Row**, are of a wholly different order from my support for Leicester City FC, the latter is unchanging) and (b) my own experience of modifying my initial enthusiastic response to **Bob Dylan and Death** seems to be directly related to my own changing life situation and on-going religious doubt. O.K.?

In **Bob Dylan and Death**, Williams sees Dylan "looking forward to release from the vale of suffering" - an acceptance, a welcoming of, rather than fear of death. There is a romanticising of death, which is not the end, in this essay, and I do understand why Williams portrays Dylan in this way. And I still agree with much of what appears in that article. It's just that now, after some years of reflecting on **Dark Eyes**, 1986, and Paul Williams, I feel (I certainly don't know) that Dylan's lonesome, death-haunted themes were not the acceptance of death that I had once thought. I now hear a deeper, sorrowing soulfulness in these songs, and that is too heartbroken for me to interpret it as a welcoming of death. Rather, I hear an awareness of death (which most of us have by our mid-40's) interwoven with a consciousness of God's presence. But, for me, Dylan is on the borderline between faith and unfaith and yet he knows there ain't no neutral ground. And that's where the melancholy comes from to imbue this period and these songs. Dylan wants to want death, knows that it is relatively imminent (how many years can one man have?) but knows that he is not at one with his God.

In **Homer, the slut** J.R. Stokes writes that Dylan presents *pictures of someone who has lost his special love entirely because of his own conduct and who is thus rendered to a state of despairing sorrow*. Stokes is referring here to a loss of sexual love and is discussing **You're A Big Girl Now** and **Congratulations**. In 1979 Dylan began a passionate love affair with Christ, and my guess is that by 1985/86 he was feeling that he had lost Christ's special love entirely because of his (Dylan's) own conduct. We do tend to repeat old mistakes in new relationships, and it is easy to believe that Dylan couldn't help himself when it came to the point. He couldn't remain faithful husband or a faithful Christian. It just wasn't in him. *Yonder comes sin - fanning the flames in the furnace of desire and the distant ships of liberty bring everything nearer to the fire*. And this is one time when it's actually worse to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. You only don't miss what you've never had. But to have had Christ and rejected Him is the end of the world for the believer; he knows exactly what he's lost.

LOST DOMAINS, FORMS OF BEING.

In **Performing Artist, Vol 2** Dylan's approach to the 1986 tour is described as being one in which he "creates, shares, explores and conveys a mood. That is the purpose of his score, his composition, his show". I find it hard to accept this. I understand that it is possible to see, in retrospect, a structure to these shows, but I find it hard to reconcile this with all I know of Dylan. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane in "Modernism" (a book they jointly edit) talk about an aesthetic revolution based on an art "that makes life, the drama of the artist's consciousness, the structure that lies beyond time, history, character or visible reality, the moral imperative of technique". Dylan can be identified with the modernist movement, but can he really have planned the 1986 shows in such a calculating manner, to so precisely reflect the state of his soul? It is hard to reconcile this with the reputation he has established as an intuitive performer. Nonetheless I think Williams may be right.

The structure Williams perceives is encapsulated as he writes: "in every city Dylan preached to us about **Lonesome Town**, and **Across The Borderline**, and the garden, and the night that comes falling from the sky". I'm prepared to accept this at face value, primarily because it suits my purposes! I can see that you might consider my approach plagiaristic, if so, it is not intentional. Williams's thoughts have certainly influenced me, but I prefer to think of my efforts as a feeble by-product of his work. He has certainly contributed much to where, emotionally, I now find myself in relation to **Across The Borderline**. I cannot hope to be original or pretend that I haven't read Williams. I can only try to convince you of what seems to be true for me.

BORDER SONGS.

Let's look briefly at the three songs Williams links with **Across The Borderline**. Are they Border Songs?

Lonesome Town.

In **Bob Dylan and Death**, Williams drew parallels between **Lonesome Town** and **Across The Borderline**, and I can see what he meant. They both use physical localities to explore similar emotional situations. I don't need to emphasise this - Williams does it well enough. When I was at school, I always liked Ricky Nelson and it was a disappointment to me when Michael Gray (**Song And Dance Man**) aligned him with Frankie Avalon and Fabian, singers Dylan himself commented contemptuously upon in 1966. In **The Telegraph** 34, Derek Mankelov notes Rick (no Y by this time) Nelson's **Garden Party** reference to Dylan:

*And over in the corner much to my surprise
Mister Hughes hid in Dylan's shoes wearing his disguise*

Through the '86 tour Dylan regularly introduced **Lonesome Town** as a sort of tribute to Nelson. On 17th July at Madison Square Garden this tribute was interesting: *I'm gonna play a real special song here in this special place. This is the very stage that Ricky Nelson got booed off for singing **Garden Party**. This is the same one we're standing on. Anyway it gives me great pleasure to sing one of Ricky's songs in this place.*

Booed off the stage, huh? Wow! That must've been some unique experience. Whatever Nelson's youthful blandness, he'd certainly enough self-knowledge to change his way of thinking by 1973. Little wonder Dylan wanted to pay his dues.

In The Garden. Another song associating a place with a feeling - in this case a feeling of reverence and worship. But it's also a reference to a borderline experience. Christ and the apostles at the borderline. For these obsessed men, whatever the morrow was to bring, they could be certain that nothing would ever be the same again. Not for them, not for the whole world. For whatever you may think about Christianity you surely cannot deny that it has been of earth-moving significance. In the garden of Gethsemane they prepared for their fate, for kismet, calvinistically predestined to come to this point to work out God's purpose. And they must've been scared.

When The Night Comes Falling From The Sky. Al Kooper referred to this song as **All Along The Watchtower**, Mark 2. Well, I'm not sure about that, though it does seem to me to be a major work. The music is dramatically compelling, evoking a stormy and romantic night under a racing moon. And it's certainly another border song: *It was on the northern border of Texas where I crossed the line.* Southern border surely? Well, no, that would be too easy. The line to be crossed is not physical, it lies in the soul or *in the wasteland of your mind*. I couldn't begin to interpret this song, but I know that it fits the mood of the period - and who are you that I should have to lie?

ACROSS THE BORDERLINE.

*There's a place, so I've been told,
Where every street is paved with gold
And it's just across the borderline.
And when it's time to take your turn,
There's a lesson you must learn
You could lose more than you ever hoped to find.
And when you reach that broken-promise land,
And all your dreams slip through your hand
You will know it's too late to change your mind.
'Cos you've paid the price to come so far
Just to wind up where you are
And you're still just across the borderline.*

*I look down the Rio Grande
A thousand footprints in the sand
Reveal a secret no one can define.
The river flows on like a breath
In between our lives and death
Tell me who is next to cross that borderline?
And when you reach that broken-promise land,
All your dreams fall through your hand
You will know it's too late to change your mind.*

*Because you've paid the price to come so far,
Just to wind up where you are
And you're still just across that borderline.*

And so we return to the subject of this essay. What is this song saying to us - saying to Dylan? To even begin to comprehend this, you've got to feel it in your bones, in your soul. Springsteen said that Dylan freed your mind. Well, sure he did, but you can't approach this song with your mind, and certainly not with your body. It speaks to something inside us, something intangible, something, I suspect for many of us that is intensely lonely. I could name it. I could call it your soul, your spirit, and these words have religious connotations and the mention of religion might be an instant turn-off. I'd like to find some other words, but there aren't any I can think of that I could be sure would hold the associations for you that they hold for me. It is a song that speaks to a common spirituality. In the process it touches something in me that is fundamental, elemental; something related to my guilt, my original sin. Something that I feel about my rejection of, and alienation from, my God. If I could be an out-and-out atheist there wouldn't be a problem. If I could be a Christian there wouldn't be a problem. Instead, I feel that at a subconscious level I have accepted that God exists in some form, but that I have rejected Him along with the commitments that acceptance of Him would entail. I know you shouldn't project your own feelings onto Dylan or his art, and yet, somehow I can't help it with **Dark Eyes** or with **Across The Borderline**.

Both songs seem to mine a religious seam in the coalfields of the soul. In the process they refresh the spirit, they console at the same time as they condemn. It is a comfort to feel sad, if in the depths of this sadness there is the hint of a relationship with a God, even if this relationship is out of kilter. At least there is a relationship. At least you feel something.

Across The Borderline evokes an almost-scriptural territory. God cast Cain out into the wilderness "a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (**Genesis Ch.4 v.12**). Who was the "original vagabond"? *And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden* (**Genesis 4 v.16** - yes, I have read Steinbeck). If **Dark Eyes** does speak to us of Dylan's doubts about his own faith, then he must have felt an awful empathy with Cain.

The words of **Across The Borderline**, particularly of the first stanza, are desperately lonesome: *and when you reach that broken-promise land, and all your dreams slip through your hand*. Taken literally it almost offers no hope, and yet I feel there is hope. The example of the Rio Grande as a border evokes memories of the River of Death in **Pilgrim's Progress**. (It also has links to **Brownsville Girl** which was written shortly before Dylan began to perform **Across The Borderline**. Brownsville is a border town at the very mouth of the Rio Grande). When Christian enters the River (**Pilgrim's Progress**) he begins to despair: *the sorrows of death have compassed me about, I shall not see the land that flows with milk and honey*. And, says Bunyan *with that a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian*. He found that *he had horror of mind and fears that he should die in that river, and never obtain entrance in at the gate*. But Hopeful reminds him that it is the wicked that *are not troubled as other men, neither are they plagued like other men*. So Christian's self-doubt was evidence of his regenerate nature and so he made it across the River of Death and entered the Celestial City. May it be so for Bob Dylan.

At the outset I referred to the significance of Seville '91. I may be guilty of projecting my feelings onto his performance again, but I believe it was with his wonderful and affecting rendering of **Across The Borderline** at Seville that Dylan's live art was reborn. For me 1991 was the Slough of Dylan's Despond. **Boots Of Spanish Leather** was an inferior performance, but all of a sudden with **Across The Borderline** the man was re-inspired. Any doubts I had about the special meaning the song possesses for Dylan evaporated at that moment. The very good 1992 concerts find their genesis in Seville 1991. It's as if some necromancy occurred at that moment on that Spanish stage by which the lyrics and melody of Cooder's song took Dylan across his own artistic borderline.

In the process of writing this essay I have found my mind wandering off into some personal hinterland, an imaginary quest for the dried-up and barren provinces that lead to the frontier in the wilderness of the soul. There is something innately attractive about border country that draws you in and calls to the essence of your being. The thorns and briars, rocks'n'gravel, only add integrity to the vision. And all is never lost. Until you cross the River of Death you don't know that you won't reach the Celestial City.

Dark Beauty meet me at the border late tonight.



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RY COODER was into the chorus of **Across the Borderline** when I glanced along row D of the Hammersmith Odeon stalls and saw a girl crying quietly to herself. She didn't look in distress, exactly, but these weren't tears of joy either. It seemed like a complicated set of emotions going on, and I thought: this must be some kind of song.

*When you reached the broken promised land
And every dream slips through your hand
Then you'll know it's too late to change your mind
Because you've paid the price to come this far
Just to wind up where you are
And you're still just across the borderline*

Listening to Cooder's warm, artless voice, his sweetly gliding bottleneck guitar and the band's swaying Tex-Mex rhythm, it certainly wasn't hard to share some of the same emotions. And since that night last March, when Cooder and Little Village performed it at the first of their London concerts, the song has kept turning up. First there was Bob Dylan singing it on television, at the "Guitar Legends" festival in Seville. Then, picked up from a market stall, there was a £5 bootleg cassette of Bruce Springsteen using it to finish his set at a 1990 charity concert in Los Angeles. Dylan and Springsteen: here are two fellows you'd trust to know a good tune when they hear it. Between them, they've composed many of the most significant songs of the last 30 years. So what drew them to a song that neither of them wrote, that wasn't written with any very profound purpose in mind, and that has never been a hit in any shape or form? And what is it that can make people cry when they hear it?

HE JUST said, 'I want a song that tells the story of the film.' Ry Cooder is thinking back to 1981, to when the British director Tony Richardson was briefing him on the soundtrack assignment for a movie called **The Border** starring Jack Nicholson as a frontier guard fending off the wetbacks down El Paso way.

Cooder is a veteran soundtrack composer; it's how he's made his living since it became obvious to him that touring the world with a band was neither financially viable nor a civilised way for a grown man to spend his time. **Southern Comfort**, **The Long Riders** and **Paris, Texas** are among his credits. He has a reputation for capturing and enhancing the moods of the southern states, thanks to his knowledge of blues, gospel, country and Tex-Mex music. So Richardson's request wasn't a surprise: but it was, in its way, a challenge.

It's a very good film, Cooder remembers, but a bleak and nasty one. There was Jack Nicholson with a bad haircut and a worse attitude, portraying the corruption of the immigration service. People didn't want that then, but Tony was a very uncompromising guy.

Richardson, says Cooder, wanted a song to start the film off. You have the opening sequence of a girl and her brother trying to get across. It's about 3½ minutes long, and I had to fit the tune into that space. I thought, what can I do? Guthrie already wrote the anthem of those people when he came up with **Deportees**. It's easy to fit a piece of instrumental music into a space like that, but it's hard to fit a song with lyrics.

Well, I got lucky. I was watching the piece of film over and over again, and a little chord progression came into my mind. Then I found a little rhythm, and a tempo, and I found I had the chord structure of a melodic ballad. From what I'd already done, I knew I had a good thing. So the next job was to get a chorus. A chorus can pull people in, and I liked the little melodic thing I came up with. Then one day I was out jogging and I thought of the words for the first verse—that yellow-brick-road thing 'There's a land, so I've been told / Every street is paved with gold . . .' Well, you've heard that a million times in gospel and pop songs, but it's still a great idea - this need that people have to feel that where they're going is better than where they've been. Little do they know! But they're driven by hope, otherwise they wouldn't go through it. Once I had that scoped out, I knew I had something I could take to John Hiatt.

Now a fellow member of Little Village, Hiatt is a singer and songwriter who had first gone on the road with Cooder in the mid-Seventies. *I drove up to his place in Topanga Canyon with a guitar and an amplifier, Cooder says. He was asleep. But Tony was coming back from France and he needed the song. So I set up in Hiatt's yard, plugged in and played. I said, John, I'm in a hurry.'* He said, *Play the chorus again.* By this time he was brushing his teeth. And he stuck his head out of the window and sang: *When you reach the broken promised land...* The whole chorus. And I said, *that's it, I'm outta here.*

WHICH BIT did I write? says John Hiatt. *The good bit of course!* He's right, in the sense that his line about *the broken promised land* is the key to the song, the idea that unlocks the emotions. It has its own specific and metaphoric meanings within the lyric, but it also resonates with rock'n'roll history. Chuck Berry was sitting in jail in Springfield, Missouri in 1962, serving part of a three-year sentence for transporting an under-age girl across a state line, when he wrote a song called **The Promised Land**. Aged 32, Berry had already written **Johnny B Goode**, **Roll Over Beethoven**, **Sweet Little Sixteen** and a dozen other classics of early rock'n'roll. To help him write this one, though, he needed a road atlas of the United States - something that the penal authorities were reluctant to provide to a potential escapee. But he got it, and with it he

wrote a song that embodies more vividly than any other the geographical and emotional reality of moving west across the USA.

On 25 February 1964, fresh out of jail, Berry recorded the song at the Chess Studios in Chicago. It gets its momentum not just from his guitar, which whines like a jet engine, but from the fact that the words don't repeat: like the journey it describes, it takes the listener from A to B, no detours.

On 15 December 1973, in one of the last genuinely creative acts of his life, Elvis Presley entered the Stax Studio on East McLemore Avenue, Memphis and cut his version of **The Promised Land**. The notion of Presley, the King of Rock'n'Roll singing this poor-boy's song of liberation is poignant enough; the spontaneous intensity with which he delivers it, snarling back at the dirty guitars of James Burton and Johnny Christopher on the sloping floor of the old cinema where Otis Redding had made his masterpieces, turns it into something else: the ultimate statement of the Tennessee truck driver who took the world, a tragic tale of desires fulfilled.

*I left my home in Norfolk, Virginia
California on my mind
I straddled that Greyhound
And rode him into Raleigh
And on across Carolin'*

No doubt Bruce Springsteen, who could play guitar like Chuck Berry and was fixated by the destiny of Elvis Presley, knew both versions when, in 1977, he wrote his own song called **The Promised Land**. Like many of the songs he composed for **Darkness on the Edge of Town**, it dealt with the frustrations caused by lawsuits between him and his former manager, which had stalled his career just when it seemed ready to take off.

These songs were about life and work, about broken promises and the ties that bind. On stage he mixed **Badlands** and **Racing In The Street** with Woody Guthrie's **This Land Is Your Land**, creating lengthy sequences that burned with a bitter, sullen rage.

*There's a dark cloud rising from the desert floor
I've packed my bags and I'm heading straight into the storm
Gonna be a twister to blow everything down
That ain't got the faith to stand its ground*

Whatever may have happened to him since then, the shadowy, fearful Promised Land that Springsteen created out of his own tribulations remains an unforgettably disturbing vision.

So now, Cooder resumes, *I needed a second verse, which had to take the story a little further. So I called Jim Dickinson in Memphis and played the song to him over the phone. He gave me the poetic heart of the song, the subtext. I was very appreciative*

*Up and down the Rio Grande
A thousand footprints in the sand
Reveal a secret no one can define
The river flows on like a breath
in between our life and death
Tell me who is next to cross the borderline*

I wrote it in a hotel room in New Orleans says Dickinson, once the pianist with the Dixie Flyers, who has worked on many of Cooder's projects. When I heard that Dylan had done it, that was the thrill of a lifetime for me. He changes the tune and the chords a little bit. And he's the only one who really gets the meaning of that last line. Now I sing his version. I figured, who is right, me or Bob Dylan?

In fact the first person to record the song was the singer Freddy Fender, brought in by Cooder for the soundtrack session. Fender sang it with beautiful delicacy, despite being, in Hiatt's recollection, *a little less than sober that day*. Cooder himself recorded it on **Get Rhythm**, a largely unnoticed 1987 album; a third verse, half in Spanish, had been added for the actor Harry Dean Stanton to sing.

Jackson Browne's being doing it, too, Cooder remarked last week, at some of his benefit concerts. But while Browne, performing it at a Sandinista benefit concert, would be thinking of the original meaning of the song, Dylan and Springsteen surely find within it a different kind of truth. Cooder does too. To me he says, that borderline may be inside yourself.

Dickinson agrees. *It doesn't have to be about illegal aliens, he says. It's about people who're trapped.*

I guess the larger metaphor is that there are borders we all have to cross in our lives, Hiatt adds, It's a pretty gosh-darn powerful song.

I have always considered *Visions of Johanna* as one of Dylan's greatest songs, and I am sure many fans do so. Still, everything about it is so hazy and fuzzy that almost every single listener has his own original point of view about it and not many people agree on what it really means, if it does mean anything at all; it is a drug song, it is a love song, it is a religious song, it is social criticism, it is the relation of a mystical experience, it is a "stream of consciousness" piece of writing, it is a plea for existentialism, and so on.... Maybe nothing in all this is vulgar or ridiculous; if it is art, we always do hear the same, we just see it from a different point of view. (In other words, it is another aspect of the "fusion at the interface" Mike Jackson was talking about in his highly recommended essay in *Homer, the slut* issue 8.)

I know many people do not like literary criticism. I know analysing every word and every nerve often breaks the magic we are all looking for when we listen to Dylan. Besides, I agree that feeling is usually more satisfactory and tells you more than understanding. Nevertheless, this is going to be a dry, intellectual literary analysis which of course pretends to be as objective as it can be. For that purpose I am going to deal with the song not as a song (I have no ability in doing so anyway) but as a piece of writing, as a poem; I do not know whether it will survive the change, but I will read it in the light of my French Cartesian mind, knowing it is only a spotlight with a very short span.

Wishing to check the structure of the song, I opened *Lyrics 1962-1985*. According to the transcription, it has five verses; the first one with nine lines, the second ten lines, the third nine lines, the fourth ten lines and the fifth has fourteen lines. Then checking the rhymes, I found out that most lines rhyme but, here and there, some do not. I felt there was something wrong somewhere and listened to the *Blonde On Blonde* version to hear what Dylan made of that when performing. It became clear that the *Lyrics* transcription was faulty and that the song should be printed as on page 9.

Actually, it has four verses of nine lines each, and a fifth verse which is extended to twelve lines, with a pattern of rhymes as follows; AAABBBBCC for the first four verses and AAABBBBBBBCC in the last verse. Is it so important? Maybe not. It just tends to show that *Visions of Johanna* is a well-wrought song or poem, certainly not a stream-of-consciousness piece of writing. It looks and sounds as if Dylan worked carefully and meticulously at it. Nevertheless, a striking element which needs analysing is the length of the first three lines of each verse and the comparatively short four (or seven) lines that follow.

Those first three lines as they are written or sung by Dylan give a misty impression of tension both in the listener and performer because they are strangely long and sung in one breath as if the narrator had got entangled in his own words and could not escape from that uncomfortable situation. For example, try to say in one breath as he does *You can hear the night watchman click his flashlight ask himself if it's him or them that's really insane*. This tension should be loosened by the next shorter lines but, strangely, it is not; the beat and rhythm, the jerky delivery, the stressed sounds of the rhymes, all play a part in enhancing this feeling of tension which stops in the last two lines of each verse when *Johanna* comes in. That is particularly important in the last verse, in which the central series of four short lines has been extended to seven, thus creating a further tension increased by the acceleration of the beat and rhythm until the word "explodes", which is the climax of the song.

This tension, built up by the very structure of the song, seems to be the result of somebody trying to get rid of some heavy burden and escape from some uncomfortable situation. It starts at the beginning of every verse, is momentarily broken when the narrator refers to the *Visions of Johanna*, and starts again with the next verse, to reach its climax at the end of the song with "my conscience explodes", when finally he seems to have freed himself. In that view the explosion is a positive one. I have been wondering if that aspect only came from my imagination, was just my way of receiving the song, or if Dylan had intentionally written it with that purpose in mind... Maybe there will be some other elements in the song to confirm or deny this feeling.

The words of a song are supposed to tell a story, or at least something the listener can understand. What about *Visions of Johanna*? Well... There does not seem to be any story told in that song, everything in it is very confusing, there is no apparent spatial unity; it moves from a room to a loft, the street, an empty lot, a museum, a cage, a theatre stage, the road; the characters seem to come out of nowhere - some ladies, a night watchman, a little boy, a mule, a peddler, a fiddler and more. Most of them are painted in droll or even delirious situations:

*The ladies play blind man's bluff with the key-chain
The jelly-faced women all sneeze
Hear the one with the moustache say "Jeeze
I can't find my knees".*

In this strange, absurd world, the narrator skips from one subject to another and, adding to the absurdity and confusion, these subjects have no apparent links between one another. The only recurring element is the **Visions of Johanna** which are present at the end of each verse, and although they confer a certain unity on the narrative, they fail to provide any help to lessen this feeling of confusion because on the one hand they are visions (by nature, visions are confusing) and on the other hand, the narrator never reveals what they really are - either because he does not want to or because he can't (maybe no word can tell...). Besides, in all this confusion in the narrative, not much is said in a straightforward way, there are many strange obscure (surrealistic?) images and metaphors;

*Louise holds a hand full of rain,
the ghost of electricity howls in the bones of her face,
jewels and binoculars hang from the head of the mule...*

Of course the game is open and everyone can give his own interpretation. Adding instability to these shifting sands, everything appears to your senses as blurred, hazy, fuzzy (except maybe in the last verse); lights flicker, the radio plays soft, the heat pipes they just cough, the all-night girls whisper, the ghost howls, the little boy mutters, voices echo. No wonder a Cartesian mind like mine feels lost; not a piece of solid rock I can hang on to.

Let's go on back to the beginning and try to find something to rely on then. One can easily understand that the story starts telling us about at least three persons who are in a room at night: a narrator (we sit here, my mind), Louise, and her lover. That seems crystal clear until you get to the second verse where the narrator reveals that he and Louise's lover are the same person; "the ghost ... have now taken my place", that is he can see himself in the face of Louise (who now is a mirror). Remembering that Louise and her lover are "so entwined", it is easy to understand that the narrator who uses the first person (I) and the lover (he) are the same person. (Remember Dylan used to be a folk singer and referring to oneself using sometimes "I", sometimes "he" is in the pure tradition of folk songs. Or is it the famous Gemini split? Maybe both...) The situation is getting clearer now; the narrator is in a room with his girlfriend Louise, he is certainly making love to her (so entwined) but he is constantly thinking and having visions of another girl: Johanna. This feels like the trivial "I'm lying next to her, but I'm thinking of you" syndrome, doesn't it? Anyway we have at least one direction to explore: Louise and Johanna (or the visions of Johanna) and their relationship with the narrator.

One can argue that the "he" side of the narrator represents the outer physical world, and that the "I" side represents the inner self: the first occurrence of "he" is in line 8 "just Louise and her lover..." where "he" is only seen as a body entwined with another body (Louise) who belongs to the same physical world. The first occurrence of "I" is in line 9: "conquer my mind"; it is not a mere chance that "I" is referred to as my mind, it represents the inner self which is conquered by the visions thus linking Johanna with the inner world, so that she epitomises the ideal the narrator is longing for.

I believe that two of the major themes in many songs of **Blonde on Blonde** are:

- 1 - The duality of human life which you can't really grasp or understand, as the name of the LP suggests... the blonde on blonde.
- 2 - The longing, the quest for a more satisfactory world or truth that the outer world (what we often call reality) can't provide alone. This aspect is an echo to **Stuck Inside of Mobile (Louise) With The Memphis (Johanna) Blues Again**. In that view, the song is about a man struggling between these two worlds; at times he sees one, at other times he sees the other, then he sees both and this to and fro movement is one of the causes of the great confusion in the narrative, which is only the reflection of what happens in the narrator's mind.

It is significant to examine how the visions develop as the narrative progresses:

-Verse 1: *they conquer my mind*

The narrator is passive, his inner self is being conquered by the visions but he does not seem to resist them.

-Verse 2: *they have taken my place* (in the mirror of Louise's face)

In this rather complicated process where Louise's face is a mirror and, possibly with the help of the frightening ghost of electricity, he is now completely overwhelmed by these visions, not only have they conquered his mind, but they have also taken his physical shape.

Verse 3: *they kept me up past the dawn*

Whereas everything which happens in this room (and outside) is told in the present tense, as if there were no past and no future, the visions are the only element apprehended in chronology. It shows how strong they are; the narrator could not sleep because of them. The use of the past tense might hint that they are over but what follows reveals that they are not and they are going to help him throw a new light on the outer world.

-Verse 4: *they make it all seem so cruel*

Thanks to the visions, one can understand how ridiculous these ladies are, how pointless society's attitude to art is. There is no "I" or "he" in this verse, only a generalizing "you" (you can tell by the way she smiles) which includes both "I" and "he" (who seem to be reconciled), and the listener. With the help of the visions, you can see what is behind Mona Lisa's smile, they help to see beyond the mere surface of things.

-Verse 5: *they are now all that remain.*

The narrator now seems at peace with himself, he accepts the visions. They have helped him to overcome or at least lessen the weight of life, as if he was awakening from a nightmare. He is reborn now, a new man.

I do not know if it is very significant, but a close reading of the song shows that the "I" side of the narrator is more and more present as the narrative develops, and, more important, its nature (quality?) has changed after the experience he has been going through:

-Verse 1: one line

"I" is mentioned once in line 9: my mind.

-Verse 2: two lines

Again "I" is mentioned only once, in line 18: my place, but in retrospect "I" is present in lines 17 and 18 and possibly in line 14 (in the mirror).

-Verse 3: four lines

Line 21 kiss to me; line 25 I'm in the hall; line 26 how can I explain?; line 27 they kept me up past the dawn

Verse 4: nine lines

You have to get to the end of this verse "they make it all seem so cruel" to understand that everything here is a comment from the "I" side of the narrator. There is no "he" any more, all this verse is about what the "I" sees and thinks.

I have already tried to point out how the narrative is built up to show that the visions become more and more severe to the extent of completely overwhelming the narrator; the increasing presence of "I" from verse 1 to verse 4 seems to confirm that view....but what about verse 5?

The peddler and the fiddler are certainly different incarnations of the "he" (as was the little boy in verse 3) who is back in this verse after being momentarily absent in verse 4 (which has "I" everywhere between the lines); anyway, here "I" is mentioned twice in line 38: name me and I'll go out; once in line 41: we can see; and of course in line 46: my conscience. In verses 3 and 4, the "he-Louise" side seemed to exert a kind of pressure on the "I-Johanna" side:

Louise, she's all right, she's just near, she's delicate...but she makes...that Johanna's not here
Now, little boy...he takes...he brags...he likes...he speaks...he's sure got a...while I'm in the hall.

The repetition of "she" before a single occurrence of "Johanna", and the same trick with "he" before "I", add to this feeling of tension the narrator and listener feel, as if "I" and "he" were opposed to each other, fighting, with "I" undergoing the overwhelming influence of "he". Here in verse 5, "he" and "I" are equally represented, as if they were not fighting each other any more and maybe even were reconciled.

Finally and most importantly, it is very significant to compare the first occurrence of "I"; my mind, to the last one; my conscience. The nature, the quality of the narrator has changed. It has developed from a 'mere' mind to a higher stage; a conscience. For sure, the visions, the experience he has just gone through are responsible for this change, they have made a new, better man of him.

What kind of experience is it? What is happening in the narrator's mind? He never says anything about the nature of his visions, leaving a large door open for the listener's imagination. This is where we can take an active part in the song. But still, if much is left unsaid, there are words and sentences (facts for Mr Jones) which say or at least suggest something.

Actually, the song starts with a general statement in the form of a paradox; the night which is the time when you can expect to find peace and quiet in fact plays tricks on you, hinting that the narrator will go through an experience completely opposite to the "peace and quiet" he was looking for, that night; "tricks" suggests mischief, deceit, cheating... The use of "you" which includes both narrator and listener is intended to give a universal significance to this statement and possibly to all the song. The night has another function: is it not the time when your senses (at least sight) are altered? The narrator is stranded in the night, nowhere to go to, not much to see. That can be a metaphor for life which prepares what is going to happen; the visions. The narrator who is disappointed, dissatisfied with his condition is going to turn inward in search of a different reality or truth. The rest of the first verse is about the unreliability of things, describing a life filled with illusions: the lights which only flicker fail in their function, the heat pipes fail to provide any heat, the radio fails to fill up the silence, Louise's lover is thinking of Johanna.

Life is pointless, we are stranded in the night, we know it but we are trying to deny it; this is where the feeling of absurdity comes from. Some people have written long books and essays to explain this, that is philosophy. Dylan explains it in one line, that is poetry.

The strong surrealistic image of Louise holding a handful of rain tempting you to defy it is also poetry, but it is difficult to come to terms with. It all depends on the symbolic function of "rain". For Freud, water (linked to the moon) symbolises women and femininity, whereas fire and sun symbolise men. Why would Louise tempt anyone to defy her femininity? (Then, why not?) Rain can also symbolise the forces of nature - the elements - and life; is it the temptation to defy life and the natural forces that are within and outside us? Is it that defiance that can lead to the visions about to occur? I am sure there are dozens of ways of receiving this line. Every listener, with his own history and experience, will "feel" it differently. Again, it is one aspect of Dylan's mastery as a writer to give us an opportunity to play an active part as we listen.

What are we left with as this verse finishes? A feeling of uselessness, emptiness, despondency (that can be heard in the tone of Dylan's voice too) and a sense that there is not much you can rely on; even the language which is used is not always reliable; what do you think of a song which starts with a question that is clearly not a question but a statement (or a statement in the form of a question)? Dylan also plays with the rhymes throughout the song; in every verse you can find one or two rhymes which are rather imprecise, as if words and sounds were also playing a part in this game of unreliability.

- Verse 1: quiet/it soft/cough/loft/off¹
- Verse 2: near/mirror
- Verse 3: seriously/me on/dawn
- Verse 4: while/smiles
- Verse 6: owed/loads

How the song moves from a room to the empty lot outside is not clear. Is it a scene which is only in the narrator's mind (visions)? Or is it something which can be seen from the room where they are? The use of we in line 12 "we can hear the night watchman..." implies that both the narrator and Louise are able to see and hear what is going on in the empty lot. We can suppose it is what they see from a window in their room.

In the first three lines of verse 2, the narrator adds to and increases the feeling of uneasiness, absurdity and unreliability of verse 1. Not only are the ladies walking about in the night, but they are blindfolded for their game (thus twice blind). The stock phrase of the night watchman clicking his flashlight has exactly the opposite effect of what it usually has; the glimmer of his torch does not help him to see anything, it only emphasises his being lost in the night.

The all-night girls echo the narrator's urge to get out of there; he feels stranded but tries to deny it, he is with Louise but he is preoccupied by Johanna and the visions; the all-night girls hint they are going for an escapade on some mysterious "D" train. Much ink has been spilt over what the "D" train might be and what

¹Ed - I have to say that I disagree with the rhyme structure here - I think soft/loft and cough/off are the (full) rhymes. However the deployment of the rhymes in this manner still creates the effect Alain is describing whichever of us is correct.

symbolic function it may have: does "D" stand for "death", or "LSD" (then they might be going through some "bad trip", not unlike the narrator's maybe)? Possibly it is simply a railway or a subway line.² It does not matter, we understand that, like the narrator, they feel the urge to free themselves, to leave, in search of some unclear ideal, not easy to reach, with some uncertainty and possibly some danger on the way. Maybe it is significant that the word "play" is used at exactly the same place in the first line of both verses 1 and 2 (the second one echoing the first one). This word which is often associated with the innocence of childhood, here refers to some pernicious game; to play tricks and to play blind man's bluff. The pun hinting that the ladies are lying to each other, turns their game into something rather mischievous. However one can wonder how these ladies can discover anything about their identity (isn't that what blind man's bluff is about?), they are twice blind, walking about in an empty lot, they are bluffing, they have only got a chain with the key missing... They might do that on and on, on for eternity, they have no escape, they are prisoners of their game and of themselves. Again, this can be taken as a metaphor for life. The ladies and the night watchman, in contrast to the all-night girls, represent mainstream society. There is nothing to expect from the ladies, they are vain, lost, useless. The night watchman, while trying to shed light on the situation, is only confronted by a deeper darkness, and when reflecting upon the all-night girls (the outsiders) he only comes to doubt his own sanity as if he had lost the landmarks of his life. The traditional values of society seem shaken and reversed; the only hope lies in the all-night girls because at least they would like to escape.

Obviously, the first three lines of the second verse continue to increase everything that began in the first verse; they enhance the sense of absurdity, emptiness and uselessness, the feeling of being lost, adrift in a dark world, and nothing there eases the narrator's despondency.



Then, suddenly, as if awakening from a dream, he is back again in this room, confronting Louise. Unlike the other characters, we do not know what Louise thinks, she does not say or do anything in this verse, she is a non-actor, she is just "here" and as such she is reassuring (she's all right, not like the rest) and the narrator has

some affection for her (she's delicate) but does that mean she is pretty, or fragile, or maybe her presence requires careful handling due to Johanna's increasing presence in the same room? However he does not seem to be satisfied with her, because the nearer he gets to her the more he thinks of Johanna - as if he was using her as a help, a means to get to Johanna, through the visions, and also to find his own identity. "She seems like a mirror" implies that he sees (or tries to see) his own physical self in her. This is confirmed later when he says that the visions of Johanna have taken his place in the mirror of Louise's face. In doing so, Johanna has not only erased his picture or reflection, she and the visions also will help him to find out about his inner self, his identity. (Maybe that is what we are all looking for in a lover: our own selves. It is a theme which was later developed in *Tangled Up In Blue*.) The surrealistic image of the ghost of electricity howling in the bones of Louise's face where dream and reality are mixed together to generate another reality; a sur-reality (it is André Breton's definition of surrealism); this image is at the same time beautiful, confusing and

² Ed - There is a D-train in the New York subway system, (Greenwich Village is one area it serves) it is one of half-a-dozen or so that run late-night services. (I've just come across a reference to it in Paul Williams's *Heart Of Gold* where he describes riding on it across Manhattan Bridge at sunset.) Since the whole song is so clearly set in New York I feel confident this is what he is referring to on at least one level, Not that this rules out any additional connotations, of course.

frightening. It is the only line where the narrator partly reveals the nature of his visions; the occult seems to take over the earthly reality in a dangerous walk on the line between sanity and insanity.

This verse started with the need for identity in some pernicious game; it finishes with the narrator losing the sense of his own identity. His own self which he was trying to find in his lover, Louise, has been replaced by Johanna, and now he seems to be completely overwhelmed by these visions which he cannot control any more. From now on, the narrative will move from the present of the room to some other unspecified times and places. As if the narrator's identity had exploded into different parts, he will examine his different selves referring to himself as a little boy, as a peddler, as a fiddler and of course as "I" which represents his ideal identity, the one he is looking for. The alternative title of this song "Seems Like A Freeze Out" probably alludes in a coarse way to the "Louise-Johanna" duality, but it might as well allude to the "he-I" duality. (I am beginning to think of another title for this song: "Till I See The Real Me At Last".)

Verse 3 sees the narrator examining his own thoughts, feelings and attitude on a social level. Talking of himself as a "little boy" suggests that he is referring to a younger Dylan, a younger Dylan who did take himself seriously sometimes (*Masters Of War*, *Ballad Of A Thin Man*), who did brag of his misery (*Ballad In Plain D*, *Tomorrow Is A Long Time*), who did like to live dangerously (*Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*, *Sitting On A Barbed Wire Fence*). When linked to the second part of the verse, there is irony and compassion towards his past self, as if he was now apologizing; he's got a lot of gall, he's useless with his small talk. Now, why is everything in the present tense? Is he aware that his "little boy" side is still part of himself? ("I" longs to be more mature and is complaining about the immaturity of "he".) Anyway, it sounds as if the narrator had an affair with Johanna when he was younger, but when he now speaks of her, the other side of himself reminds him that it's all over; "he speaks of a farewell kiss to me", and in order to renew with her, or to go on with the visions, the narrator must get rid of (kill?) that "little boy" side of himself (the freeze out). I'm in the hall, ready to go on, but he is in front of a wall, a prisoner, preventing me from doing so. Line 26: "How can I explain? It's so hard to get on" may be the expression of this dilemma, and line 27: "And these visions of Johanna, they kept me up past the dawn" hints that it took all night before the matter was settled.

Verse 4 is most confusing because, apart from the visions, nothing there seems to have any link with the rest of the narrative. The narrator is now reflecting upon society's attitude to arts. Again, everything in this verse takes place in a closed space; "inside the museums..." Like the narrator, who at the beginning was stranded in a room, works of art are stranded, prisoners in museums, deprived of any life, frozen, with vain people walking about only to judge them (an echo of T.S. Eliot's line "In this room the women come and go talking of Michelangelo"?)

The use of a somewhat colloquial language shows a bit of disrespect when speaking of Mona Lisa: "Mona Lisa musta had the highway blues..." it is, after all, one of the most famous paintings in man's history, people go to see Mona Lisa as if they were going on some kind of pilgrimage. What do they see then? The lines and shapes that Leonardo da Vinci laid on canvas and which are hanging on a wall, forever frozen. That, again, sounds useless, but it only comes from the "jelly-faced women's" attitude to art; on the contrary, with the help of the visions, with his new consciousness in the process of being born, the narrator can see what is behind the lines and shapes, behind that enigmatic but frozen smile, he can see what Mona Lisa has got in her mind and in doing so, he manages to make her alive again, *She musta had the highway blues* hinting that she still must have them at the moment and that she would like to leave the museum. This is what our attitude to art should be: active, positive, not passive. It is our own responsibility to give life to lines, shapes, sounds and words which otherwise would only be dead matter that can go up on a useless trial for infinity.

I have often caught myself smiling when thinking of the lines "hear the one with the moustache say "Jeeze, I can't find my knees". I have also always wondered who is speaking; is it one of the jelly-faced women, or a man who is in the museum too? Or even a portrait hanging in the Louvre who - because the artist never painted his whole body - complains that he can't find his knees and is unable to move? Some 18 years later, Dylan was to use the same idea in *Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight*:



*But it's like I'm stuck inside a painting
That's hanging in the Louvre
My throat starts to tickle and my nose itches
But I know that I can't move*

Was Dylan aware that a French surrealist artist - Marcel Duchamp - once painted a parody of Mona Lisa, adding a moustache to her face? He called it "LHOOQ" which phonetically reads "Elle a chaud au cul", i.e. "her ass is hot" or even "she's got her ass on fire", hence her urge to leave and run down the highway. Don't get mad, I think I am only joking.

Back to more "serious" consideration, there is another piece of the puzzle that doesn't seem to fit in anywhere: the mule. It could be one of those vain jelly-faced women - a rich tourist visiting the Louvre with her jewels and binoculars hanging from her head. This image would point at people's vanity when they try to cover up their real selves with jewels and try to go beyond their senses using some devices of human technology (binoculars) which in verse one have proved to be useless (light, heating, radio). Whatever this lady does or tries to look like, she will remain a mule.

My "sweet lady" who is a Dylan fan too (it makes our lives easier, but not our children's) has an interesting theory about the mule and I will mention it although I quite disagree with it; perhaps I can't be right all of the time... Here's what she says, and I will let her have the last words on this verse.

"The jewels symbolize something precious and rare; few people can get some; they also symbolize light which is absent in the rest of the narrative. Binoculars help you to see what is difficult to see; they can help us to get nearer a truth which we could not see without them.

The mule is an insignificant animal we do not usually notice. Nevertheless, the jewels and the binoculars are hanging from its head. Isn't the key to Knowledge and Truth hidden in simple things? And is it really hidden? Anybody can take what is hanging from the head of a mule... Aren't we trying to go too far to find what is within reach? Truth is accessible to everybody but our eyes are not used to seeing it, maybe because our consciences have not exploded yet."

In verse 5, many new characters emerge apparently from nowhere: a peddler, a countess, Madonna, a fiddler, and Louise is back after being absent from the two previous verses. The first two lines deal with the idea that human relationships are parasitic and hypocritical. There is irony and bitterness in the fiddler's words "Name me someone that's not a parasite and I'll go out and say a prayer for him", because he is speaking to somebody who actually is only pretending to care for him. Trying to guess who the peddler and the countess are seems quite useless, we have no clues; these two people are only referred to as social entities. Maybe the peddler is another aspect of the "he" side of the narrator, and the countess could be Louise. The peddler has a social status inferior to that of the countess. If you define yourself according to your job or your social stratum, you lose a great part of your freedom as a human being and you become a character acting a part in society. Does social life oblige us to cover up our real selves and wear some sort of fancy dress? Are we on a stage acting a play in which everything is phony, everything is illusion? Another Bob Dylan song can be quoted here:

*All the people we used to know
They're an illusion to me now
Some are peddlers or fiddlers
Some are countesses, one is Madonna
Don't know how it all got started
I don't know what they're doing with their lives*

Well, I'm sorry it's only the parody of a quotation...

Anyway, when you take yourself too seriously in your social role, what's left of the real you when you take off your fancy dress? Not much: that is what Louise seems to say when she prepares herself (takes off her clothes) for him.

There is something about the rhymes of those three lines that I do not know how to deal with... Has anyone else got any idea? They sound very heavy because they are extended to three words and three times have the same one at the end: care for him, prayer for him, prepares for him. I feel that the tension which was on / at the beginning is now intensifying, but is shifting on to *he's* shoulders, who is now in an uncomfortable situation:

- He is confronted with the hypocrisy of the countess
- He is dependent on somebody's prayer (to be saved?)
- He is, according to Louise, about to be disappointed

From a grammatical point of view, it is not a subject any more, but an object; it has come under other people's influences. Does that suggest that a change in the I-he duality is occurring (or has occurred)?

The acceleration of the rhythm in the lines that follow is striking when you listen to the song performed, as if the narrator had spied an open door somewhere in the distance and was rushing towards it.

Madonna probably refers to Mary, the mother of Christ; if so, she represents Salvation. She, too, is depicted as an actress who was once on a stage, wearing a cape; this stage is compared to a cage which is now corroding. Is it irony towards institutionalised religions? - which teach you to say prayers but not to pray. Maybe the visions have helped the narrator to think about the matter; Truth, God, Salvation are not to be found in some useless theatrical parade performed in full dress clothes, this way to handle religion is to be restrictive, like being in a cage which, thank God, is now empty, with its bars corroding away. It is the first real hint of freedom in the narrative, and if we reflect back on the song, we become aware that slowly, step by step, the characters come from a situation where they are prisoners, motionless, to one where they are free, where movement can start again.

- Verse 1: stranded, entwined
- Verse 2: a chain (but no key), whisper of escapades
- Verse 3: he = in front of a wall, I = in the hall
- Verse 4: inside the museum, Mona Lisa has the highway blues, I can't find my knees
- Verse 5: I'll go out, empty cage corrode, steps to the road, trucks that load, skeleton keys

The narrator has freed himself on three different levels:

- Social: his debts are paid (everything's been returned which was owed)
- Physical: steps to the road
- Spiritual: my conscience explodes

Getting free is one of the main themes of the song, but it seems to be a rather difficult task; you must get rid of all the prejudices and hypocrisy which can inhabit your mind, you must find the balance in the forces that are within yourself, between your ideal and reality, so that "I" and "he" can be reconciled.

I have not used the word "mysticism" yet but this process can be considered as a mystical experience after all. It is the search for truth, for God which is within yourself; and this can only be done after going through a journey to hell, a dangerous one, where your sanity is at stake. (Doesn't "Johanna" sound very much like "Gehenna"?) If you do succeed you come back with the skeleton keys and the rain, the former can open any door and give you access to the truth, and the rain holds the mystery of life. The narrator never says he has got hold of the skeleton keys and the rain, only the wailing harmonica tune suggests he might have had a glimpse at them, and he is left there, with his visions that remain, unable to say more, puzzled, just like we are, just like I am.



P.S. I realise that what was supposed to be "as objective as it can be" has turned into something very subjective indeed. Maybe it is better that way after all; there is more to think about, to agree or to disagree with.

VISIONS OF JOHANNA

- 1 - Ain't it just like the night to play tricks when you're trying to be so quiet?
 - 2 - We sit here stranded, though we're all doin' our best to deny it
 - 3 - And Louise holds a hand full of rain, temptin' you to defy it
 - 4 - Lights flicker from the opposite loft
 - 5 - In this room the heat pipes just cough
 - 6 - The country music station plays soft
 - 7 - But there's nothing, really nothing to turn off
 - 8 - Just Louise and her lover so entwined
 - 9 - And these visions of Johanna that conquer my mind
-
- 10 - In the empty lot where the ladies play blind man's bluff with the key chain
 - 11 - And the all-night girls they whisper of escapades out on the D train
 - 12 - You can hear the night watchman click his flashlight ask himself if it's him or them that's really insane
 - 13 - Louise, she's all right, she's just near
 - 14 - She's delicate and seems like a mirror
 - 15 - But she makes it all too concise and too clear
 - 16 - That Johanna's not here
 - 17 - The ghost of 'lectricity howls in the bones of her face
 - 18 - Where these visions of Johanna have now taken my place
-
- 19 - Now, little boy lost, he takes himself so seriously
 - 20 - He brags of his misery, he likes to live dangerously
 - 21 - And when bringing her name up, he speaks of a farewell kiss to me
 - 22 - He's sure gotta lot of gall
 - 23 - To be so useless and all
 - 24 - Muttering small talk at the wall
 - 25 - While I'm in the hall
 - 26 - How can I explain? It's so hard to get on
 - 27 - And these visions of Johanna, they kept me up past the dawn
-
- 28 - Inside the museums, infinity goes up on trial
 - 29 - Voices echo this is what salvation must be like after a while
 - 30 - But Mona Lisa musta had the highway blues you can tell by the way she smiles
 - 31 - See the primitive wallflower freeze
 - 32 - When the jelly-faced women all sneeze
 - 33 - Hear the one with the moustache say 'Jeeze
 - 34 - I can't find my knees'
 - 35 - Oh, jewels and binoculars hang from the head of the mule
 - 36 - But these visions of Johanna, they make it all seem so cruel
-
- 37 - The peddler now speaks to the countess who's pretending to care for him
 - 38 - Saying 'Name me someone who's not a parasite and I'll go out and say a prayer for him'
 - 39 - But like Louise always says 'Ya can't look at much can ya man?' as she herself prepares for him
 - 40 - And Madonna, she still has not showed
 - 41 - We see this empty cage now corrode
 - 42 - Where her cape of the stage once had flowed
 - 43 - The fiddler he now steps to the road
 - 44 - He writes everything's been returned which was owed
 - 45 - On the back of the fish truck that loads
 - 46 - While my conscience explodes
 - 47 - The harmonicas play the skeleton keys and the rain
 - 48 - And these visions of Johanna are now all that remain



Bob Neuwirth

Anyone familiar with the life and music of Bob Dylan should recognize the name of Bob Neuwirth. He has played, and hung out, with Dylan since the mid 1960's. Notably, he can be seen in *Don't Look Back*, jamming on old Hank Williams' songs and insulting Joan Baez. He was leader of Guam, the house band for the Rolling Thunder Revue and indeed the concept and development of the Revue partly evolved during Neuwirth's residency at the Other End in New York when Dylan, along with T-Bone Burnette and Ramblin' Jack Elliott, joined Neuwirth after the shows to play together and reminisce.

Neuwirth was involved with many of the leading figures of the sixties counterculture. He spent some time as Jim Morrison's unofficial "minder", mostly on the basis that Neuwirth could party harder and longer than even Morrison. He was involved for a time with Andy Warhol and the Factory scene, escorting Warhol starlet Edie Sedgwick and being the catalyst for Dylan's brief involvement with Warhol's entourage.

He had all the right connections and, in spite of his apparently extreme lifestyle, as he stated in his biographical note in Jean Stein's book *Edie*, "I'm well and continue to make art." Maybe, but there were no signs of any of this art being available to the paying public. So I was amazed and delighted when, in 1988,



the Observer carried a review of an album by Bob Neuwirth called *Back To The Front*. The review, by Simon Frith, described the record as "the best Old Country album of the year." I have often found myself disagreeing with Simon Frith's views but I felt that any album by the man who, legend has it, wrote the opening lines of *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*, had to be worth searching out.

I was right. While I wouldn't agree that the sound is "Old Country" I'd certainly be willing to put *Back To The Front* forward as a contender for Album of the Year. As I hoped and expected the lyrics were intelligent and well-crafted but I was also struck by the musical context in which they were set. There is an almost total absence of electric instruments. The songs are dominated by acoustic guitars, supported at various times by mandolin, violin and dobro. There are occasional uses of an electric bass guitar but drums do not feature on the album at all. The overall tone seems to combine elements of folk and country though this is inexact. The only way, really, to describe the music is as pure Bob Neuwirth. The best thing to do is hear it.

The Dylan connection is obvious even by merely looking at the personnel and liner notes for the album. Neuwirth's most serious working relationship with Dylan was on the Rolling Thunder Revue and he has clearly maintained contacts from those days. Steve Soles and Dave

Mansfield feature prominently and T-Bone Burnette plays on two tracks as well as writing the brief introductory liner note. This liner note offers probably the best indication of why Neuwirth's output is so small, and indeed why it took him until 1988 to release any album at all. As Burnette says: "I never thought Neuwirth would make a record..." going on to comment on Neuwirth's apparent inability to commit his songs to tape or even to paper. He describes sitting around with Neuwirth, swapping songs, and how Neuwirth would "start playing the best song any of us had ever heard." Neuwirth would be asked who had written the song and it would become apparent that he "had been making it up as he went along, and that he couldn't remember a note he had sung." This is very reminiscent of the frustrations other musicians have felt at Dylan's habit of producing great songs during rehearsals or warm-ups which are then never heard again.

It is also clear that Bob Neuwirth has absorbed many of Dylan's notions concerning the best way to record. **Back To The Front** is certainly not a carefully produced album. In so far as it is produced at all the honours go to Steve Soles but, as the album notes state, it was "recorded live in Steven's living room." The effect of this is one of immediacy and intimacy. The sound you hear echoes Burnette's description of Neuwirth and his friends sitting around, swapping songs and generally having a good time.

The songs on **Back To The Front** range from straightforward narrative through picturesque scene painting to honest consideration of Neuwirth's own life and circumstances. A number of the songs have a light and humorous feel to them (**Private Eye**, **Heartaches**) while others are intimate and introspective (**Venice Beach**, **Akron**). What is clear in all of them is that Neuwirth sings them like he means them.

Consider, for example, the opening line of **Akron**, a song which, it would seem, is highly autobiographical:

I remember Akron, whiskey-cold mornings

To me that is so evocative; you feel the chill and the need for a nip to keep out the raw morning air.

The song also makes clear references to Neuwirth's battles with drugs and drink. The need to escape from the present through chemical and alcoholic means is summed up as:

Finally taking what it takes to take the pain away

Annabelle Lee, a song, incidentally, also recorded by T-Bone Burnette, is a fine evocation of the old American South. Neuwirth's description of a group of ladies *all gathered together to gossip like a bunch of old colonels*, is a beautiful inversion, turning a cliché on its head in a manner of which even Bob Dylan would be proud.

Neuwirth also has an uncanny ability to sketch a character in just a phrase. His comment on the woman in **Beauty**,

Perfume followed her home all the way from France

at once brings to mind the image of a sophisticated, travelled person. You can picture her, and even literally smell her.

The whole of **Private Eye** is a spoof on the Philip Marlowe/Sam Spade school of detectives, complete with references to trench-coats and even a reference to a character's mantelpiece containing "eagles galore", shades of the Maltese Falcon. Shades too of **Empire Burlesque**!

A final example of the lyric quality of **Back To The Front** is the first lines you hear on the album, the opening of **Eye On The Road**:

*Easter brought a stranger too low across the border,
A harbinger of trouble yet to come*

It's that second line which is special. It affirms the sense of foreboding, of slight menace, suggested by the stranger. Neuwirth has a real grasp of language, and how to make it work in unusual ways to tell a story or convey a mood. **Back To The Front**, to my mind, doesn't have a weak track.

It seems that, having finally recorded one album, Bob Neuwirth was keen to repeat the experience. Two

years later, in 1990, his second album, the intriguing titled **99 Monkeys** was released. As with the first album, this one attracted little critical, or public, notice although it did receive a four star review from John Bauldie in Q magazine.

Once again the album is produced by Steve Soles and is based largely around acoustic instruments. The recording technique is the same too - this time referred to specifically as "audio verite" - songs recorded live in the studio with no overdubbing. Somehow, though, the album sounds more consciously created; it lacks the ramshackle, what-the-hell quality of **Back To The Front**. Having said that, it is still a fine album.

The tight, descriptive evocations of place and mood of the first album are still present but **99 Monkeys** also features a number of more philosophical songs. **Great Spirit**, for example, draws heavily on the American Indian tradition while **Ancient Questions (War&Peace)** meditates on questions and definitions of love, peace and war. While these are initially interesting they can also be a little ponderous and wordy. Neuwirth is more successful when producing throwaway comments, capturing moments and images in time, for example:

*With a glance into the rear view
She gets a picture of the past*

(Good Intentions)

This is a beautifully concise image. On one level it is a literal description of a physical past receding as she drives away. On another level it suggests a mental reviewing of past events in her life. Neuwirth's ability to paint a multi-layered picture in words is surely what the best song-writing should do.

Neuwirth is also able to be simple and yet still be effective. The opening of **The First Time** will strike a chord with anyone remembering their first romance:

*The first time is the one that
You think about forever
And if it don't last it's the past you regret*

Neuwirth's talent for a neat phrase is well to the fore on this album. His advice that, on the streets of New York, you should

*Keep your money in your boot
And your business to yourself*

(Biggest Bordertown)

is as concise and succinct a definition of "street-wise" as you could wish for.

His description of the main character in **Biding Her Time**:

*She's tried nearly everything under the sun
But she's never had a hand holding man*

has an almost country and western tone and summarizes, in just two lines, a life full of one night stands but devoid of simple tenderness and companionship.

So far Bob Neuwirth has produced just two albums, but both of a quality that is rare to find in current popular music. Surprisingly, neither has received any great attention, either from the music press or the record-buying public. As is so often the case, lack of sales or critical acclaim do not signify lack of talent. If you enjoy beautifully crafted songs performed by excellent musicians with real style and feeling you could do worse than search out these albums. They can be a little tough to track down but determination should pay considerable dividends. As you will gather, my own preference is for **Back To The Front**, but both albums repay repeated listening. Anyone who loves the music of Bob Dylan will, I am sure, find something to appreciate in the music of Bob Neuwirth.

Back To The Front and **93 Monkeys** are both on the Gold Castle Records label. At present, unfortunately, neither is listed as being available in the UK but imported copies are, I believe, still to be found in some larger record shops. As the manager of my local Our Price in Cambridge said to me, "just keep on searching those racks."



Patrice Hamilton

The Cuttings

Page	Source	Author(s)	Date
3	<i>Clockwise from top left: The Financial Times</i>	Antony Thorncroft	14/6/93
	<i>Q</i>	N/A	Aug 93
	<i>The Independent</i>	Andy Gill	17/6/93
4	<i>From Top To Bottom: The Crouch Ender</i>	N/A	1/7/93
	<i>NME</i>	Johnny Cigarettes	26/6/93
	<i>Time Out</i>	Russ Fortune	9/6/93
5	<i>The Guardian</i>	Tracey MacLeod	14/6/93
6	<i>Top: The Daily Telegraph</i>	David Cheal	14/6/93
	<i>Bottom: The Evening Standard</i>	Gill Pringle	11/6/93
7-8	<i>The Independent Magazine</i>	Nick Hornby	26/6/93
9	<i>Top: The Evening Standard</i>	Peter MacLie's substitute	19/8/93
	<i>Bottom: The Independent On Sunday</i>	Nicky Walker & Jason Bennetto	15/8/93
10	<i>Left: The Observer</i>	Lesley Gerard	15/8/93
	<i>Right: The Times</i>	N/A	18/8/93
11	<i>Clockwise from top: Hornsey Journal</i>	John Ryan	12/8/93
	<i>Today</i>	N/A	13/8/93
	<i>Hornsey Journal</i>	N/A	19/8/93
	<i>Halifax Evening Courier</i>	N/A	13/8/93
12	<i>Hornsey Journal</i>	John Ryan	19/8/93
13	<i>Clockwise from top: Ham & High</i>	N/A	23/7/93
	<i>The European</i>	N/A	29/7/93
	<i>Vox</i>	N/A	Sep 93
14	<i>Left: Hello</i>	N/A	7/8/93
	<i>Right: Q</i>	N/A	Oct 93
15	<i>Clockwise from top: The Independent</i>	Andy Gill	??/8/93
	<i>The New Yorker?</i>	John Leonard	8/3/93?
	<i>Vox</i>	Patrick Humphries	Sep 93
	<i>NME</i>	N/A	3/7/93
16	<i>Main Feature: The Daily Express</i>	Michael Gable	21/8/93
	<i>Bottom Right: The Daily Express</i>	N/A	18/7/93
	<i>Bottom Left: The New York Times</i>	N/A	13/3/93
17	<i>Clockwise from left: Vox</i>	Patrick Humphries	Oct 93
	<i>RCD</i>	Karen Donaghay	#14
	<i>NME</i>	Edwin Pouncey	7/8/93
	<i>Record Collector</i>	Peter Doggett	Sep 93
18	<i>Top Right: Q</i>	Andy Gill	Oct 93
	<i>Left: Rock World</i>	N/A	Aug 93
	<i>Through The Wind And The Rain #8</i>	N/A	Summer 93

The Cuttings: Table of Contents continues over page:

The Cuttings: Table of Contents continued:

Page	Source	Author(s)	Date
19	<i>The Independent On Sunday</i>	Jasper Rees	15/8/93
20-21	<i>Fort Worth Star-Telegram</i>	Jerry Coffey	25/7/93
22	<i>Religious Cult Magazine</i>	Bert Cartwright	Summer 93
23	<i>Clockwise from top Jewish Chronicle</i>	Don Carnell	14/5/93
	<i>You Magazine (The Mail On Sunday)</i>	"Journalists"	20/6/93
	<i>Rolling Stone</i>	N/A	29/6/93
	<i>Rolling Stone</i>	N/A	29/6/93
	<i>TV Guide</i>	N/A	May 93
	<i>RCD</i>	N/A	#13
24	<i>The Guardian Weekend</i>	Biff	12/6/93
25	<i>Clockwise from top left: Rolling Stone</i>	Michael Goldberg	July 93
	<i>Record Collector</i>	Peter Doggett	July 93
	<i>Q</i>	N/A	Aug 93
	<i>RCD</i>	G.M.	#14
	<i>Vox</i>	Patrick Humphries	July 93
	<i>NME</i>	Bobby Surf	10/4/93
26	<i>Clockwise from top right: NME</i>	Cartoon	31/7/93
	<i>The Guardian</i>	"Weatherwatch", Stephen Moss	2/9/93
	<i>The Independent Magazine</i>	Writing Competiton (sic)	6/3/93
	<i>Making Music</i>	N/A	Aug 93
27	<i>Clockwise from top right: Vox</i>	Lowry	Oct 93
	<i>?? (US)</i>	N/A	Spring 93
	<i>NME</i>	N/A	12/6/93
	<i>NME</i>	N/A	19/6/93
	<i>Q</i>	Johnny Black	Aug 93
	<i>ICE</i>	N/A	June 93
	<i>New York Post</i>	N/A	15/6/93
28	<i>Clockwise from top right: El Mundo (Spain)</i>	Picture	10/6/93
	<i>The Tennessean</i>	Bill DeMain	14/4/93
	<i>Nashville Scene</i>	Clark Parsons	20/4/93
	<i>Shreveport Times (Louisiana)</i>	Larry Burton	3/4/93
29	<i>Clockwise from top right: ?? (US)</i>	Jay Orr	14/4/93
	<i>Tennessean News Service</i>	N/A	14/4/93
	<i>New Star (Monroe, Louisiana)</i>	Nicholas Deriso	23/4/93
30	<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	Greg Kot	15/8/93
31	<i>Clockwise from top: RCD</i>	Brian Cheeseman	#15
	<i>Vox</i>	Patrick Humphries	June 93
	<i>RCD</i>	N/A	#15
	<i>RCD</i>	N/A	#15

Thanks again to all who sent something in, please keep those cuttings coming.

Dylan in one of his more bullish moods

If you're Irish a Fleadh is a party; if you're not Irish (perhaps even if you are) it is falling flat on your face in a muddy field, making contact with a rich undergrowth of detritus, and trying to avoid the rain while waiting for some warmth, some raising of the spirits, by musicians from over 30 predominantly Irish bands.

Good things have been spoken of this annual hooley in north London, but Saturday's event was only fitfully enjoyable. An English summer was at its bleakest and Finsbury Park lacks natural grandeur. Even an appearance by that well-known Irishman, Bob O'Dylan, failed to ignite the 20,000-odd rather forlorn spectators.

Dylan was in one of his more bullish moods. He tried. And though not by nature an Irishman you could somehow recall hearing his voice, that confident cranking of a musical saw, replicated by some lone Paddy in the bar of a Camden Town pub on a Saturday night. On my last viewing of perhaps the most creative pop artist ever he was invisible, skulking in the shadows of a stage and content with a perverse mockery of his talent. On Saturday he was up front, blowing his harp with enthusiasm and duelling with his guitarist in

extrovert, imaginatively embroidered versions of "All Along the Watchtower" and "Memphis Blues Again".

The slower songs were less successful, enabling the man to take refuge in his legend, but Dylan still sounds miraculously contemporary. He can find relevance and rhythms in his music with the right aura to make a damp depressing evening an occasion.

The Fleadh is a wonderful reminder of the Irish contribution to popular music. Before Dylan on the main stage we had Irish high spirits, with Hothouse Flowers, and Irish melancholy, with Van Morrison. Hothouse Flowers lifted the crowd and got the arms waving. They may lack the character and originality to become mega but as a snapshot for the 21st century of what a mainstream pop band used to be like on stage they could hardly be bettered.

Morrison just goes on and on, his jangly, jig-like band acting as the ideal counter point to his resonant, lived in, voice. He was in restrained, spiritual mood, with songs like "The Garden" rather than the old beltters. He came across as a genuine echo of an Irishman far from home.

Antony Thorncroft



Bob O'Dylan, the least conspicuous

Celt at the Finsbury Park Fleadh, brings another show on the Never-Ending Tour to its shuddering climax. A double CD of the Madison Square Garden Dylan tribute is due out next month while Dylan undertakes a co-headlining tour of America with Santana in August.

REVIEW: Andy Gill on Bob Dylan and Van Morrison at the Finsbury Park Fleadh

THE annual Fleadh Festival has become increasingly just a case of Van the Man in Finsbury the Park, with a sizable supporting cast reduced to increasingly distant undercard status. The gulf between Morrison and the preceding act, Hothouse Flowers, gets greater every year, so the addition of Bob Dylan at the business end of the bill helped inject a little extra excitement. Though this added spark was less, admittedly, than would accompany Dylan in the days before he set out on his Never-Ending Tour.

In the event, audience expectations were more than rewarded: this was one of Dylan's good gigs, where his seat-of-pants approach paid handsome dividends despite his frequent attempts to bamboozle his band with erratic strumming and questionable singing. Dylan long ago embarked upon a policy of never singing the same song the same way twice, with widely variable results. On "All along the Watchtower", the extreme nasality of his delivery

The grumpy duo

acts like a kind of natural vocoder, a bizarre sound which has the perverse but welcome effect of reclaiming the song from Hendrix's version.

His "Stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again" is a wild sub-operatic fantasia, and when he's joined by Morrison for a duet on "The Irish Rover", flash-bulbs popping madly as rock's grumpy brothers come together over the same microphone, they appear to be singing in different keys. It's more hit-and-miss even than the Johnny Cash duet on *Nashville Skyline*, closer to Ornette Coleman's experiments in harmolody (which, roughly translated, means everyone playing whatever they want, with no regard for conventional harmonic relations).

When it works, though, this approach can transform a song, breathing new life into it. It's

the vocal equivalent of off-road driving and it makes Dylan probably the premier extempore artist in popular music.

But it requires a band with uncommon alertness and sensitivity, able to switch styles mid-song and stretch out to fit any of Dylan's off-the-cuff alterations. And at the moment, he has such a band, equally at ease with a big fat Z Z Top boogie-style version of "Maggie's Farm" or a country-rock "Mr Tambourine Man" which heads off down Mexico way like his *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* soundtrack.

Mostly, though, the band favours the twin-guitar attack associated with the Allman Brothers or, more pertinently for Bob, with the Grateful Dead. When John Jackson's fluid, Jerry Garcia-styled guitar break sidles past Bucky Baxter's pedal-steel guitar and the gentle funk-rock backing of bassist Tony Garnier

and drummer Winston Watson on a well-nigh unrecognisable "Tangled Up in Blue", you're left thinking that this, surely, is how the dreary *Dylan & the Dead* album ought to have sounded.

Even Dylan, playing mainly electric guitar, gets to dash off a spikily effective solo on a version of "Watching the River Flow" that's been reimagined as a Flying Burritos-style hill-billy hoedown. It looked more fun than usual for him, too.

Earlier, Van Morrison had brought his new, more relaxed approach to the proceedings, starting well with a jaunty "Not Feeling It Any More" but then dissipating the mood with a succession of generic blues vamps. These would be fine for a small smoky club but were just whisked away on the wind here.

Morrison all but turned things round again with the concluding "In the Garden" but overall it's clear that when the day is drizzly and overcast, Van's not really the man to brighten things up.

How many Songs Must a Man Endure? The Answer is P**sing in the Wind Dylan's Rain is Over!

FLEADH '93

Bob Dylan convinced 35,000 people at Finsbury Park what the rest of the world has known for years - that he cannot sing a note.



BOB DYLAN LONDON FINSBURY PARK FLEADH

IT TAKES about four minutes to realise that this sub-Dire Straits dribble of an MOR boogie is in fact 'Stuck Inside Of Mobile With The Memphis Blues Again'. A Dylan classic! From 'Blonde On Blonde'! And it now sounds like a semi-paralysed, senile git whining out the contents of his muddled mind, while the Old Folks Home band desperately attempt to shovel slabs of make-up on the corpse.

The fact that Bob plays mainly old numbers (the opening 'Hard

Times' and the trad 'Botany Bay' from last year's 'Good As I Been To You' were welcome breaks) only compounds the sense of tragedy. 'All Along The Watchtower', 'Maggie's Farm' and 'Watching The River Flow' are all given vaguely country, vaguely cajun, vaguely MOR

arrangements, and if a busker did 'Hey Mr Tambourine Man' as badly as Dylan he'd be quite rightly arrested for disturbing the peace.

Van Morrison, who'd already done his bit in wowing the parish, shuffles on halfway through in a bid to save the day, and the crowd, only far too aware of their legendary status, roar as the pair

(gasp!) sing 'One Irish Rover' into the same mic for a few seconds. It's a reminder of how far we've come from their peak periods. The highly amusing similarity of Van's voice to Yogi Bear and Bob's to Boo Boo is lost on the audience, and boredom still abounds for the unconverted.

As Dylan returns for a single short encore of something purporting to be 'It Ain't Me Babe', the Good Lord himself decides enough is enough and the heavens open on the crowd. Half of them - hardcore Dylan fans and Irish pundits already happily watered on Spider Stacey's Pogues, The Hothouse Flowers, Marxman and the woeful Runrig

are strangely blissed out. Others, wet and weary, are quitting the rain and the soggy sentiments early.

For the rest of us, this whole sorry event is a reminder that we're better off ignoring heavyweights of yore like Dylan as they slowly decay, and sticking with mewling, dribbling tools we can trust. After all, if Mark E Smith is around in ten years time, he'll still be value for money (are you betting on it - Ed). For Dylan, rigor mortis is rapidly setting in.

Johnny Cigarettes



Fleadh 1993

FINSBURY PARK, SAT

Around 40 acts on three stages over 12 hours for £25. Festivals may be lucrative for artists and organisers alike, but when it's not uncommon to be asked to pay £20 for a bog-standard ticket to an uninspiring gig at a less than salubrious concert hall, it's not hard to understand their increasing profusion and appeal.

This year's event, strangely minus Mr Fleadh himself, Christy Moore, is headlined by the gloriously bedraggled and seemingly revitalised Bob Dylan, in his first British festival appearance since 1978. His mystic chum Van Morrison, meanwhile will be playing a more R&B-styled music - as featured on his fine, albeit uneven, new album, 'Too Long In Exile' (Polydor). It's not beyond hope or expectation that rock's favourite pair of grumpy old duffers might even perform a song or two together.

The pick of the other acts include Moving Hearts, Mary Black, Hothouse Flowers, Runrig, The (MacGowan-less)

Pogues, Eddi Reader, The Rockingbirds, Marxman, The Lost Soul Band, Mary Coughlan, Lindsafarne and John Martyn. It may not be the most dramatic or imaginative line-up ever assembled, but despite the lack of any inspirational greatness (grizzled Bob and fat Ivan aside), there is a quality throughout the bill that should ensure a rockin' good time with a strong Celtic feel for an adult audience no doubt featuring nearly as many people over 50 as under 30. Accompanied children under 12 get in free, and there's a kids area, which says it all. For full line-up see listings. *Ross Fortune*

Dylan's reign falls

Tracey MacLeod

ON PAPER, Fleadh '93 looked like the perfect musical primer, offering some 40 Irish and Irish-inspired acts over 12 hours, culminating in the twin colossi, Van Morrison and Bob Dylan. In practice, with the action happening on three stages separated by thousands of people, it was like being a foreign correspondent posted to Washington and asked to knock off Glasgow and Sydney at the same time.

But the three stage set up did have its advantages. Torn between watching the reformed Stiff Little Fingers on the main stage, or the new Irish star Christie Hennessey in the Mean Fiddler marquee, I found it was possible to position myself so that I could hear both at once, though Christie's buttery warble was not necessarily improved by the crashing opening chords of Alternative Ulster.

There were good crowds for the two smaller stages, one housing the rootsier, more intimate artists, the other occupied by a succession of youthful bands with electric guitars. But it was in front of the

main stage that the majority of the crowd chose to camp. The only female artist to headline on the main stage was Mary Black, Ireland's biggest recording star after U2. Swamped in the poppier arrangements, the delicate country vibrato of Black's voice was better displayed on sparer songs like the neo-Nashville ballad No Frontiers.

By mid-afternoon, I was frantically shuttling between stages. The revived, but still not notably Irish Lindisfarne turned in a rousing Fog On The Tyne. Of the newer acts, Christie Hennessey was tipped as the one to watch. His phlegmy tremolo recalls Cat Stevens, and he too would appear to

*His Bobness, Van
The Man and a host
of Irish bands at the
Fleadh in London's
Finsbury Park*



PHOTOGRAPH: HENRIETTA BUTLER

be a man with a religious mission, introducing the catchy There's A Light Above You as "about Jesus, but not holy holy . . ."

When the masters of good-time music, The Pogues, took the main stage, it was obvious that they were playing to a heartland audience. Watched wistfully from the wings by former frontman Shane MacGowan, new singer Spider Stacy made a convincing Shane-alike on anthems like Dirty Old Town.

Kirsty MacColl in the marquee turned in a greatest hits set that showed her voice to have developed a new fullness. Equally impressive was Mary Coughlan,

Bland on bland: 'Dylan's voice seems to emanate from the top of his head, by-passing his vocal chords completely'

whose smooth, jazzy delivery of material such as Sting's Moon Over Bourbon Street made every word audible, but could also encompass a torchy gruffness on the raw Damn Your Eyes.

The Hothouse Flowers were the last band to take the main stage before the Big Two, with leader Liam O'Maonlai making a brave claim to baby rock messiah status by going on barefoot and wrapped in swaddling clothes.

By popular consent, it was Van Morrison's Fleadh. Flanked by a subtle and inspired band led by Georgie Fame, he turned in a joyful set.

A surprisingly large number of people opted to leave after Van Morrison's set. They were obviously the ones who'd seen Dylan at Hammersmith. He mounted the ramp to the stage like one of the cast of Awakenings, but sadly there was to be no miraculous recovery when he got there. His voice now seems to emanate directly from the top of his head, by-passing his vocal chords completely, while his reworkings of old songs like Blowing In The Wind, in by-passing the original melodies, turn his performances into a tragic game of Name That Tune. One hairy individual in the crowd had brought his own guitar, and confidently positioning himself near the stage, began to strum along. Tellingly, as the set progressed, he began to draw a crowd. Van Morrison joined Dylan for The Irish Rover, the fullness of his voice next to Dylan's a cruel study in contrasts. As Dylan motioned his way through Mr Tambourine Man, the crowd was leaving in droves, and the rain finally arrived. Maybe it was God's way of telling Bob to quit.

Tracey MacLeod is a presenter of the Late Show and hosts a music programme on Sunday evenings on London's GLR radio station.

LONG before this year's *Fleadh* — the annual day-long rock festival held in north London's *Finsbury Park* — had come to an end, thousands of fans were swarming towards the exits. It was raining heavily, but the reason for their sudden departure was that the main stage was occupied by *Bob Dylan*, wheezing away in the strangulated whine which is all that remains of his voice and inflicting GBII on some of his best songs. The man who used to be one of rock's

The great Dylan wash-out

most enigmatic and influential figures is today in serious danger of becoming a laughing stock. Only the sea shanty *Jim Jones* was remotely affecting; for the rest of the time Dylan was content to interrupt the band's rather pleasing musical interludes with his doodling delivery ("Iain gonnaworkarnmaggiesfarm namore", etc). The audience

ROCK

members who remained were either too drunk to move, or were unable, despite the evidence before them, to distinguish between the myth — that Dylan is still a great artist — and the reality, which is that he has had it.

What a contrast between all this and the other main

attraction at this celebration of Irish-Celtic-Gaelic music, *Van Morrison*. The soulful Belfast-born singer showed that after more than 25 years at the top he is still bursting with new music, and the sensitive rendition of the title track of his new album, *Too Long in Exile*, was one of the highlights of the event.

In fact *Van Morrison's* stint would have been a triumph but for his penchant for delicate, plinky *diminuendos*. Those famous *Morrisonian* quiet bits may go down well at indoor venues, but here they fell victim to noise from diesel generators, burger vans and chattering fans.

But perhaps *Van Morrison's* most important contribution to this event was to show that it is possible to reinvent songs without destroying them.

DAVID CHEAL



Kirsty McColl and The Pogues (above) support while Bob Dylan (right), non-Irish but in the right spirit, tops the bill

Gael warning

IF Oscar Wilde were around, he might call tomorrow's *Fleadh* at *Finsbury Park* "the irrepressible in pursuit of the unpronounceable". One of the hottest rock parties of the year, the *Fleadh* (pronounced "flar" for all you non-Gaelic speakers) continues its stealthy rise to become the capital's largest outdoor music festival.

Now in its fourth year, this weekend sees the event return to *Finsbury Park*, featuring more top names than before and expected to draw a crowd of 30,000 revellers.

It's nothing new in Ireland, where for centuries the *fleadh* (Gaelic for party) has been a way of life, with dozens of such annual gatherings springing up across the country.

But, then again, it's nothing particularly new here either. Where most outdoor rock festivals have become just another summer ritual, the *Fleadh* cheekily poses as something different. When is a rock gig not a rock gig? When it's a *fleadh*.

Promoter and countryman *Vince Power* shamelessly admits to milking its novelty value: "I suppose it's nothing more than an outdoor music festival dressed up in

It's Irish, it's London's biggest open-air music party and it's heading this way. Even *Bob Dylan* is joining the *Shamrock Club* for the day, reports GILL PRINGLE

a different guise. "But it has a distinct Irish flavour," he adds.

The acts on tomorrow's bill are perhaps more pronounceable than the name of the event, featuring such festival veterans as *Bob Dylan* and Irish elder-statesman *Van Morrison*.

Now it doesn't take a genius to figure out that *Dylan* (nee *Robert Zimmerman*) isn't Irish — but *Mr Power* has an answer to everything. "It doesn't matter that he isn't Irish. It's the spirit of the occasion which counts," he explains.

No newcomer to the *fleadh* scene, *Mr Power* (who also owns *Halesden's Mean Fiddler*, the *Clapham Grand* and the newly-christened *Forum*) has already hosted one such recent event in

Scotland and will hold another at *Tramore*, County *Waterford*, on 3 July.

The *Tramore Fleadh* features that well-known Irish artist *Ray Charles*, but it would seem *churlish* — pointless, actually — to question him on this one. "The whole charm of the *Fleadh* is illustrated in the way that radical newcomers like *Marxman* play alongside traditional favourites like *Mary Black*," he continues unabashedly.

Sponsored by *Murphy's Irish Stout*, the event is expected to attract a 60 per cent Irish audience when the gates open at 11am tomorrow. There are 31 acts, with music on three stages commencing at midday — those hoping for a prime view of the prestigious *Stage*

One should arrive early. Ireland's most famous rock export, *U2*, are missing, but that doesn't bother *Mr Power*: "They've grown too big for such an event."

HOWEVER, the *Finsbury Park Fleadh* features a wealth of other talent. The bill includes *The Hothouse Flowers*, *Mary Black*, *Runrig*, *The Pogues*, *Stiff Little Fingers*, *Eddie Reader*, *Kirsty McColl* and the stunning *Woman's Heart* line-up of *Dolores Keane*, *Eleanor McEvoy*, *Frances Black* and *Maura O'Connell*. Not bad for an event which a decade ago would have had to rely on a handful of folk acts and the questionable charms of *Bob Geldof's Boomtown Rats* and *The Undertones*.

An old hand at *fleadhs* is Dublin-based singer *Mary Black*: now Ireland's second-biggest musical export after *U2*, the mother-of-three has attended such events since she was a child.

"They're always such happy occasions, very family-orientated. The modern rock festival of recent years has become a youth thing, whereas people of all ages — especially children — are always welcome at the



fleadh," she says. (To reflect that, all accompanied children under 12 will be admitted free tomorrow.)

A contemporary folk singer, 37-year-old *Mary* has carved out a modern identity, giving a distinct interpretation to astutely-chosen traditional songs. Her liquid voice combines a seamless mix of jazz, blues, soul, country and folk, accompanied by anything from an electric piano and sax to the fiddle. Like a well-aimed arrow, her voice goes

straight for the heart, and her stock in trade is melancholy and heartbreak.

Despite their absence, *U2's* influence hangs over the event, many of the participants having spoken out about the way the *U2* *Murphy* has influenced the making or breaking of bands in Ireland.

If *Mary Robinson's* recent tea party with the *Queen* warranted so much significance, then the *Finsbury Park Fleadh* may well deserve a peace prize.

THE FLEADH LINE-UP

STAGE ONE: *Bob Dylan*, *Van Morrison*, *Hothouse Flowers*, *Runrig*, *Mary Black*, *The Pogues*, *Stiff Little Fingers*, *That Petrol Emotion*, *Goals Don't Shave*, *Marxman*, *Big Geraniums*, *Energy Orchard*.

STAGE TWO: *A Woman's Heart*, *John Martyn*, *Mary Coughlan*, *Tommy Makem*, *Kirsty McColl*, *Christy Hennessy*, *Eddie Reader*, *Capercaillie*, *Toss The Feather*, *Nonus*.

STAGE THREE: *The Four Of*

Us, *The Stunning*, *The Men They Couldn't Hang*, *The Pale*, *Weddings Parties Anything*, *Engine Alley*, *Ghost Of An American Airman*, *The Devils*, *Blink*, *Lost Soul Band*.

VENUE AND TICKETS: *Finsbury Park Fleadh*, *Finsbury Park*, London N4. Nearest Tube: *Finsbury Park* (Piccadilly and Victoria lines). Tickets, £25, available from all *Mean Fiddler* venues. Credit card bookings: 081 963 0940, information: 081 963 0797



Mary Black: fleadh's are "always happy occasions"

Saturday in the Park with Bob

The first law of outdoor pop concerts is that you always have a good time, no matter how miserable the experience. NICK HORNBY had a good (and deeply nostalgic) time at the Fleadh in Finsbury Park, north London, earlier this month – despite the drizzle and Bob Dylan's singing.



DAVID MODELL

It feels now as though I spent most of the summer months of my early teenage years in the early Seventies standing around in a muddy field, waiting for a pop band to come on stage. I saw Humble Pie and Grand Funk Railroad in Hyde Park (for free, when I was very young, and anyway it wasn't my idea, but a friend's brother, and...), the Faces and the Who at the Oval, Van Morrison and the Allman Brothers at Knebworth, Eric Clapton at Crystal Palace, the Who again at Charlton, and all sorts of terrible people – Focus, Status Quo, Lindisfarne, Genesis, I think – at the Reading Festival.

It wasn't just the music that attracted us, of course. There were the stalls selling bootleg records, cheesecloth shirts and jewellery, the incomprehensible messages about insulin delivered by excitable DJs, the exotic smells of joss sticks, dope, patchouli and onions, the shouts of "Wally" and the subsequent, mystifying hilarity. But best of all there was the chance to mess about with friends for an entire weekend, drink cider and Warneys Party Fours, smoke Gitanes, and eat chips for breakfast in Wimpy Bars all over the Home Counties.

Those days are long gone. True, Van Morrison still plays with inadvisable regularity at outdoor gigs; and this summer, in a muddy field near you, you can see John Mayall, the Kinks, Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin, Neil Young and Richard Thompson of Fairport Convention; and the

stalls are still there, and the onions, and the dope... Oh, hell. Nostalgists must face the awful truth: everything is exactly as it was, give or take a whiff of Body Shop Dewberry here and a bottle of Budweiser over there. Back then, post-Isle of Wight, pre-Rotten, we thought we were doing something that would lock us into a time and a place for ever, but we might just as well have spent the summers swimming, or pulling the legs off frogs, like everybody else throughout history.

The Fleadh (pronounced "flah") at Finsbury Park, north London, now an annual event, is ostensibly a celebration of Irish music. The younger members of London's Irish community turn up in their thousands to wave tricolours, drink Murphy's, and listen to Van the Ubiquitous, Hothouse Flowers, the Pogues and lots of people called Mary. The Fleadh has also become something else, however: an annual gathering of those who used to like pop music a lot, but don't really know what to listen to any more. Their record collections have a visible high-tide mark – many of them stopped buying records in any quantity around the mid-Eighties, although they are buying CD replacements of their crackly vinyl favourites.

They have been alienated by the increasing dominance of dance music, and are baffled by some of the more *outré* manifestations of current guitar rock, notably grunge. In their confusion they have turned to what

has become known as "roots" music, the practitioners of which play real instruments and sing real songs. Consequently the Fleadh has stretched its definition of Irish music to include, for example, the frankly Texan country artist Nanci Griffith; this year, the star of the show was Bob O'Dylan.

More important than the music, however, is the notion that we are none of us too old for this sort of thing, that if we put our hands together for whoever wants us to, we will be transported back to Hyde Park or Knebworth or Reading.

To describe a rock audience as "good-natured" or "well-behaved" or "polite" in print has become, perversely, an insult – all good rock music, by definition, is unspeakably uncivilised, the theory goes, and unless there are listeners to match, then pop writers feel that they are in the wrong place, and get a little sniffy. It becomes clear as soon as one enters the park that this is a polite audience. They have come to enjoy themselves by listening to the music, smoking a little dope and drinking (maybe too much, a tiny minority of them, but, hey, that's rock'n'roll), and dancing, in their own fashion.

A significant proportion of them are thirtysomething, and therefore behave well because they can no longer remember how to behave any differently; an even more significant proportion are under ten, and behave badly because they are bored and fractious, not because they have been

driven insane by loud music and bad acid. ("There's a kids' area, which says it all," observed *Time Out* in its preview of the Fleadh, but, in fact, this says very little, beyond the fact that fans of Dylan and Morrison are older now than they were 15 or 20 or 30 years ago. As it turns out, the kids' area is the day's spectacular success: bouncy castles, radio-controlled cars, an impossibly febrile activity tent.)

One is quickly reminded, however, that there is a lot to be good-natured about. There are the long queues for overflowing mobile toilets: women stand in line for the Gents, gents go up against the perimeter fencing ("They might just as well wear a T-shirt saying I'M GOING FOR A CRAP," a friend observed of the unfortunate males forced to stand in line with the females). There is the weather: "Fleadh gray" ought to be featured on the next Dulux colour chart, a recognition of the sun's refusal to put his hat on for the day since the event began five years ago. There are the overpriced, warm drinks and overpriced, venomous hamburgers, and the hours spent trying to find one's place in the crowd after one has purchased said hamburger; most of all, there are the hundreds of yards between much of the audience and the stage.

To be fair, the Fleadh is efficiently organised. There are short waits between short, crisp sets in the Live Aid mould, and three separate stages, so that there is always something going on; in fact, most of the good things at the Fleadh happened in the tent or at the smaller stage reserved for

the younger bands. The sound is good, although sometimes as polite as the audience – no chance of local residents complaining, as they did during the Madness concert last year, that the ground beneath their block of flats was vibrating alarmingly. Van Morrison, in fact, was comfortably drowned out by polite chit-chat. Yet even the mighty Vince Power, the promoter responsible for most of London's live music, can do nothing about the fact that Morrison and Bob Dylan are quite small, and the audience is quite big.

Watching pop bands sing outdoors to crowds of this size was never a great activity, particularly in this country (if people can't sit down because of the wet, they just...mill around for several hours), particularly if the bands don't do anything worth watching. Guns N' Roses and Michael Jackson and Pink Floyd may be hopelessly, damnably unrootsy, but at least these acts seem to appreciate that people who have paid a lot of money to stand on a football pitch ought to be able to see something – even if it is only a giant video screen and an inflatable pig. The artists who play the Fleadh, however, are above all that nonsense. (Indeed, Bob Dylan is above any kind of communication whatsoever, as it turns out, even an explanation of why his songs no longer have the same tunes that they used to have.) Inflatable pigs would destroy the illusion that we are all in a little club somewhere, being intimate, so they are frowned upon.

I probably have more in common with many of the people who attend the Fleadh

that I do with any large gathering of people. When I go to football, I am frequently struck by how little I share with the rest of the crowd, who love the same team as I do but who listen to Phil Collins or Nigel Kennedy, and read the *Telegraph* or the *Sun*, and enjoy films starring Sylvester Stallone or Helena Bonham-Carter. One of the many felicities of football is that one can find oneself embracing a *Sun* reader and enjoying the experience hugely. "Adult orientated rock" audiences are much more disappointingly homogenous. I would not need the whole six degrees of separation to find a connection with much of the crowd in Finsbury Park; I could probably make do with one or two.

The biggest difference between the consumers of pop and football, however, is the former's unshakeable determination to have a good time, however poor the view, however arrogant the artist. Football crowds can accommodate the notion of having a bad time quite comfortably: you can watch your team get thumped, boo them off the pitch and go home satisfied. As the rain fell, and Dylan mangled "Mr Tambourine Man" in a manner that would have embarrassed the most vocally disadvantaged busker (the band were excellent, but they should dump the lead singer if they want to get anywhere), and the audience whooped their appreciation, I remembered the immutable first law of outdoor pop concerts: you always tell your friends that you had a good time, however miserable the experience. No one wants to be taken for a mug. ●





Moving? Bob Dylan

Knockin' on Dave's door

I KNOW Jefferson Airplane have a semi in Colliers Wood and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young share a basement flat in Harlesden but, newspaper reports notwithstanding, I'm not sure I quite believe that Bob Dylan is looking for a house in Crouch End.

It all reminds me of a story I heard from the BBC's John Walters. Invited to Dave Stewart's place, Dylan had mistakenly asked the cab driver not for Crouch Hill but Crouch End Hill or Crouch Hall Road or some such. Dropped off at number 145 he'd rung the doorbell, been greeted by a housewife and inquired: "Is Dave in?"

"No," she said — assuming he was referring to her husband, Dave, who was out on a plumbing job — "but he should be back soon." Bob asked if she would mind if he waited? Dave the plumber returned after 10 minutes and asked his wife if there'd been any calls. "No," she said, "but Bob Dylan's waiting for you in the front room."

Now, apparently, Bob Dylan has been seen waiting in front rooms all over N8. Well, I'm sure he'll fit in. Back in the days when he and Joan Baez shared a three-bed detached in Carshalton Beeches, I remember asking Dylan just how he kept his front lawn so free of grass tramage. I'll never forget his reply. "The answer, my friend, is mowing in the wind."

No direction home? Dylan tries Crouch End

THE TIMES they may be changin' for Crouch End, a stretch of north London that estate agents used to talk up by referring to it as "Highgate borders".

A trickle of mildly glamorous media types who have recently made their homes in the suburb, perched near fashionable Highgate and Hampstead, include the disc jockey Andy Kershaw, the writer and director Anthony Minghella (*Truly, Madly, Deeply*), the television writer Laurence Marks (*The New Statesman*, *Birds of a Feather*), and Kara Noble, of Capital Radio's *Chris Tarrant Show*.

But now a name to eclipse them all is on the scene — Bob Dylan has been house-hunting in Crouch End.

The free-wheeling doyen of folk-rock, who already owns homes in California and New York, viewed a semi-detached house priced at around £310,000 two weeks ago. Sandra Parker, who owns it with her husband, Stephen, answered the door to a tall man and a woman. "Behind them was a little guy," she said. "I was a bit annoyed because they were an hour early and I told them to wait so I could get the dog out. When I realised who the little one

PICTORIAL PRESS



The house that Bob might buy

was, I was speechless."

The home has a large, secluded back garden, with a patio and a sloping lawn, one of the features which the estate agents say attracted Dylan.

Dylan, now 52, got to know Crouch End — the prosaic name is said to come from the Latin *crux*, a cross or crossroads, plus "End", as it is at the eastern end of a valley — because Dave Stewart, formerly of the Eurythmics, lives there and owns a recording studio, The Church,

By Nick Walker
and Jason Bennetto



'It's the new Bob Dylan album'

just down the road. Dylan worked on an album there.

Dylan is also a regular at Shamrats, one of many local Indian restaurants (the district is reputed to have more than the whole of Austria). "He was in here two weeks ago," said the owner, Faruque Ali. "I recognised him from the telly, but I'm more of a Beatles fan myself."

Restaurants are an important reason for Crouch End's blossoming reputation: new ones include two of the most highly rated in London: Ban-

ners (Cajun/Mexican mixture, lots of wood, live Irish music, a fax machine, weird breakfasts, and couples who bring their babies) and Florians (traditional Italian, more than 60 types of grappa and, above all, no pizza).

In the Seventies, Crouch End was a popular retirement area for elderly London gangsters. It is still "undiscovered", its humble roots evident. The only supermarket is the downmarket Budgens; nearby is a large Woolworth's. But upmarket giftshops sell iron candlesticks and "home-made" cards and an organic hairdresser's is well established.

However, Dylan's possible arrival was not being viewed with unmitigated joy last week. Nick Jones, of Rock Around the Clock, a guitar shop which ranks among its customers another celebrated Bob — Geldof — commented: "This is a great area for music, but Bob Dylan's past it. He used to be good, but he's rubbish now."

Mr Jones need not worry and Crouch End residents should not count on property values soaring just yet. The estate agent says Dylan has not yet made an offer to buy the house.

Tambourine Man shakes them up in Crouch End

Lesley Gerard

IT'S CLOSER to the M1 than Highway 61. It may not as hip as Greenwich Village, but something is happening in London's Crouch End and most people know what it is.

The middle-class suburb is abuzz with the word that rock icon Bob Dylan is house-hunting in the area. According to neighbours in leafy Birchington Road, N8, the spokesman for a generation has made an offer for a £300,000 six-bedroom house in their quiet residential street.

'It's a fantastic honour,' said market analyst Don Hedley, 45. 'It might even put money on the rest of the houses around here and raise the asking prices.'

'We heard last night that Bob Dylan has actually bought the property,' he confided. 'I've got his records and I'm a fan, so naturally I'm thrilled.'

Crouch End may not seem the coolest place for the 52-year-old bard to settle. But he has been visiting the area for years to use the recording studios of record producer and former Eurythmic Dave Stewart.

Mr Hedley's son Michael, 11, has his own theory as to why the area has attracted the songwriter. 'I think he wants to live here because of the food. There are wonderful cafes and restaurants,' he revealed.

In fact Dylan has made so many trips to Crouch End that the area has amassed its own folklore about him. Any self-respecting follower can be expected to recount the tale of how Dylan, on his first visit to Stewart's studio, got lost. The diminutive star ended up having a cup of tea in a local plumber's home by mistake.

There are many stories of



Bob Dylan: House offer.

Dylan arriving in restaurants and failing to be recognised. The manager of the Shamrat Indian restaurant said: 'We did not recognise him at first, but he is a regular guest of Mr Stewart. Mr Dylan's favourite dish is the vegetable samosas followed by chicken Madras.'

Dylan is said to be 'very taken' with the house in Birchington Road. The present owner said she was astounded when the doorbell rang and she was confronted by the enigmatic musician, who turned up to view the property himself.

However the prospect of being Dylan's close neighbour does not impress all the residents. One said: 'I'm a heavy metal and punk enthusiast myself. I suppose it will be OK so long as he does not have his band round for rehearsals. It's hard to imagine knocking on his door to tell him to keep the noise down.'

Young Michael Hedley did not want to dampen his father's enthusiasm, but when Mr Hedley left the room he confided: 'Actually it would be much better and more exciting if Michael Jackson was moving in.'

Where top people live

How many roads must a trendy house-hunter walk down?

In the shifting sands of social snobbery about smart addresses, two new pointers emerged last week. The first was from the society magazine, *Harpers & Queen*, which sought to establish the choicest county in which to live. *Rachel Kelly writes.*

Its conclusions were predictable for gossip-column readers. Counties are defined by those who live in them: the more royals, the better, so the smartest county is royal Gloucestershire, as it has been for the last decade. A house on the right side of the border could easily justify a 10 per cent premium.

The least desirable home county is Essex, which *H & Q* says, "spells shiny suits, oversized pools in under-sized gardens, new money, new development and not enough pretty countryside". Surrey is equally undesirable, redolent of worthy commuters, whereas East and West Sussex is "real country".

Other socially superior counties are Hampshire, Dorset and Oxfordshire, where addresses carry a price premium. In London, "Hampstead is fashionable... West Hampstead definitely is not. Richmond has style, but cross the Thames to buy in Twickenham and you have stepped off the property catwalk".

A second pointer came with the news that the man who revolutionised rock 'n' roll has been looking at an Edwardian semi in north London. Bob Dylan has been inspecting a £300,000, three-storey, six-bedroom, red-brick house in leafy Birchington Road, London N8, once the heart of sleepy suburbia.

Even a rock legend, it seems, must sometimes telephone estate agents. "He rang

several weeks ago," says Steve Herman, of Tatlers, a Crouch End agency. "He had seen photographs of the house in our window."

Mr Dylan is blowin' with the wind of fashion. "Crouch End", Mr Herman says, "has become trendy. It used to be dominated by middle-class families but recently plenty of affluent younger people have moved in."

"Now it is full of smart places for discerning people. If you were to walk down Crouch End dressed in a peculiar fashion it would be accepted."

Mr Dylan is said to be very taken with the leafy suburb's village-like atmosphere and the proximity of Dave Stewart, co-founder of the Eurythmics, whose recording studio the American performer has used.

He is also said to have been impressed by all the mod cons on offer in the Birchington Road house, which has a whirlpool bath, gold taps and expensive decor.

The drawing room and dining room are decorated in neutral pastels, and the curtains are ruched.

Just like a woman, Mr Dylan was said to be impressed by the solid granite work tops and integrated appliances in the kitchen.

The house's owners, Sandra and Stephen Parker, who are also fans, were stunned when Mr Dylan knocked on their door to look at the house.

Mrs Parker says: "I was a bit annoyed because he and the agent were an hour early. I told them to wait while I let the dog out."

The singer spent 15 minutes looking around the Parkers' home. Should he decide to live there, *H & Q's* survey may need to be updated.



Dylan: London search



DYLAN HOMES IN

Superstar Bob set to splash out on £300,000 property

BOB Dylan is planning to buy a £300,000 house — in Crouch End!

★ The times they are a-changing — in London's Crouch End at least.

Superstar Bob Dylan is said to be on the point of moving into a five-bedroom house in the North London suburb.

He turned up to view the property — to the owner's astonishment — and is thought to be very keen on the area.

One local estate agent who asked not to be named said the U.S. star had been inquiring about large houses with gardens which were not overlooked.

The rock legend is set to make an offer on a five-bedroom property in Birchington Road...owned by two of his biggest fans.

He saw the house — close to Park Road — advertised in a Crouch End estate agent's window and made an appointment last week.

"It was amazing," said Sandra Parker, who owns the house with her husband Stephen. "I opened the door and there was this big man with a woman and behind them was a little guy. I was a bit annoyed because they

By JOHN RYAN

were an hour early and I told them to wait so I could get the dog out.

"When I came back I let them in and realised who the little one was. I was completely speechless — it was Bob Dylan. They were here for about 15 minutes and seemed to like it."

Stephen, 41, added: "I have a lot of his albums and really respect him. I wasn't there at the time and I won't forgive Sandra for not getting his autograph. It'd be great if he moved into Crouch End."

The move would con-



● BOB DYLAN

Dave Stewart's "Church" studio in Crouch End Hill and is a regular at the Shamrat Indian Restaurant in Tottenham Lane.

Estate agent Steve Herman, of Tatler's, said: "He called from a hotel in Knightsbridge looking for something on the Highgate side with four to five bedrooms and a garden that wasn't overlooked. I thought Birchington Road was just the place.

"It seems he was walking around Crouch End and saw the house in our window.

"We've sold to a few stars like Mandy Smith and Charles Dance but he's probably the biggest.

"I am expecting a call from him later this week or early next week. We are very hopeful he'll put down an offer."

firm Crouch End's status as the "hippy capital of north London".

The superstar, who headlined the Fleadh concert at Finsbury Park in June, has visited the area on several occasions. He has recorded at Eurythmic

DYLAN HAS SECRET PAD

BOB Dylan is not moving to Crouch End — he ALREADY lives there!

The Journal last week broke the news of the superstar's plan to buy a house in Birchington Road.

But now we have learned that the 51-year-old singer has been renting a property off his old pal, Dave Stewart, for more than two years.

A source at Stewart's Church recording studios said: "He's got his

own place and has been using it for a good while.

"He obviously loves the area because now he's looking for something more permanent. Don't ask me where it is because I'll probably lose my job."

A spokesman for Tatler's, the estate agents dealing with the £300,000 property Dylan viewed two weeks ago, said: "We are expecting a call from him later this week."

Dylan fans in heaven as he knocks on door



Home hunt: Dylan

ROCK legend Bob Dylan is house hunting in London.

Dylan fans Sandra and Stephen Parker were stunned when he turned up to view their house.

But at first they did not recognise him and told him to wait outside.

The couple said Dylan, 52, — whose hits include Knockin' On Heaven's Door — liked their five-bedroom house in Crouch End, north London.

World focus on the house that Bob Dylan might buy

THE COUPLE WHO PUT CROUCH END ON THE MAP

THE "couple who put Crouch End on the map" were this week taking a well-earned rest.

Sandra and Stephen Pavlou are the owners of the house Bob Dylan might buy – and would like it known they have done their FINAL interview.

Since the Hornsey Journal last Thursday told the world the rock superstar was planning to buy their five-bedroom home in Birchington Avenue, the Pavlous haven't had a minute's peace.

● Every national newspaper from The Times to the Sunday Sport has camped outside their front door.

● Nearly every television station this side of Bob's New York birthplace has badgered them for a peek inside what could be his new "pad".

● And even Spanish tourists have knocked on the Pavlous' door looking for "Mr Deecelan".

"It's been an incredible week," said Sandra, who confessed to being



● **BOB DYLAN**

"speechless" as she showed the ageing singer around her home.

"From 7.30am on the day the Journal came out, the phone just hasn't stopped ringing. On the Thursday, all the papers and TV arrived. On Friday, it was the radio, Saturday the tourists and Sunday more papers and television. At first it was quite scary but after a while you get used to it."

Stephen, 41, who owns a fashion company in Islington, added: "It has done Crouch End the

By JOHN RYAN

world of good. London's best kept secret is finally out.

"The great thing is most of the stories didn't just concentrate on the Dylan angle they researched everything about the area. We have been living here for 20 years: Before, when you told people you were from Crouch End, they would say 'where?'. They thought it was some kind of bowel disorder. Now it's like 'wow you live in Crouch End!'"

However, the couple revealed to us that they may not sell the £310,000 house after all.

"We were going to move to something smaller because our daughter was planning to go to Australia for a year, but now she's had second thoughts and so have we," said Stephen.

"But even if Bob

doesn't move into this house, I am positive he will buy a place in Crouch End."

Restaurateurs and estate agents in the area reckon the exposure will boost trade.

Faruque Ali of the Shamrat, a regular Dylan haunt, enthused:

"The publicity has been fantastic – we're thinking of putting Bob Specials on the menu."

The only person not impressed was Stephen and Sandra's 22-year-old daughter Anita who, after the 51-year-old singer's visit, remarked: "He looked really old and wrinkly."



● **SANDRA and Stephen Pavlou and the house Bob Dylan might buy.**

Picture: Mark Moody

DYLAN HOMES
IN Superstar Bob set to splash out on £300,000 property

Bob Dylan is planning to buy a £300,000 home in Crouch End

● **WORLD exclusive**

... last week's Hornsey Journal front page told readers about Dylan's house hunting in Crouch End.



● Bob Dylan, the international rock legend, mingled with the crowds in Camden Town this week during filming for a joint venture with former Eurythmics star Dave Stewart.

Dylan was looking reflective as he took time out for a cuppa at the Tasty Corner Food Bar, in Parkway, on Wednesday.

But little detail was forthcoming about the filming. "It is something that Dave and Bob have worked out between themselves. I really can't say anything

more about it," said a spokeswoman for Stewart.

The sighting came as film-maker Sir Richard Attenborough paid tribute to Camden for the assistance given during the filming of Chaplin, and more recently Shadowlands, both of which featured scenes shot around King's Cross.

Council leader Richard Arthur said: "London is often described as unfriendly to film-makers but this proves that this need not be the case."



Pop star Bob Dylan (above) in top hat and undertaker's garb takes a break with grizzled fellow musician Dave Stewart outside a north London teashop during a film Stewart is making about the American singer

Could I offer you a fondant fancy? Dave Stewart entertains friend Bob Dylan to tea in Camden where the great folk bard was busy filming a video under Stewart's direction, and snapping up bootlegs of his own albums.



It was teatime for a very sombre-looking Bob Dylan, who took his refreshment outside a tea shop in Camden, in London. Bob's cadaverous appearance was heightened by his choice of undertaker's garb which included a top hat and sinister black rubber gloves. The veteran singer, who has made films including *Don't Look Back*, *Renaldo And Clara* and *Hearts Of Fire*, was taking a break from filming with Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics. Dave is directing Bob in an as yet untitled, fly-on-the-wall film, recording Bob's antics around London and Los Angeles. This is Dave's second stab at movie making. He has just completed his first film *Taking Liberties With Mr Simpson*, starring *EastEnders* actress Daniella Westbrook. Dave, who produced Bob's album *Knocked Out Loaded* in his North London recording studios, recently hit the headlines over reports that he and his wife, Slobhan Fahey of *Shakespeare's Sister* weren't getting on.



The rumour mill was set grinding by sightings of

His Bobness in the streets of Camden Town shooting "some kind of film about the nature of being Bob Dylan" with long-time mucker Dave Stewart. Rumours such as: he's going to dispose of his final obligation to Columbia Records with a Good As I Been To You II-style covers album and then sign for Stewart's Anxious label; and then again, oh no he's not, he isn't going to sign for anyone ever again *and* he's going to call a halt to The Never Ending Tour because he firmly believes the end of the world is nigh and he fancies getting in a couple of be-piped and slippers years of retirement before that comprehensive quietus occurs at the close of the millenium; and then again, piffle, tosh, the truth of the mis-eavesdropped conversation which gave rise to the Armageddon rumours concerned not "the world's end" but "Crouch End". This last hypothesis proposes that he's about to buy a £300,000 house there - added credence being derived from sworn statements by a local estate agent and the presence of Dave Stewart's Church studio in that particular neck of North London.



ALBUMS: Andy Gill on Dylan with a whiff of corporatism.

BOB DYLAN

The 30th Anniversary Concert Celebration

(Columbia COL 474000 2)

The artist credit is a bit of a fib, really, considering that His Bobness sings on only four of this double-CD's 29 tracks, and that on two of those four he's sharing verses with various of the old-lag rockers come to Madison Square Garden to celebrate... what, exactly?

The thing which deserves celebration, Dylan's compositional gift, is only incidentally lauded here, as an impressive parade of artists from different genres offers interpretations of Bobsongs. Since the anniversary in question is that of Dylan's first recording for CBS, what we're primarily asked to feel grateful for is the composer's 30-year association with a record company. And since few of us hold shares in that company, why should we be bothered which label was the recipient of his genius? Considerations such as these add to the stench of corporatism surrounding the project. Count, for instance, the number of guests who happen to reside on that same record label. We are at least spared the speech by a company bigwig which, I am informed, was roundly booed.

Which is not to say this package is entirely bereft of redeeming qualities. There are several reasons to be cheerful, not least the first-time pairing of Neil Young with Booker T & the MGs, which opens the second disc with "Just Like Tom Thumb's

A bit of Bob, a bit of a cheek

Blues" and a scorching "All Along The Watchtower". Virtually all of the highlights, apart from Johnny Winter's slide-guitar version of "Highway 61 Revisited", are on the second disc: Dylan's own "It's Alright, Ma"; George Harrison's Buddy Holly-esque pop reading of "Absolutely Sweet Marie"; The O'Jays' gospel workout on "Emotionally Yours"; and, best of the lot, Eric Clapton's blues revision of "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right". These are the artists who have applied themselves seriously to the honour at hand. But too much of the concert, as presented here, is simply dashed-off versions by such as Tracy Chapman, John Mellencamp and Richie Havens.

VARIOUS ARTISTS**Bob Dylan: The 30th Anniversary Concert Celebration**

(Columbia 47400014-2)

Well, I doubt if Sinéad O'Connor, who isn't on the album and was booed off stage on the night, would call it a celebration.

Bob Aid is unnecessary—if you seek Dylan's monument, look around you. So, without even the saving grace of being all for charity, the criticisms come thick and fast: beginning with John Mellencamp's massacre of "Like A Rolling Stone", Tracy Chapman's reverential "Times They Are A Changin'", Johnny Winter's flash "Highway 61 Revisited".

The highlights come from the unlikeliest sources: The Clancy Brothers' rousing "When The Ship Comes In"; Lou Reed's relentless "Foot Of Pride"; Clapton's blistering "Don't Think Twice...";

George Harrison's jaunty "Absolutely Sweet Marie"; Neil Young's steamrolling "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues". The finale singalongs ("My Back Pages", "Knockin' On Heaven's Door") allowed everyone to nuzzle up to the microphone. Typically, the man for whom it was all in aid of opened with "Song To Woody" by way of deflecting all the hosannas aimed at his head towards the man who started it all off for him. But his guitar wasn't plugged in, Judas in reverse. ● 6

Patrick Humphries

George Harrison's jaunty "Absolutely Sweet Marie". Neil Young's steamrolling "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues".

The finale singalongs ("My Back Pages", "Knockin' On Heaven's Door") allowed everyone to nuzzle up to the microphone. Typically, the man

for whom it was all in aid of opened with "Song To Woody" by way of deflecting all the hosannas aimed at his head towards the man who started it all off for him. But his guitar wasn't plugged in, Judas in reverse. ● 6



Old codgers united: (left to right) Clapton, Dylan, Petty and Young

'DYL CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

A while back, I read that Sony planned to release an album of **BOB DYLAN's** 30th anniversary celebration concert, which took place at Madison Square Garden last October. But since then I've heard nothing. Has the album been scrapped, deferred, made into flower-pots or what?
T Horsfield, London NW10

■ You don't have to wait much longer. Sony plan to release the album through Columbia on

July 26. Apparently, everyone who took part – George Harrison, Tom Petty, Stevie Wonder, Lou Reed, Neil Young, Eric Clapton etc – has given clearance on their material and virtually everything that was seen and heard on TV will form part of the double-CD set. However, Sinéad's little contretemps amid Bob Marley's "War" will not make it onto your home CD-player, and neither will Dylan's opening "Song To Woody", as Bob forgot to plug his guitar in properly, thus ruining the track.

Star cast plays tribute to Dylan

VARIOUS ARTISTS: Bob Dylan 30th Anniversary Concert Celebration (Columbia)

AFTER 30 years, 38 albums and over 500 songs that helped to change the course of rock music, Bob Dylan, above all others, deserved to be honoured with an event of this magnitude.

"Bobfest" is how Neil Young refers to it at one point, and certainly there has not been quite such a gathering of talent since Live Aid.

But the difference on this occasion was that nobody seemed to have any ulterior motive for being there — it simply comes across as a genuine celebration and a heartfelt tribute.

As the accompanying sleeve notes point out: "In the end, it was about the songs". And yet the way in which some of the more familiar ones have been reinterpreted by other great artists in their own inimitable style — everything from Irish

ROCK
By MICHAEL CABLE

folk to New Wave rock and from blues to country — is what makes this triple album/double CD more than just a collector's item for Dylan fans.

Among the many highlights, the brightest and most startling include Stevie Wonder's deeply soulful *Blowin' In The Wind*, Eric Clapton's slow blues version of *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right*, and George Harrison's delightful *Absolutely Sweet Marie*.

Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder delivers a stark and dramatically effective *Masters Of War*, while Johnny Winter powers his slide guitar along *Highway 61 Revisited* at full throttle and Chrissie Hynde adds a radiant quality to *I Shall Be Released*. Else-

where, the O'Jays bring a hint of gospel to *Emotionally Yours*, Rolling Stone Ron Wood rocks his way through a rousing version of *Seven Days*, and Neil Young attacks *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues* and *All Along The Watchtower* with tremendous verve.

Roger McGuinn opts for a note-perfect reproduction of The Byrds original *Mr Tambourine Man*, while Johnny Mellencamp opens with a similarly faithful rendering of *Like A Rolling Stone*.

Kris Kristofferson, Lou Reed, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Roseanne Cash, June Carter Cash, Ritchie Havens, The Clancy Brothers, Tracy Chapman, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Shawn Colvin, Tom Petty and The Band complete the impressive line-up.

Dylan himself actually opened up on the night with *Song To Woody*, but, sadly, technical problems with the recording meant that this couldn't be included on the album.

We are left with *It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)* and *My Back Pages* — for which he is joined by Roger McGuinn, Tom Petty, Neil Young, Eric Clapton and George Harrison — before everybody assembles for a disappointingly downbeat finale with the dirge-like *Knockin' On Heaven's Door*.

Then Dylan pops out again by himself for a more fitting close with the plaintive *Girl Of The North Country*. The man, his guitar and his harmonica — that's still the way we remember him best.



5:30 P.M. (13) In the Spotlight: "The Bob Dylan 30th Anniversary Celebration." The start of a two-part, five-hour special, taped in October 1992, commemorating the anniversary of Dylan's debut album; with Stevie Wonder, Lou Reed, Tracy Chapman, Neil Young, others. 709348

ROCKING ON: Bob Dylan's 30 years of music

The times are a-changin' for Bob Dylan at 11.45 p.m. 11.45 - 1.25 **ROCK DINOSAURS: A TRIBUTE TO BOB DYLAN.** Bob Dylan recorded in concert at Madison Square Gardens, New York (rpt). 591963.



"No! Happy, Bob... Hap-pyl Just a smile... please? Oh, forget it..."

BOB DYLAN: IN HIS OWN WORDS

Chris Williams
(Omnibus, £7.95)

"People are still living off the table scraps of the '60s... There used to be a time when the idea of heroes was important. People grew up sharing those myths and legends and ideals. Now they grow up sharing McDonalds and Disneyland". Howling-at-the-moon mad, totally tonto, but still, indubitably, Bob Dylan, *In His Own Words*.

"Who is there to admire now? Who?... There's a guy who works in a gas station in LA, an old guy. I truly admire that guy. What's he done? He helped me fix my carburettor once". Still out there, still being cantankerous and Messianic, still trying to shrug off a past so glittering it won't let him go.

Still typecast as spokesman of a generation, despite: "Do you have any important philosophy for the world?". "I don't drink hard liquor, if that's what you mean", "No, the world in general. You and the world?" "Are you kidding? The world don't need me. Christ, I'm only five feet ten". ● 7
Patrick Humphries

BOB DYLAN - IN HIS OWN WORDS

CHRIS WILLIAMS

(Omnibus)

Does anyone really need another Dylan book. So many tomes, so many words written about the rambling ex-folkie that there has to be a limit to Dylan shelf space. Still, at least this work sees Dylan as main man rather than some hack's reverential analysis of every Zimmerman utterance. Most of his lines are somewhat dubious, the meaning always

open to analysis. Then again, some quotes are from the Dylan hip, even if a tad tongue in cheek at moments. 'Folk singing is just a bunch of fat people' and a measure of cynicism creeps through consistently. On the topic of the hopeless *Hearts Of Fire* movie he recalls 'They paid me as much as they'd probably pay Robert DeNiro. It's too bad it wasn't something more to my liking, like *Chariots Of Fire*.' (KD)
■■■□□

BOB DYLAN IN HIS OWN WORDS: Chris Williams (Omnibus £7.95)

BOB DYLAN is a man of many words, most of which he fires at his audience through his songs. When the '60s claimed him to be the spokesman for that particular generation he had very little to say publicly – if you wanted to listen to what Dylan really had to say you bought a copy of 'Highway 61 Revisited' or 'Blonde On Blonde' and turned it up loud so that you could hear his every word. It is for this reason that *Bob Dylan In His Own Words* is such a skimpy affair when compared to his far bulkier songbook.

Dylan the interviewee is less interesting than Dylan the artist, although there are the occasional gems of good humour and scalpel-sharp philosophising to be enjoyed here, as well as his personal thoughts on the records he has made over the years. Dylan purists will gulp much of this down at a single sitting and beg for more.

Those who don't care about Dylan will find little to change their opinion.

Edwin Pouncey

BOB DYLAN: "In His Own Words" (Omnibus, £7.95)

Once he'd moved beyond the surreal one-liners of his mid-60s press conferences, and played dumb through the infamous 1969 interview with 'Rolling Stone', Bob Dylan's conversations with the press were either short and sour (a popular Dylan response to questions is a non-committal "uh-huh"), or else long, pensive and entirely lacking in memorable soundbites.

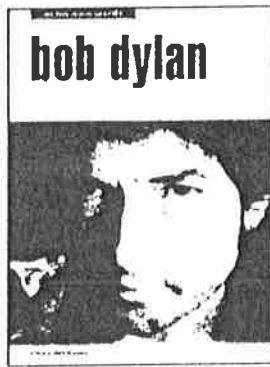
That makes the bulk of this particular 'In His Own Words' collection worthy rather than exciting reading, as Dylan refuses to be pinned down to a pat explanation of his songwriting or his musical roots, and continually groans about how much better everything was in the past. (And quite likely he was right.)

That doesn't make this book boring, simply not a contender for the wittiest collection of quotes you'll ever read. What comes across strongly is Dylan's increasing uncertainty about his own creative urges, alongside his equally strong conviction that he is simply doing what he has to do. A man out of sync with the hi-tech, low-content ideals of the age, he sounds like a travelling minstrel in the century of the computer.

Two minor quibbles: a couple of the quotes on page 32 are repeated later in the book; while the photo selection is mostly familiar, though I'd never seen the shot of Bob and Julian Lennon before. And annoyingly, the one picture I wanted a caption for isn't explained: what is Bob up to on page 93?
(PD)

Somebody who hasn't been good-looking for half a century is old **Bob**

Dylan, and now even his voice has gone. But what a huge influence he has been, and think how many great songs he's written. For a man of few spoken words, when he does say something it's usually amusing, intriguing or at the very least thought provoking. I love his line "Folk singing is just a bunch of fat people". And then there is his observation "I always thought that one man, the one man balladeer with a guitar, could blow an entire army off the stage if he knew what he was doing". How absolutely true. I've seen it done. What emerges from 'Bob Dylan: In His Own Words' by Chris Williams (Omnibus Press) is a picture of a



very confused man who didn't even like his own movie 'Don't Look Back' which many assumed gave the most accurate portrait of the Sixties' star. "When I saw it in a movie house, I was shocked at what had been done. It was all out of context..." Ah, that's what they all say.

BOB DYLAN IN HIS OWN WORDS

Chris Williams
Omnibus, £7.95

Until the section on Renaldo & Clara, wherein – protesting perhaps too much – the quotes pile explanation upon justification, the Dylan presented here remains typically enigmatic and non-committal. This characteristic refusal to be confined or defined gives many of his answers a pronounced querulousness, particularly in the stinging rejoinders and angry young lurkery of his amphetamine years, when spitting denunciations were the order of the day: "I don't call myself a poet because I don't like the word. I'm a trapeze artist."

A refusal to contextualise or credit the interviewers gives the impression that compiler Williams is suggesting that Dylan's pearls of wisdom sprang forth of their own accord – a fabrication which does all involved a disservice. It's a deliberate attempt to prophesise Dylan, to clear the muck and grime of context away from the holy texts, which are presented with only the year and location to explain them (as if the fact that something was said in New

York not Houston has bearing on its content). Accordingly, the quotes sit like scriptures pertaining to the prophet's proclamations upon the important events of his life to be debated back and forth by batty Dylanologists for years to come.

There's a tendentious slant, too, in the way that quotes on a specific subject are not arranged chronologically. Again, it imposes some private agenda upon the answers – so that, for instance, speculative, individual ruminations upon writing from the late '60s are, as it were, subsequently "trumped" by a 1963 quote about political engagement in his writing – "What comes out of the music is a call to action" – which may well have been gainsaid in later years.

That said, and apart from the same quote being used as representative of both the Times They Are A-Changin' and Nashville Skyline albums, this is an entertaining effort, though as with much sampled music, the interest lies in the original inspiration rather than the way the material has been organised. After all, as Bob said in 1963 – in New York – "It ain't the melodies that are important, man, it's the words. I don't give a damn about the melodies". ★★

Andy Gill

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING

THE ALTERNATIVE LFC SONGSHEET SONG No: 4

Come gather round, Kopites, from home or abroad
And remember a time when our midfielders scored
We'd laugh and we'd scream and we'd shout and applaud
There was no need for ranting and raving
And you didn't sit there thinking "fuck me, I'm bored"
Oh, the times they are a changing.

I remember that time when the defence was strong,
When Dalglish turned on sixpences all winter long
When Graeme Souness couldn't do a thing wrong
While the Manx never shut up complaining
And we didn't let class players go for a song
Oh, the times they are a changing.

I recall when the chairman had only one face
And if we sold a player, he sank without trace
There was vision and skill, pin-point passing and pace
Now we're cursed with a desperate craving
For a Kennedy, Souness, McDermott or Case
Oh the times they are a-changing

There was no player's name we weren't too proud to sing
There was no headless chicken out there on the wing
An aeroplane sickbag, there was no need to bring
There was no question mark over training
And I've seen more urgency in a wet piece of string
For the times they are a-changing

The glory has gone and the cupboard is bare
And the Reds often play without passion or flair
The team and morale are beyond your repair
In the press room you're constantly whinging
Next time I'm at the job club, hope I'll see you there
Then the times will be a-changing



Blowin' this way and that

It was a protest song, but not everyone seemed to notice. Jasper Rees traces the career of Bob Dylan's first classic



BOB DYLAN was not the first singer to perform "Blowin' in the Wind"; nor has he ever had a hit with it. For a while there was doubt that he was even its author. The first of many cranks to dog Dylan's steps was a New Jersey economics teacher, who claimed that a pupil of his called Lorre Wyatt had penned the song at the age of 15, and that Dylan had bought it with a \$1,000 donation to charity. Wyatt soon admitted that Dylan's song resembled his own "Freedom is Blowing in the Wind" in name only, then waited until 1974 before confessing that no such song ever existed.

No one denied the simple folk melody owed something to a spiritual entitled "No More Auction Block for Me", but the words were Dylan's own, jotted down on 16 April 1962 in a Greenwich Village coffee house, the Commons. He tried the song out on fellow folkie Gil Turner, who was so blown over he included it in his set that night at Gerde's Folk City. With a lyric sheet on his mike stand, Turner became the first in a long line to pose that lilting litany of metaphorical questions starting with "How many roads must a man walk down/Before you call him a man?"

Riotous applause told Dylan, if he didn't know it already, that "Blowin' in the Wind" was his first classic. The next day Dave van Ronk, who had been working the Village scene far longer, begged to differ. "Jesus, Bobby," he recalled telling him, "what an incredibly dumb song! I mean, what the hell is blowing in the wind?" A few weeks later he had the answer. "I was walking through Washington Square Park and heard a kid singing, 'How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood/The answer my friend is 'blowin' in the wind'. At that point I knew Bobby had a smash on his hands."

Bob Spitz, one of Dylan's biographers, claims that "Blowin' in the Wind" may be the only song from the 1960s that will be remembered a hundred years from now. If so, it will be because it was built to outlast its context. As the civil rights movement gathered pace, some sniped that this so-called protest song was too like the breeze of which it sings, an insubstantial offering which held back from actually saying anything. But this missed the point. "Blowin' in the Wind" was

LIVES OF THE GREAT SONGS

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dylan's shot across the bows. Its very lack of polemic, its mere hint of ire, is what made it so popular — that, and a sweet tooth of a tune. It led a double life as an angry anthem and a pretty pop bauble. Anyone could render it — folk singers, country acts, gospel groups, cabaret chanteuses, beat combos, guitar heroes, orchestras, even the New Seekers — and practically everyone did.

Like many folk ditties that call for just a voice, a guitar and a passing acquaintance with three major chords, it could have been written yesterday, or some time in the first century. The lines "How many times must cannonballs fly/Before they're forever banned?" may have voiced a modern concern at the nuclear threat, but you'd never guess from Dylan's antiquated imagery that hi-tech weapons had even been invented, let alone recently deployed on the island of Cuba.

"Cannonballs" is one of the song's tiny handful of polysyllables. Few songs that pack such a literary punch as "Blowin' in the Wind" use so many short words. The three verses and their echoing refrain are a model of brevity. Couplets like "How many deaths will it take till he knows/That too many people have died?" trip along with a fleet-footed simplicity that has a mesmerising power.

In May 1962, the lyrics were published in *Broadside* magazine. Dylan himself recorded the song on 9 July. Dry, deadpan, almost downhearted, his version would not just overshadow most others but leave them looking like a misreading. The treatment, like the song, was a case of less being more: just him, his acoustic guitar and his harmonica. It's verse, refrain, solo, verse, refrain, solo, verse, refrain: solo; no bridge, no middle eight, no climax. The solos are more like fills — brief, almost brusque. The vocal is done with the minimum of fuss, and no variation in dynamics: Dylan sings the nine questions as if they'd just occurred to him, with a casual "Yes and" before

the second and third one in each verse. He sounds not remotely uplifted. Amazing, when you listen to just about everybody following behind.

Even before Dylan gave his own version to posterity, the song had become a Village anthem: someone somewhere was performing it every night, and its popularity so dispirited Dylan that he considered leaving it off his second album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. He relented, but only on the insistence of his veteran producer John Hammond who, after Dylan's critically reviled debut LP, needed something to justify his faith.

By this time the song was already famous, thanks to Albert Grossman, Dylan's manager, who farmed the song out to another of his clients, Peter, Paul and Mary. The smiley trio, fresh from a hit with "Puff the Magic Dragon", took a honey-eyed version of the song into the upper echelons of the chart, adding harmonies, bolstering the instrumentation and passing the lead vocal around the group. It may have taken away a harsh edge but it persuaded a million people to buy the single. As Grossman calculated, the song opened doors for his protégé to the rest of America.

By the end of 1964 the song had been recorded by a good 60 acts, from Joan Baez to Sam Cooke, Bobby Darin to Marlene Dietrich. It was open season on "Blowin' in the Wind".

Cooke's recording was a live one, made in 1964, the year he died. He did it as a chain-gang spiritual, with a chugging guitar, cheery horn section, chiming cymbals, and a beautiful, easy-swing that paved the way for the song's rebirth as a feel-good R&B love tune. That's how it was done by the young Stevie Wonder, who in 1968 became the only act other than Peter, Paul and Mary to have a hit with it, and last year sang it at Columbia's 30th anniversary Dylan tribute at Madison Square Garden.

Dietrich was the exception to the rule that the lushier the instrumentation, the softer the punch.

This was probably because she first recorded the song in German. As with "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?", her first success with a protest song, Dietrich soon cut the song in English, but "Die Antwort Weiss Ganz Allein Der Wind" is the stronger version. Her deep, haunted voice, backed by Burt Bacharach's jaunty orchestration, captured the song's weary resignation in a way that Bacharach's other muse, Dionne Warwick, was unable to match.

The young Marianne Faithfull recorded it in only her second stint in a studio, as a follow-up to "As Tears Go By". Hers is the only version with a fade-out, which doesn't come soon enough. It would be good to hear her do it now that her voice has, as it were, broken. She might wrench something apocalyptic out of the song as no one has yet managed, not even a direly howling six-minute version by Neil Young, captured for evermore on the festival-of-feedback live album, *Weld*.

The Hollies gave it the "He Ain't Heavy" treatment, big, booming and hollow. The Brothers Four, and many others, turned it into a country thigh-slapper. Diana Ross and the Supremes, recording it in 1969, close to the end of their tether, reduced it to just another product on the Motown conveyor belt — a tinny, percussive version which did no justice to the lyrics. The Ray Conniff Singers turned it into lift muzak. But no one plumbed the depths quite like the New Seekers who, elaborating on the more restrained example of the Seekers, delivered a happy-clappy sing-along with a ghostly lead-guitar break.

For a song whose bite is in its lyrics, there is a surprising array of instrumental versions. Duke Ellington, Duane Eddy and Chet Atkins all came up with accounts of the melody that sound just as you'd expect them to. The London Philharmonic Orchestra, meanwhile, passed the parcel between the prettier instruments before letting a funeral choir in on the act. How many times must a song be sung, before its spell starts to wane?

□ If you'd like to hear "Blowin' in the Wind", tune into Virgin 1215 between 9.30 and 10am today, when Graham Dene will be playing two of the versions discussed here. Virgin is on 1215 kHz MW (AM).

ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL BURGESS

ROCK OF AGES MEETS ROCK 'N' ROLL

Civil-rights preacher wrote the book on Bob Dylan

By JERRY COFFEY
FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

FORT WORTH — The line that began forming in the very early morning outside Sears in Town Center was about what you'd expect with tickets to an upcoming rock concert going on sale in a few hours: young couples making a night of it, street people hired by scalpers to grab up blocs of black-marketable seats, a well-known street-corner flower salesman.

But standing quietly near the front, his position assured by middle-of-the-night arrival, one small, frail man of advancing years — white-haired, bespectacled and reserved — seemed quite out of place. And when daylight enabled the queuefellows to see each other better, the startled look on the face of the young woman in front of him confirmed the incongruity of his presence.

"Rev. Cartwright?" she ventured in wonderment. "You baptized me!"

And so he had, along with countless others in a ministerial career lasting more than 40 years. Indeed, Dr. Colbert S. Cartwright was — and is — one of the most distinguished figures in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), not only a devoted pastor but also a leader and scholar of the denomination and the larger Christian community and a noted champion of civil rights and social justice.

In *Sources of Inspiration*, a book produced last year by the prestigious Educational Testing Service of Princeton, N.J., Cartwright was one of 15 essay subjects cited as outstanding modern religious leaders.

But outside Sears that morning, it was the other Bert Cartwright, the *secular* Bert Cartwright, exercising an interest that had consumed much of his private time for more than a quarter-century.

That Bert Cartwright has gained prominence, too — as an internationally recognized scholar and writer on the lyrics of Bob Dylan.

He has a large collection of performance tapes

and what he believes to be the world's largest collection — some 6,000 items — of printed resource material about the enigmatic singer-songwriter who came to symbolize the social-protest aspect of rock 'n' roll in the 1960s and retains a fervent following to the present.

Though he remains very active in church affairs, Cartwright, 68, retired as Trinity-Brazos Area minister for the Christian Church in the Southwest in 1989, and since then has been able to indulge his Dylan interest more fully.

Dr. Colbert S. Cartwright is a distinguished figure in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and a scholar and writer on the lyrics of Bob Dylan.



Fort Worth Star-Telegram/RALPH LAUER

Cartwright received an honorary doctorate from TCU in 1976 wearing a Bob Dylan T-shirt under his academic robes, one of his few out-of-ministry moments.

He recently revised and expanded his influential book, *The Bible in the Lyrics of Bob Dylan*, contributes essays to Dylan-centered publications and maintains correspondence and trades tapes with other Dylan scholars all over the world.

That this endeavor causes raised eyebrows among some church people doesn't faze Cartwright.

"I've always had the view that a minister needs to keep one foot in the sacred world and the other in the secular, and I don't have any problem separating the two," he said in an interview.

Though his published work on biblical references in Dylan's works might suggest that Cartwright's interest is tied to his Christian calling, such a notion would be misleading, he noted. "My interest in Dylan is strictly literary. . . . His religious beliefs, his values, his morality, his lifestyle do not concern me."

Indeed, much of Cartwright's Dylan-digging has no religious connotation whatever. He's particularly pleased with the detective work that produced the identity, previously unknown among Dylan scholars, of a painter in New York whom the elusive Dylan had mentioned as an early influence.

Cartwright observes, though, that there are parallels between Dylan's world view and his own that may help explain why he was drawn to the folk-rock artist as a scholarly interest.

"I believe Christianity should

have an impact upon the world and that a minister should know not only the theology of his faith but also the kind of world he lives in."

Cartwright said.

"In that regard, in about 1965 someone called my attention to Bob Dylan as being an unusually perceptive songwriter, so I bought a couple of his albums and immediately was struck by the power of his artistry and his imagery. I recognized in his lyrics an earnestness that bespoke a search for life's ultimate meaning, so I began to collect his records and study his lyrics. He seemed to reflect the condition of America at that time very vividly, criticizing in a secular way the same kind of society I was seeing through a religious perspective."

In the monograph that resulted, Cartwright interpreted Dylan's use of the Bible and annotated the lyrics wherever there was a biblical reference. The book was published on a limited, nonprofit basis in Great Britain, a major center of Dylan interest, in 1986.

Revised and enlarged by a third, *The Bible in the Lyrics of Bob Dylan* recently was re-issued in England and is being circulated in the United States through Rolling Tomes of Grand Junction, Colo.

Direct publication in the United States has been prevented by copyright restrictions arising from Dylan's persistent refusal to allow his lyrics to be quoted in books about him.

The reclusive singer-songwriter won't talk about his work, either.

Cartwright never has spoken to or corresponded with Dylan and doesn't expect to. "It doesn't matter whether I ever have contact with him," he said. "My involvement with his work doesn't depend on that."

Cartwright described Dylan as "a fascinating person who really has invented his own life." Having grown up in a middle-class Jewish family in Minnesota, he changed his identity — from Robert Zimmerman to Bob Dylan — and his persona when he moved to New York at age 20, portraying himself as wandering roustabout and balladeer.

"Although he flunked out of the University of Minnesota, he obviously has a keen mind that absorbs everything," Cartwright said.

"He first picked up the Bible as a literary source among many other literary sources. The first biblical references in his songs come from black and white spirituals and from the blues. He started out using the Bible more for imagery — quite sophisticated imagery — than for spiritual message, but later, after he had a personal religious experience, became a kind of born-again Christian and attended a Bible school in California, he began to use biblical allusions in a more directly religious way."

Cartwright said Dylan "is very much into the imagery of the Apocalypse. . . . He believes God's judgment is about to descend, that the end of the world is near, and that he's going to be among the few who will be saved."

The churchman had no trouble understanding the disillusionment about the American way of life that Dylan expressed in many of his songs, because by the time his interest in the songwriter developed, the minister had experienced his own disillusionment regarding his or any other minister's effectiveness in promoting social change.

Growing up in Chattanooga, where his father was a Disciples of Christ minister and led the city's interracial forum, Cartwright sensed from childhood "the wrongness of segregation," and from the beginning of his ministry he championed the cause of racial equality and justice.

Becoming pastor of Pulaski Heights Christian Church in Little Rock in 1954, the young minister, a graduate of Yale Divinity School, wasted no time placing himself on the leading edge of the civil rights movement. On the Sunday after the Supreme Court issued its historic school desegregation decision, he preached a sermon supporting it, and after the text was printed on the op-ed page of the *Arkansas Gazette*, letters came in from eight states, mostly condemning his stand.

Undeterred, Cartwright kept pressing the cause of desegregation, helping form Arkansas' first Council on Human Relations and becoming its president just in time to be, in 1957, at the center of the most dramatic civil rights showdown of the era: Gov. Orville Faubus' calling out of the Arkansas National Guard to prevent court-ordered integration of Little Rock's Central High School, followed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower's federalization of the guard and dispatching of U.S. Army airborne troops to enforce the court order.

"John Chancellor, whom I met when he was covering the story for NBC, called the Little Rock confrontation the first media event, the first time that the full impact of television's immediacy got through directly to the American people," said Cartwright, who himself carried press credentials through the crisis.

"It truly was a shattering experience. No one who was around that school then or saw what happened on television will ever forget it."

Cartwright's sermon the next Sunday was memorable, too. In *Sources of Inspiration*, Roy Reed writes of the occasion:

"Bert Cartwright was an unlikely Moses. His voice was weak and so were his eyes. His glasses made him look like the bookworm he was. He weighed 110 pounds. The sophomore girls in the church were taller than he. And yet, when he climbed into the pulpit that morning, he spoke words of such power and conviction that members of the congregation remembered the sermon 30 years later as the best they had ever heard."

Contrasting the dignity and courage of Elizabeth Eckford, one of the nine black students turned away from the school, with the behavior of the jeering gantlet of hostile whites that she walked past, the preacher condemned the racist defi-

ance at Central High in terms that deeply offended a significant part of his congregation.

"I had visited her at home after the incident and asked her where she got the strength to face that mob," Cartwright recalled. "She mentioned reading in Psalms the night before the passage that included the words 'and a host should encamp against me, I will not fear.' So I talked about that in my sermon."

He also suggested that white people who did not recognize the humanity of the black students were in danger of losing their own souls and said Elizabeth Eckford "has more guts than anyone present here today."

"The church lost 10 percent of its membership overnight," Cartwright said, noting that while he never regretted the message of that sermon, he did have second thoughts about the tone of it.

Many other members disagreed with his stand but supported his right to speak out, he said. He received a vote of confidence from the congregation and remained at the Little Rock church until 1963, when he accepted a pastorate in Youngstown, Ohio, and discovered that leaving the South did not mean leaving racism.

He continued to work for racial justice and against other forms of discrimination in Little Rock, Youngstown and Fort Worth, but the Little Rock experience and subsequent frustrations took a heavy toll, personally and spiritually.

"I became disillusioned with what can be accomplished and I had a greater sense of the perversity of humanity," Cartwright said. "I went through a crisis of understanding who I am, what the church is, what society is, and became rather depressed. I functioned, but it was a time of having to rethink the basis of what I'd been working for."

"It was quite similar to what happened to a lot of people with the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. But I'd been through all that before those things happened, so I could identify with the disillusionment of those in the Sixties."

His re-examination, though, produced not a falling into apocalyptic despair like Dylan but "a fresh understanding of God being at work and alive in the world and in the church" and a renewal of faith and hope.

Cartwright became pastor of Fort Worth's South Hills Christian Church in 1971, was appointed to the city's Human Relations Commission and, starting in 1973, chaired its committee administering the equal employment opportunity law for a decade. In 1978, he joined the Disciples' Fort Worth-based regional staff, becoming Trinity-Brazos Area minister.

He and his wife, Anne, make their home in far south Fort Worth. They have five children, four of whom live in the area, and nine grandchildren.

Though the Fort Worth years have been satisfying professionally

and personally and somewhat more tranquil than earlier times, they have not been without controversy.

In the later 1980s, Cartwright found himself challenging discrimination of a different kind when conflict arose over the establishment of a new Disciples congregation in Arlington. The Trinity-Brazos Area Board's decision to call a woman minister to be pastor of the new church led to a severe split in the potential membership.

After efforts at compromise failed, Cartwright as area minister advised the board to dissolve the warring nucleus and start over. It did so, naming the woman minister to organize the new group. The resulting congregation, St. Andrew Christian Church, is going strong, and the Rev. Lucy Maier remains its minister.

Recalling Cartwright's leadership, Maier said, "He caused the Trinity-Brazos Area to insert in its charter an affirmative-action clause like that of the U.S. government so that it's against the bylaws to deny ministerial jobs on the basis of gender or race. . . . It's a measure of his effectiveness, I think, that things like that don't even come up anymore."

"It would be easy to underestimate him," Maier said. "At meetings where there's negotiation and differing points of view, he'll sit meekly and quietly while everybody else goes out on their respective limbs. But when he does begin to comment, fireworks go off and you realize this man is very sharp and there's no getting anything past him."

"As I got to work with him more, I really came to appreciate the depth, scope and clarity of his theological thinking. He's very focused and well-organized, and at the same time very creative and open to new ideas. He's also lots of fun and has a terrific sense of humor."

Cartwright is uncomfortable about being cited as a source of inspiration.

"I recognize that some people look up to me, but I get a sense that my myth is bigger than I am. People see me in a way that I don't see myself," he said. "I've never thought of myself as doing anything other than what a pastor does in the course of his work."

"When I was out on the streets in Little Rock in the morning, in the afternoon I was calling on the sick, counseling people in trouble, conducting funerals, going to board and committee meetings, just doing the regular mix of a ministry. I don't mind being a source of inspiration, but I don't conspicuously try to be, and I'm a little uncomfortable with that connotation."

He names his father, who lived to be 102, as a personal source of inspiration because of the elder Cartwright's work for racial equality — often discussed around the family dinner table — and the sense of unity between the secular and the sacred that he conveyed to his son. "It was mostly unconscious inspiration — he never sought to influence me or give me advice; he never told me how to be a minister — but it definitely had an effect," Cartwright said.

The minister has had a special interest in his church's style of worship, writing two books on the subject. He currently is co-editing the Disciples' first book of worship since 1953. He also is deeply involved in the development of a new hymnal for the denomination, which he assures will not include songs of Bob Dylan.

Diligent in his church activities, he is equally so in discharging his responsibilities as a Dylan scholar. It was, in fact, his sense of duty to other members of the Dylan network that sent him out in the middle of the night some years ago to make sure of a seat for an upcoming appearance by the singer at Dallas' Starplex amphitheater.

And when the evening of the concert arrived, it was that sense of duty that sent him through the ticket gate with a tape recorder secreted in one of his cowboy boots.

Having benefited from others' clandestine tapings of Dylan performances, how could he fail to return the courtesy?

It was, he concedes, a somewhat unministerly thing to do. "But I was able to convince myself that in the circumstances it was permissible," he said. "There could be no possible commercial use for that tape, and there was no law against it, just the restriction imposed by Dylan's people."

Even so, Cartwright went through the deceptive mission with extreme unease. "I had the feeling that that boot looked twice as bulky as the other one and that I was sure to be found out," he said.

"It got especially tense when I had to wait a little ways inside the gate while my companion parked the car. It seemed to me that every guard in the place had his eye on me."

As it turned out, one of them did, and started walking toward him.

"I figured, this is it. They've got me. But the guard just came up with a concerned look on his face and asked, 'Are you all right, sir?' I told him I was," Cartwright recalled.

That was the extent of his undercover work for the Dylan network, unless you count the solemn ceremony at Texas Christian University commencement in 1976 when Cartwright received an honorary doctorate wearing a Bob Dylan T-shirt under his academic robes.

Folk, Faith and Bob Dylan

by Bert Cartwright

*Editor's note: Bert Cartwright is a retired pastor who has for years been a significant interpreter of the lyrics and cultural importance of Bob Dylan. Please read his *The Bible in the Lyrics of Bob Dylan*, rev. ed. Welcome to our pages Rev. Cartwright.*

It's been thirty years since Bob Dylan first began shaping America's conscience through the songs he composed and sang. His method was to break through the tinpan alley love song stereotypes and reach back to the roots of folk music. In doing so he changed the face of American popular music. He infused it with concerns of the spirit which grappled with the eternal issues of human existence.

In 1963 Dylan explained: "I'm tryin' to be like the medium at a seance. There's mystery, magic, truth and the Bible in great folk music. I can't hope to touch that, but I'm goin' to try." The genius of Bob Dylan lies in shaping a whole quest for life's meaning by the use of these folk ingredients.

In that same year he composed and sang a song titled "When the Ship Come In" which takes the form of a sea chantey. Using this traditional folk genre, Dylan seems to have toyed with the common American Dream of what it would be like "when my ship comes in."

However for the Dylan of "mystery, magic, truth and the Bible" the ship becomes an apocalyptic ark of salvation. The song is a millennial vision of God's renewal of creation.

The song opens with a time

When the winds will stop
And the breeze will cease to be breathin'.

That alludes to Revelation's picturing angels holding back the winds in utter stillness just before all havoc breaks loose (Rev. 7:1).

Subsequent verses envision a renewed order of nature and history. Instead of streets paved with gold, as in Revelation, here

Then the sands will roll
Out a carpet of gold
For your weary toes to be a-touchin',
And the sun will respect
Every face on the deck,
The hour that the ship comes in.

In the end all foes will be judged:

And like Pharaoh's tribe,
They'll be drowned in the tide,
And like Goliath,
They'll be conquered.

• A NEW BOOK •
**THE BIBLE
IN THE LYRICS OF
BOB DYLAN**
ENLARGED AND UPDATED
BY BERT CARTWRIGHT

Available from: The Bob Dylan Collectors' Service
Rolling Stones, Inc.
PO Box 1943
Grand Junction, Colorado 81502



At his Carnegie Hall, New York City concert of October 26, 1963, Dylan introduced *When the Ship Comes In* by saying: "I want to sing you one song here recognizing that there are Goliaths now days and, uh, people don't realize just who the Goliaths are. But in olden days Goliath was slayed, and everybody now days looks back and sees how cruel Goliath was. Now days there are crueller Goliaths who do crueller, crueller things, but one day they are going to be slain, too, and people 2,000 years from now can look back and say, 'Remember when Goliath the Second was slayed.'"

Throughout Dylan's 30-year-span of song writing he has shifted perspectives many times. As a born-again Christian in 1979 he re-envisioned the apocalypse as "A Slow Train Coming." The years have taught him to be less sure of human success in conquering evil and more dependent upon the sovereign grace of God.

But the vision of a new humanity of love, justice and freedom haunts all his compositions. Even in the midst of a world where "Everything is Broken" Dylan sings with compassion:

Ring them bells, Sweet Martha, for the poor man's
son,
Ring them bells so the world will know that God is
one.
Oh, the shepherd is alsoep
Where the willows weep,
And the mountains are filled with lost sheep.

With the prophet Ezekiel, Dylan laments the false shepherds who fail to attend their sheep, (Ezek. 34). Dylan ~~claims to be "no prophet or prophet's son"~~ ~~he is not a~~ reformer. But keeping a steady eye upon mystery, magic, truth and the Bible, he has consistently woven for thirty years a passionate vision in which one day every person may sing, "I Shall Be Released."

For his 38th album, issued in November, titled *Good as I Been to You*, Dylan has returned to his roots, singing nothing but folk songs. One suspects in his waning years of creativity that Dylan is seeking renewal where he first discovered it--among the common folk of faith. He obviously continues to live by his adage expressed years ago: "(Anyone) not busy being born is busy dying."



Television

Highway 61 and the exit sign

By Don Carnell

Strange things happen out on Highway 61. It was where Bessie Smith, one of the greatest-ever female blues singers, was killed in a car crash; where Martin Luther King was assassinated; where Elvis used to drive a truck and where, according to Bob Dylan, "God said to Abraham: 'Kill me a son.'"

Things get stranger still when you discover that Dylan's father was called Abram, and that Highway 61 ran by his childhood home.

Saturday night's BBC 2 programme, "Arena: Tales of Rock 'n' Roll," traced this highway that bisects America, running from the Canadian border down to New Orleans, via Bob's home town of Hibbing, to try to fathom out what it

PLACE OF BIRTH County of <u>ST. LOUIS</u>		STATE OF MINNESOTA # 54389 Division of Vital Statistics	
Township of _____		RECORD OF BIRTH	
Village of _____		Reg. District No. _____	No. in Registration Book... <u>838</u>
City of <u>DULUTH</u>		(Above numbers to be filled in only by local registrar or his deputy)	
No. <u>519 3rd Ave. East</u>		No. <u>519 3rd Ave. East</u>	
FULL NAME OF CHILD <u>ROBERT ALLEN ZIMMERMAN</u>		DULUTH, ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MINNESOTA	
FATHER'S NAME <u>ABRAM H. ZIMMERMAN</u>		MOTHER'S NAME <u>BEATRICE STONE</u>	
FATHER'S ADDRESS <u>519 3rd Ave. East Duluth, Minnesota</u>		MOTHER'S ADDRESS <u>519 3rd Ave. East Duluth, Minnesota</u>	
COLOR <u>JEWISH</u>		COLOR <u>JEWISH</u>	

The birth certificate of Robert Allen Zimmerman, son of Abram Zimmerman, better known as a certain rock star

was that made Dylan so different, so itchy to get away from the life his parents had mapped out for him, which if it had gone to plan, was to be to culminate in him inheriting the Zimmerman family electrical appliance store.

Dylan's biographer, Robert Shelton, commented that "there were only about 100 Jewish families across the whole of this region... It must have been strange growing up as such an outsider."

In fact, the community was so small that Dylan himself once recalled that the preparation for his

barmitzvah was conducted by an itinerant rabbi in a room above the local coffee house.

Dylan's teenage friend, John Bucklen, guided viewers through this town that once boasted the largest open-cast iron ore mine in the world, and showed us the bland-looking house where he and the young Zimmerman retreated to the bedroom to pound out Little Richard songs.

And it was in the rhythm-and-blues songs that Dylan spent his teenage years listening to that he discovered that the highway offered an

escape and an almost mythic chance of rebirth.

He realised he could emerge at the other end of the Highway not as Robert Zimmerman, son of a local trader, but as Bob Dylan, son of whoever he wanted.

In one of the more revealing scenes in this programme, Bucklen recalled how his young friend tried to talk him into joining him on the road.


"He was going to take Abe's car and drive to St Paul [the nearest city]...I thought about it and said no. He went and I stayed"

The rest, as they say, is history.

close up

WILLIE NELSON
THE BIG SIX-O (CC)
9 PM

'A LIVING TEXAS LEGEND'



So proclaims Gov. Ann Richards, who joins in an all-star birthday concert for The Outlaw from Abbott, Texas. Highlights: Nelson duets with Bob Dylan ("Pancho & Lefty"), Bonnie Raitt ("Getting Over You"), Ray Charles ("Seven Spanish Angels"), Paul Simon ("Graceland"), Waylon Jennings ("Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys") and Kris Kristofferson ("Foolin' Around"). Lyle Lovett, Travis Tritt, Emmylou Harris, B.B. King and Edie Brickell perform as well; and Nelson sings "On the Road Again," "Valentine," "Always on My Mind" and "Whiskey River" with his "family band." Also: greetings from friends and admirers, including President Clinton. (2:00)

The taping of WILLIE NELSON's sixtieth-birthday bash in Austin was as down-home as a big-name, prime-time special could be. RAY CHARLES serenaded Nelson with an unscript-

ed version of "Happy Birthday," while Nelson's duet partners ranged from PAUL SIMON to a dour BOB DYLAN, who traded verses on a charged performance of TOWNES VAN ZANDT's "Pancho and Lefty." Says buddy KRIS KRISTOFFERSON: "Willie gives a song a mythic quality, makes it a little larger than life. At the same time, he's absolutely the most human of any of us."

BOB DYLAN
HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED
(CBS)

The much lauded songwriter fairly rattled off great tunes during his creative peak of the mid '60s. There's barely an album recorded in that decade that doesn't warrant inclusion in that decade that doesn't warrant inclusion in any seminal albums list. Best known originally as a folkie with a biting turn of phrase *Highway 61* saw Dylan plugging into some electrics. The controversy outraged the purists who wanted Dylan as a re-born Woody Guthrie, but his fusion of rock, folk and the surreal as highlighted on *Highway 61* proved far more significant than any folk versus rock debate. Compositions like *Desolation Row* and *From A Buick 6* set new standards in song construction.

Yes, **CHRISIE HYNDE** performed at a *Fur Is a Drag* show at the London club Heaven. And yes, she's putting the finishing touches on the **PRETENDERS'** new album. But she still found time to jump onstage recently at a **VAN MORRISON** show in Dublin with a few pals, including **BOB DYLAN**, **ELVIS COSTELLO** and **BONO**. "We did 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue,' and Van was jolly," says Hynde. The horde then headed to a pub where it imbibed incognito. "With that lot, we could just walk down the street, and no one would notice us. You've seen what burns we look like offstage."

PUMP UP THE VOLUMES
Ten rock fanzine titles

- The Amazing Pudding* (Pink Floyd)
- Zi Duang Provenge* (David Bowie)
- Chronic Town* (REM)
- Mangled Mind* (The Doors)
- Never Trust A Hippie* (Sex Pistols)
- Ignorant Heaven* (Del Amitri)
- Steal Softly Thru The Snow* (Captain Beefheart)
- T Mershi Duween* (Frank Zappa)
- Sunday Refugees* (Duran Duran)
- Homer the Slut* (Bob Dylan)



IN THE NEWS

► Saxophonist Steve Douglas, who played on classic recordings by Phil Spector, the Beach Boys and Duane Eddy, died of a heart attack at a Hollywood recording studio on April 19th. He was fifty-five. Considered one of the best rock & roll sax players of all time, Douglas had toured with Bob Dylan and Eric Clapton and had also worked with Sam Cooke, Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley.

ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE: THE BAND AND AMERICA: Barney Hoskyns (Viking, £15.99)

EVER SINCE Greil *Mystery Train* Marcus deified The (four-fifths Canadian) Band for 'holding up a mirror to America', a 'king harvesting account of this critically lauded – and over intellectualised – band must surely come. It's taken until now – 18 years after that benchmark essay and seven since the sad suicide of keyboardist/vocalist Richard Manuel finally extinguished any hope of a full-blown reunion – largely, one suspects, because so much of the story has already been told via the slew of Dylan biographies to pore over their intermittent musical alliance.

But perhaps the lack of any real *heart* to The Band's celebrated odyssey, how their very love of collaboration and community excised the central tenets of many a rock star biography, has played a part? No matter, Barney Hoskyns is here, and clearly relishing the task.

Indulging in the same hokey cabbage-patch colloquialisms as his subjects one moment, passing the kind of critically astute judgements on their output you'd expect from a former *NME* journo the next, Hoskyns takes us from the sleazy low-rent one-nighters backing up the Canadian king of rock'n'roll (™) Ronnie Hawkins to the even sleazier high-rolling one-nighters firing up Dylan, and beyond into a celebrated media divorce (*The Last Waltz*) explaining as he goes how a bunch of musicians who, at their 1968 *Deliverance* chic 'inception' stood full in the face of prevailing rock fashions to

codify the very 'otherness' that made their music seem so magical, came to enshrine the professional torpor and personal excess that defined the '70s.

Hoskyns fingers Robbie Robertson's hidden agenda as a social-climbing, musically grandstanding rock 'n' roll ingenue (here was one country boy who wasn't backwoods in coming forwards) as a prime culprit for The Band's eventual decline into limping, oldies show self-abasement (marked, it must be said, by some cruel twists of fate, Manuel's demise notwithstanding), but he's happiest celebrating the sheer *musicality* of these people, an instinctive, soulful commitment to music-making that even extended beyond the grave.

Whilst filming the part of Loretta Lynn's father in the 1980 biopic *The Coalminer's Daughter*, Levon Helm stopped his own wake to rise from the open casket – deathmask make-up in place – and instruct his 'mourners' in the proper way to harmonise 'Amazing Grace'!

Bobby Surf

SAX LEGEND DOUGLAS DIES

Most of the legendary 'Wrecking Crew' of Los Angeles sessionmen who played on hundreds of hit records in the 60s remained nothing more than names to the listening audience, rarely venturing beyond the soundproofed walls of the studio. But more than a million people had the chance to see Steve Douglas – who has died at the age of 55 – when he toured with Bob Dylan in 1978, having performed on Bob's 'Street Legal' album.

Douglas will be best remembered, though, for his work with Phil Spector (playing on almost all the producer's Phillies hits of the early 60s), Duane Eddy, the Beach Boys, Jan & Dean and many more L.A. luminaries of the era. He was one of the first artists to issue a single on Phillies – 'Yes Sir That's My Baby' – and he continued to work on Spector's projects well into the 70s, appearing on albums like Leonard Cohen's 'Death Of A Ladies Man' and the Ramones' 'End Of The Century'. He produced a series of sessions for Mink DeVille in the late 70s, and at the time of his death was working on a new album by Ry Cooder.

Like his session colleagues – Hal Blaine, Larry Knechtal, Tommy Tedesco and Ray Pohlman – Steve Douglas could provide musical excellence to order, without his playing ever sounding mechanical. He helped shape the sound of American pop in the 60s, without most people ever knowing his name. For a taste of the Steve Douglas sound, listen to Duane Eddy's 'Peter Gunn', the Crystals' 'Da Doo Ron Ron' or Bob Dylan's 'Baby Stop Crying'. (PD)



Blame Robbie Robertson...

THE HOLLIES Hollies Sing Dylan (EMI 7 81330 2 5)

This is the album which prompted Graham Nash to quit The Hollies and make waves with Messrs Crosby & Stills.

Nash felt these covers trivialised Dylan's songs, and certainly The Hollies' interpretations err towards the jaunty rather than reverential. *Hollies Sing Dylan* is an historical curiosity, qualifying Dylan's almost mythic status at the time (1969), which sees 'Blowin' In The Wind' and 'Times They Are A-Changin'' treated like the Gettysburg Address.

Bonus tracks include 'Blowin' In The Wind' and 'Times They Are A-Changin'' with Nash. A period piece, though of interest more to Dylanologists than Hollieastes. ● 6

Patrick Humphries



ARTHUR ALEXANDER

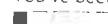
A soul writer and singer from Alabama who had a great influence on the British beat

boom, Arthur Alexander died last month in Nashville of heart and kidney failure, aged 53, just as he was about to launch his first new album since quitting the music business to earn his living as a bus driver some 20 years ago. While Alexander's own recording successes were limited to the American R&B charts, The Beatles with Anna (Go To Him) and The Rolling Stones with You Better Move On covered him on their first albums and Johnny Kidd & The Pirates had a minor hit with Shot Of Rhythm And Blues. Later Bob Dylan recorded Alexander's very first single, Sally Sue Brown from 1961, on his Down In The Groove album. His new album *Lonely Just Like Me* has just been released in the UK.

VARIOUS ARTISTS SONGS OF BOB DYLAN

Sequel NEB CD 655

If Bob Dylan's career survives this month, it'll survive anything. His reputation has been insulted by *The Hollies Sing Dylan*, to which insult has been added by this lacklustre 16 track hodge-podge of mediocrity. Remarkably odd that so many, usually second rate artists think that covering a Dylan song will give their careers a flip. Surely Dylan's idiosyncratic style is a far too risky business for most to come away as anything but inadequate. What is truly bizarre about this set is that Monkee Davy Jones, who warbles tunelessly through *It Ain't Me Babe*, doesn't provide its lowest point. In fact, its nadir is an astonishing three way dead heat between skiffle king Lonnie Donegan feigning not even the slightest interest in singing *Farewell (Fare Thee Well)*, Joe Cocker gargling soapy water throughout *Just Like A Woman* and The Tremeloes out-blanding The Hollies in a rendering of *I Shall Be Released* that is so inept it should have had its sentence extended. Dylan freaks, of course, will have to have it. You've been warned. (GM)



Weatherwatch

Stephen Moss

THERE can be few songwriters as obsessed with the weather as Bob Dylan. During a prolific career, spanning four decades, scarcely an album has gone by without a weather-related image at the centre of one his songs.

One of the earliest is still one of the most famous. *Blowin' in the Wind*, written in 1963, soon became a standard of the sixties protest movement, sung at rallies and festivals throughout the world. Taking a familiar figure of speech, Dylan invested it with a new power and resonance, as fresh today as 30 years ago.

As his career developed, Dylan became less direct in his use of metaphor, and began to create more oblique images. Once again, the weather — and in particular wind and rain — remained predominant. *Hard Rain*, written in 1965, was eerily predictive of the perils of the nuclear age.

A decade later, *Idiot Wind* includes one of his most lasting and powerful images, his voice howling in unison with the imaginary wind as it sweeps into every corner of public and private life.

But for the last word, we must



go back to 1965, when at the height of his popularity, Bob Dylan took a wry dig at gurus like himself, whose followers expected him to guide their every waking moment. In *Subterranean Homesick Blues* he urged his listeners to take a look out into the real world, and rely on their own experience and judgment, with the immortal phrase:

"You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows..."

Fortunately for the forecasters at the Met Office most people, in Britain at least, haven't taken his advice!

WRITING COMPETITION

Results of No 231

You were invited to write a song about old age by Bob Dylan, who for the first time in his life is older than the President of the United States.

A magnum of champagne goes to Cathy Comerford for this:

'Twas in another country,
I was singing some old songs,
A crowd of teeny boppers
Kept gettin' the words
all wrong,
They swayed and held their
hands up high,
I wanted to sit down,
"Come on," they said,
"an encore,
We've all paid 20 pounds!"

The room was gettin' smoky,
My feet were feelin' sore.
This guitar's kinda heavy
And I don't know any more.
I'm thinking of my hotel room,
A bed, a cup of tea.
"Come on," they said,
"an encore,
You know nothin's ever free!"

Champagne to Roger Caldwell:

The times are a-changing, but
not down our way
And there's nothing much
happening here today,
For if Clinton's our hero,
he's not JFK.
And my best days are long
since over,
My face is as cracked as my
voice now, they say
That it's time I was lying
in clover.

Well, my anthem is sung — when
I shouted it last
Jericho walls didn't fall
at the blast.
The tambourine jingles from
times that are past,
The times I should like to stay in.
When I slink on the stage, all
the critics, aghast,
Criticise my harmonica-playing.

I can't help it if all I could
tell in a word
Was a part of the future that
never occurred
But Reagan and Thatcher

were also absurd,
Now they're lost to the world
they held stage in.
If their souls had music, it was
none that I heard.
They're good as dead. I am
merely ageing.

I still have my court, I'm my
own history,
My harmonica slips as I strive
for a key
Kept as a secret 'twixt the Lord
God and me,
I can't remember my words
to the letter,
But I call to survivors
the sad memory
Of a world that should have
been better.

Phil Dowell wins champagne:

ainnit just like the night
to play tricks when you're tryin'
to get some sleep
lyin' snoozin'
ma goddam pacemaker
goes beep
without ma glasses I caint
count no
sonofabitch sheep
flushes echo from the
opposite john
somethin' in ma pipewords
wrong
ma spincters screamin' i
shouldda gone
but theres nothin' ther
nothin' to turn on
just drips

and another toothless vawn
and visions of valhalla
keep me up past the dawn.

inside the sanatorium
senility goes upon trial
voices mutter this is what
chemotherapy gets like
after a while
but their joints all got arthritis
you can tell by the way
nobody smiles
the nurses started feedin'
me slops
i quit walkin' without usin' props
doc sez your eyes are swimmin'
lay off wimmin'
you're a zimmer-man
pops
jewel-crusted spectacles
hang from the neck of the wife
and visions of valhalla
they conquer my life

Special thanks go to
Gordon Stevenson:

Come join me, old people,
in the shopping mall.
And complain that our social
security's small.
And if we had savings they've
gone to the wall.
For the times they are
short changing.

Our concessionary tickets are
all very well.
When the buses proceed like
chariots of Hell.
And the schedules and route

maps no mortal can tell,
And the times are always
changing.

Though we watch TV now
'til the little spot fades,
In the old days our own
entertainment we made,
And we'll never refrain from
this boring tirade
That the times they are
a changing.

Thanks to Patrick Smith for this:

How many grins in the mirror
does it take
Before a man will truly know
himself,
When his teeth are smilin' from
a different glass
That stands upon the bathroom
shelf?

And how can it be that his hair,
once so wild
You could swear you were seein'
it grow,
Is now parted so wide in the
centre, my friend,
That it looks like desolation row?

The answer, my friend, ain't no
simple twist of fate.
The answer's a song that's
almost sung.
The answer, my friend, when
there's just gums in
your grate,
Is that nobody can stay
forever young.

READ ALL ABOUT IT

In Israel, he's just plain Bob

JERUSALEM (AP) — The times they are a changin' for Bob Dylan. The rock legend apparently had to wait in line upon arrival in Israel yesterday, just like any other tourist.

Dylan's passport was handed to the head passport officer at Ben Gurion Airport. Airport officials said the officer refused to process it and told the singer to wait in line like everybody else.

"There's no favoritism with us. He should stand in line like everyone else," the officer was quoted as saying.

The publicity-shy Dylan, who was met on the tarmac with a special car that brought him to the terminal, took his place in line, the officials said.

Dylan could not be reached for comment and his publicity agent in Israel said she knew nothing of the incident.

The singer, scheduled to perform three concerts during the trip, was last in Israel in 1987, when he gave two performances that critics described as disappointing.

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER: Columbia plans mid-July or early August for *Bob Dylan - A 30th Anniversary Celebration Concert*, a working title at press time. The double-CD live set contains most of the concert from last October held at New York's Madison Square Garden which featured Dylan songs performed by a bevy of stars, including George Harrison, Tom Petty, Stevie Wonder, Lou Reed, Eddie Vedder, Neil Young, Eric Clapton and Dylan himself.

"Everything's been remixed from the sound that you heard on television," an involved source tells *ICE*, referring to the pay-per-view broadcast. Thus far, no stars have withheld their approval from the project, so the set should run close to 150 minutes over the two CDs. Sinéad O'Connor's spontaneous outburst of the Bob Marley song "War" and her confrontation with the audience are definitely not included, although the producers considered using her rehearsal version of Dylan's "I Believe In You" on the package. That idea was nixed when it was discovered that the rehearsal recording was not up to snuff. "It wasn't recorded with a multi-track tape machine," the source says. "Her voice was kind of buried and she didn't do a full take of it, so we felt it wouldn't work."

The only technical glitch that occurred during the show itself involved, unfortunately, a song by Dylan himself. "Song To Woody," Dylan's first song performed during the show's final segment, won't be included because his guitar wasn't plugged in part of the time. "There's no way to fix it in the mix," our source says, ruefully.

The set will probably come packaged in a standard double-CD jewel box, and includes a booklet with liner notes and a host of photos by long-time Dylan photographer Ken Regan. Regan had access to the rehearsals as well as the show, and the behind-the-scenes photos are said to be outstanding.

Mrs. Tambourine Man...



"Hey, Mr. Tambourine Man, play a song for me - I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to!"

New Names In Woody-Mia Wake

DYLAN Farrow — the 7-year-old at the center of the Woody Allen-Mia Farrow court battle — may be having an identity crisis. Seems she has a new name. Andre Previn's son Fletcher told us yesterday that Dylan is now called *Eliza Farrow*. "Dylan doesn't like her name anymore and wants to be called *Eliza*," a family friend added. "Obviously, the family wants to get her life straightened out and restarted on the right foot, and agreed." A source said the inspiration for the appellation was likely *Eliza Doolittle*, the flower-selling waif from "My Fair Lady," who is transformed by Henry Higgins into an upper-class dame. Asked what she made of the name-change, Dr. Joyce Brothers told us, "If the girl decided this on her own, it is a good thing. If, like *Eliza Doolittle*, she wants to come out of the cocoon of the last few months and turn into a beautiful butterfly, well, then good for her." Farrow's original name, meanwhile, may or may not have been inspired by the name that singer Robert Zimmerman borrowed from the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. Dylan spokesman Elliot Mintz pointed out to us that there is a scene in "Annie Hall" where Diane Keaton, backstage at Madison Square Garden, says something like, "I haven't had this much fun since a Bob Dylan concert" — prompting Woody to roll his eyes skyward. In any case, shedding the names their mother gave them could be a right-of-passage for Mia's kids. Lark Farrow has already relieved herself of the name Morning Song.

BOB DYLAN

Live At Budokan

COLUMBIA 467 850-2

Mid-price re-issue for a double-album of live-in-Tokyo Bob from 1978, when the Budokan was bidding to become one of the world's premier gigs. As with many Dylan live offerings, virtually every cut gets an unfamiliar arrangement, fine when it works, disastrous when it doesn't. The heavy-rock "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" is right on the money, as is a soulful "Maggie's Farm" and a heartfelt "I Shall Be Released." Too often though, he treats his own material with the kind of disrespect that would irk him if somebody else dared perpetrate it. The almost-reggae "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" plus girly chorus is a farce, and recurrent outbreaks of aimlessly tootling flute and recorder detract from every track they touch. A half-great live album, essential only for the terminally smitten. ★★★

Johnny Black

★ **JONI MITCHELL**, who made a recent return to live performance at the Troubadours Of Folk Festival in Los Angeles, is planning to record an entire album of Bob Dylan covers.

★ **BOB DYLAN, ELVIS COSTELLO, FRANK BLACK, TOM PETTY** and **SOUNDGARDEN's CHRIS CORNELL** are among the artists reported to have submitted songs for Johnny Cash's first album since signing to the Def American label.

Dylan heading to Monroe

By LARRY BURTON
The Times

The free-wheelin' Bob Dylan will come knock, knock, knockin' at Monroe Civic Center Theatre on Wednesday evening, April 21.

The musical chameleon, reluctant icon and willful non-conformist will appear in Monroe at 8 p.m. as part of a seven-city minitour starting April 13 in Nashville.

Dylan's band, according to Tulsa, Okla.-based promoter Little Wing Productions, will consist of John Jackson, guitars; Tony Garnier, bass; Bucky Baxter, keyboards; and Winston Watson, drums.

Dylan, whose latest album is 1992's *Good as I Been to You*, is playing Monroe because it fit logistically in his tour schedule.

The content of his concert at the roughly 2,300-seat Monroe theater is anybody's guess, said tour publicist Renee Pfefer. "He's Bob Dylan, so I don't know that anyone ever knows what to expect," Pfefer said from Columbia Records in Los Angeles. "He does his hits on one night and every unknown song the next."

In addition to the Monroe show, Dylan is slated to perform April 23 at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. Tickets to the Monroe show — \$25 each and selling steadily — can be charged by phone by calling the Monroe Civic Center box office, 329-2338.

Know Thy Neighbor

BY CLARK PARSONS

Just as word arrives that Jimmy Buffett is selling his Williamson County home, word is that the Nashville area may gain two more musical icons.

The first, Bob Dylan, has been the subject of widespread rumors this past week. Dylan was spotted around town for several days before his TPAC shows last Tuesday and Wednesday, and sources say the legend spent some time looking at houses. Rumors also had him flying back to town this week to scope out a few more residences and meet with real estate agents. Two of Dylan's bandmembers, pedal steel player Bucky Baxter and guitarist John Jackson, are Nashvillians.

The other musical figure said to be in the process of emigration is, *drum roll please*, former disco queen bad girl Donna Summer. Sources say she is selling both her ranch in California and place in Connecticut as part of the move to Nashville. Assisting with the deal is Donna Tisdale of Fridrich & Clark. Hey, if it's good enough for Donna, then maybe it's good enough for Dylan.

At least the weight is lessening on Steve Winwood's shoulders. For the first couple of years after his arrival, he was the touchstone for people who wanted to point to the city's coolness.

You're next, Sinatra.

Meanwhile, Buffett's historic Williamson County home has been shown several times by local Realtor Steve Fridrich, fueling rumors that the troubadour is leaving town for a sunnier clime. One rumor has him packing his bags for Palm Beach.

Asking price for Buffett's home: \$2 million. Known as "Old Town," the home includes log cabins, 40 acres of land, barns, and all the other accoutrements of Southern rural life.



By BILL DeMAIN

What becomes a legend most?

For Bob Dylan, it's the intimacy of TPAC's Jackson Hall, 950 enthusiastic fans and straight-ahead renderings of his most powerful songs.

During last night's performance — the first of a two-night stand — the revered singer-songwriter led the surprisingly young audience on a grand tour of his formidable catalog.

The crowd rose and cheered as Dylan and his four-piece band eased into the opener, *Hard Times*, an acoustic folk song with an almost Irish lilt. It was one of several songs featured from his latest release, *Good As I Been to You*.

All *Along the Watchtower* swelled with dynamic intensity, Dylan growling the enigmatic lyrics, then launching into a blistering guitar solo that brought appreciative whistles.

After the bluesy groove of *Disease of Conceit*, the rock troubadour broke his usual silence and mumbled, "That's my favorite."

On the hard-edged *Tangled Up in Blue*, Dylan really seemed to be enjoying himself, leaning down on one knee, shaking his guitar neck and allowing his usually sullen features a few sly grins.

At 51, Dylan is still the scruffy vagabond. Unshaven, with mussed corkscrew hair and dressed in a thrift store tux jacket, he exuded a kind of hobo mystic aura.

The voice, one of rock's most recognized and imitated, has deepened and turned raspy, but can still sneer and mock.

He sounded positively youthful during an extended acoustic set, the highlight of which was the classic

Dylan delivers with legendary style

Getting there

Bob Dylan performs at 8 tonight in TPAC's Jackson Hall, 505 Deaderick. Tickets cost \$27.50 and \$22.50 through Ticketmaster. Call 737-4849.

Don't Think Twice. At the tune's end, Dylan blew a mean harmonica solo. The crowd erupted in cheers.

Throughout, there was solid playing from his four-member band, who unfortunately were never introduced. The standout was the pedal steel player, who made the instrument weep, cry and moan.

On the technical front, it was a no-frills approach. The lighting was simple — mostly reds, blues and yellows — but effective in keeping attention focused on the charismatic Dylan.

Opening the show was a Sun Records' original, Billy Lee Riley, best known for his rock n' roll classic *Red Hot*. ■

Bill DeMain is a Nashville songwriter and member of the group Wild About Harry who writes reviews for *The Tennessean*.

Dylan concerts linger as 'high achievements'

Bob Dylan has left the building

Bob Dylan's Monroe appearance proved one thing: The guy is no fan of history.



NICHOLAS DERISO

This would seem ideal. But the problem with concert-goers in the post-MTV age is that they want the hits, and they want them note for note. Yawn.

You could hardly blame someone for not wanting to play a 25-year-old song the same old way. (To be honest, you could hardly blame him for not wanting to play it *at all*.) Well, some folks did. And that's too bad.

If you wanted to hear "Like a Rolling Stone" regurgitated, Dylan's message was this: Buy the record.

Dylan played with structure, changing the key and tempo of almost all the tunes.

And while the set included its share of his evergreens — "Tangled Up in Blue," "Mr. Tambourine Man," "Watchtower," "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," "Highway 61" — a surprise was Dylan's explorations of his newer releases.

Included were two gems from 1989's "Oh Mercy," and three from his current release of traditional folk tunes, "Good As I Been to You."

Dylan even changed songs on his backing band. This made for one of the more subtle pleasures of the night:

Dylan strums, and bassist Tony Garnier looks over at guitarist John Jackson. Garnier and Jackson shrug. *What's this?*

Well, it's "Mr. Tambourine Man." Out of place on the set list and, at this point, unrecognizable to almost everyone.

Garnier seems to pick up on it first, and he starts laughing. Soon, the band — sometimes, understated; other times, rumbly and groovy — is rolling.

"Tambourine Man" was part of a jaunty acoustic set at the concert's center, dotted with simple instrumentation and the pull of Dylan's pleasing whine.

The final electric third bounded out with "It Takes a Train To Laugh," and, from then on out, this band — which also included Bucky Baxter on pedal steel and assorted other stringed instruments; and propulsive drummer Winston Watson — felt its oats.

Most songs ended in lengthy, swinging blues jams.

Often Dylan would turn around to hush Watson, who responded immediately. Jackson made for an intuitive, moving sideman — seamless as

By Jay Orr
Banner Entertainment Writer

On both nights of his unprecedented two-night stand in Nashville, Bob Dylan sang *Tomorrow Night*.

Recorded by Dylan for his most recent album, *Good As I Been to You*, the tune was a hit for blues singer Lonnie Johnson in 1948, and Elvis Presley cut the song at Sun Records in 1954 with only guitarist Scotty Moore playing quietly.

Tomorrow Night connects Dylan to a rich legacy of 20th century American popular song, a legacy in which he now holds an honored place.

"Tomorrow night, will it be just another memory/Or just another song/That's in my heart to linger on?" the song asks.

Dylan's '93 concerts at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center Tuesday and Wednesday will linger as high achievements in the memory of the audiences — some 1,400 each night — who heard him.

Working with a sharp band that included Nashville-based musicians John Jackson (guitar) and Bucky Baxter (pedal steel, lap steel, Dobro, accordion and mandolin) along with bassist Tony Garnier and new drummer Winston Watson, Dylan stretched songs with mid-song jams and false endings that often included abrupt shifts in tempo.

Dylan seemed to take special pleasure in playing guitar himself, sometimes recalling Jerry Garcia — another hero to Dylan's younger fans — with his musical recklessness; at other times recalling the cosmically random soloing of Willie Nelson.

lead guitarist, but backing off when Bob felt the urge to pluck. Baxter set the show's tone with his deft shadings.

Sitting in front of them was a strange mix of folks.

The kids were all 1990s chic, replete with clunky boots and funky haircuts. This was met headlong by the diehards — scraggly long-hairs who knew all the words. Lastly, it was leavened by a few dozen guys in swanky suits.

Sort of like Jack Kerouac's "On the Road" meets Douglas Coupland's "Generation X" meets Donald Trump's "The Art of the Deal."

And very reserved. Other than frequent whooping, and a few dullards who insisted on yelling out requests, nobody moved from their seats until the show crashed to a halt with "Everything is Broken."

Dylan seemed to lose interest with a *harrumph* here, quickly pulling off his guitar and exiting stage right.

Moments later, the band returned for two encores — a sped-up "What Good Am I?" and a completely retooled "Highway 61" for the road.

Then, Dylan bowed and left. He was probably in his bus and gone, with us still clapping.

Jackson's guitar work was a revelation. Taken for granted locally as HX band frontman and a hired hand for country artists, Jackson showed that years of experience have made him one of the most versatile and musically sensitive accompanists Dylan has ever had.

Baxter's several instruments added color and texture to every arrangement of the night.

Both evenings opened with an acoustic treatment of Stephen Foster's *Hard Times*, from the new album, and both evenings featured extended acoustic segments, but with the full band unplugging to provide accompaniment rather than Dylan playing acoustic alone as he has done customarily in the past.

Instead of wildly different concerts, both nights featured structured sets of 18 songs each, performed in just over two hours. In recent years, Dylan often announced song selections to band members in between-song conferences at the drum riser.

Songs from both nights (and at the same place in the show) included *Hard Times*; *All Along the Watchtower*; *Tangled Up in Blue*; *Born in Time*; *Watching the River Flow* (to a fast, *Mystery Train*-style shuffle); *Jim Jones*; *Tomorrow Night*; *Don't Think Twice, It's Alright*; *I and I*; *Everything Is Broken* and encore selections *Magpie's Farm* and *It Ain't Me Babe*.

Rockabilly original Billy Lee Riley, handpicked by Dylan to open the concerts, won the crowd over each night with honest showmanship and strong vocals. At 60, Riley still has plenty of the pep he gave to his own recordings for Sun Records and to the work of others.

NEWSMAKERS

TENNESSEAN NEWS SERVICES

Dylan jazzes up bill at music fest



DYLAN resumes next Thursday through Sunday. About 380,000 attended last year's seven-day run, said a festival spokeswoman.

NEW ORLEANS — Thousands of people gathered for this weekend's New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, with Bob Dylan the top name on yesterday's bill.

Featured today are cajun singer Zachary Richard, jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, the Allman Brothers, Rockin Dopsie and the Zydeco Twisters, the Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble, and a reunion performance by the cast of the stage show *One Mo' Time*. Coincidentally, Paul McCartney is appearing tonight at the Superdome. Tomorrow's list for Jazzfest ranges from modern jazz by Terence Blanchard to performances by Fats Domino, Sonny Rollins and Pete Fountain. The festival, in its 24th year,

Casting giant shadows

Dylan and Santana finally learn to live with their legends

By Greg Kot
TRIBUNE ROCK CRITIC

Their days as media-hyped supernovas behind them, Bob Dylan and Carlos Santana say they couldn't be happier.

Dylan, who merely changed the course of popular culture in the 20th Century, and Santana, who stretched the boundaries of rock guitar after his explosive coming-out party at Woodstock, will share the stage Aug. 28 at the World Music Theatre.

If such a pairing had occurred in, say, 1970, it would have been an event on par today with a Nirvana/Pearl Jam double bill. But neither Dylan nor Santana is central to the pop zeitgeist these days, nor do they seem particularly keen to keep up with a new generation of rock icons. (If anything, it's the other way around; at last year's tribute to Dylan at Madison Square Garden, Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder and Mike McCready performed a particularly moving version of Dylan's "Masters of War.")

Dylan's last release, "Good as I Been to You" (Columbia), is a stark, solo acoustic album in which he interpreted a variety of traditional folk and blues, throwbacks to his days at Gerdes Folk City in Greenwich Village. He says a new album, out this year, will take a similar but "more focused" approach to another batch of traditional songs.

Santana's 1992 album, "Milagro" (Polydor), contains a few cliché-ridden forays into pop but also is laced with adventurous guitar excursions that draw as much on post-"Bitches Brew" jazz as they do rock.

In a three-way phone hookup, Dylan and Santana remained as iconoclastic as ever. Santana was typically passionate and effusive, while Dylan spoke with a warmth and directness that belied his reputation as an enigmatic interview. If their past achievements cast a huge shadow, neither is intimidated by it.

"My whole thing has been about disallowing demagoguery," Dylan says. "The songs I recorded in my past, they're almost like demos. I'm still trying to figure out what some of them are about. The more I play them, the better idea I have of how to play them."

Which may explain why Dylan seems perpetually inclined to tamper with his classics, messing with chords and altering his phrasing as he turns "Like a Rolling Stone" into a shuffle or "All Along the Watchtower" into a dissonant rocker.

"My audience has changed over a couple of times now," Dylan says. "A lot of 'em don't even know 'Like a Rolling Stone.' They're not enchanted



Bob Dylan, who performs here Aug. 28, is aware of his changing audience: "A lot of 'em don't even know 'Like a Rolling Stone.'"

by the past, and I don't allow the past to encroach on the present."

Santana, who broke ground by mixing rock guitar with Latin percussion on such songs as "Soul Sacrifice," says, "I made a commitment about 1972, with our fourth album, which was almost all instrumental, to go another way. I learned from people like Miles Davis and Weather Report. I wasn't afraid of any comparisons, because I was too concerned about the next note."

If the music of Dylan and Santana takes on a new life on stage, it has struggled to find its identity in the studio over the last 15 years. It's no surprise that Dylan's best record in years—"Good as I Been to You"—was recorded live in one take, without backing musicians.

"Modern recording technology never endeared itself to me," says Dylan. "My kind of sound is very simple, with a little bit of echo, and that's about all that's required to record it. I'm most disappointed when producers overlook the strength of my music."

"The way most records sound these days, everything is equalized. My kind of music is based on non-equalized parts, where one sound isn't necessarily supposed to be as loud as another. When producers try to equal everything out, it's to a dismal effect on my records."

With "Milagro," Santana also went for a live-in-the-studio approach.

"Some of my favorite records, like Mary Wells' 'My Guy,' were recorded with the musicians and the singer all gathered around one microphone," he says. "That gave the voice treble tones, chest tones, abdominal

tones, depth. With all the technology today, you lose the overtones, which is what gives people chills when they listen to a record. Producers today know the construction of knobs and wires, but they don't know a damn thing about feeling and sound. They don't know how to capture the soul of someone like Bob."

The antiseptic nature of studio recording is only partly to blame for the erratic albums that Dylan and Santana have released. Bad songs and indifferent or misdirected performances have something to do with it, too. But scintillating moments still occur. The title track of "Milagro" is prime Santana, his guitar cutting majestic swaths through a battery of percussion. And Dylan's exquisite, if idiosyncratic, guitar playing and vocal phrasing throughout "Good as I Been to You" is enough to pull any number of disenchanting fans back into the fold.

Clearly, Dylan's career, even at age 52, is still a work in progress. Which is why it seemed a bit odd for a bevy of rock stars, from Neil Young to George Harrison, to be paying tribute to him at Madison Square Garden last year, even if it was the 30th anniversary of his first record.

Dylan says it was "hard not to be overwhelmed," but "it was really about all those songs," speaking as though someone else had written them. "It was fun to hear them performed. I just tried to stay out of it."

As for Sinead O'Connor, Dylan says he wasn't miffed that she had a standoff with the audience and was ultimately booed off the stage.

Although he didn't get a chance to speak with her, he says, "I hold no rancorous

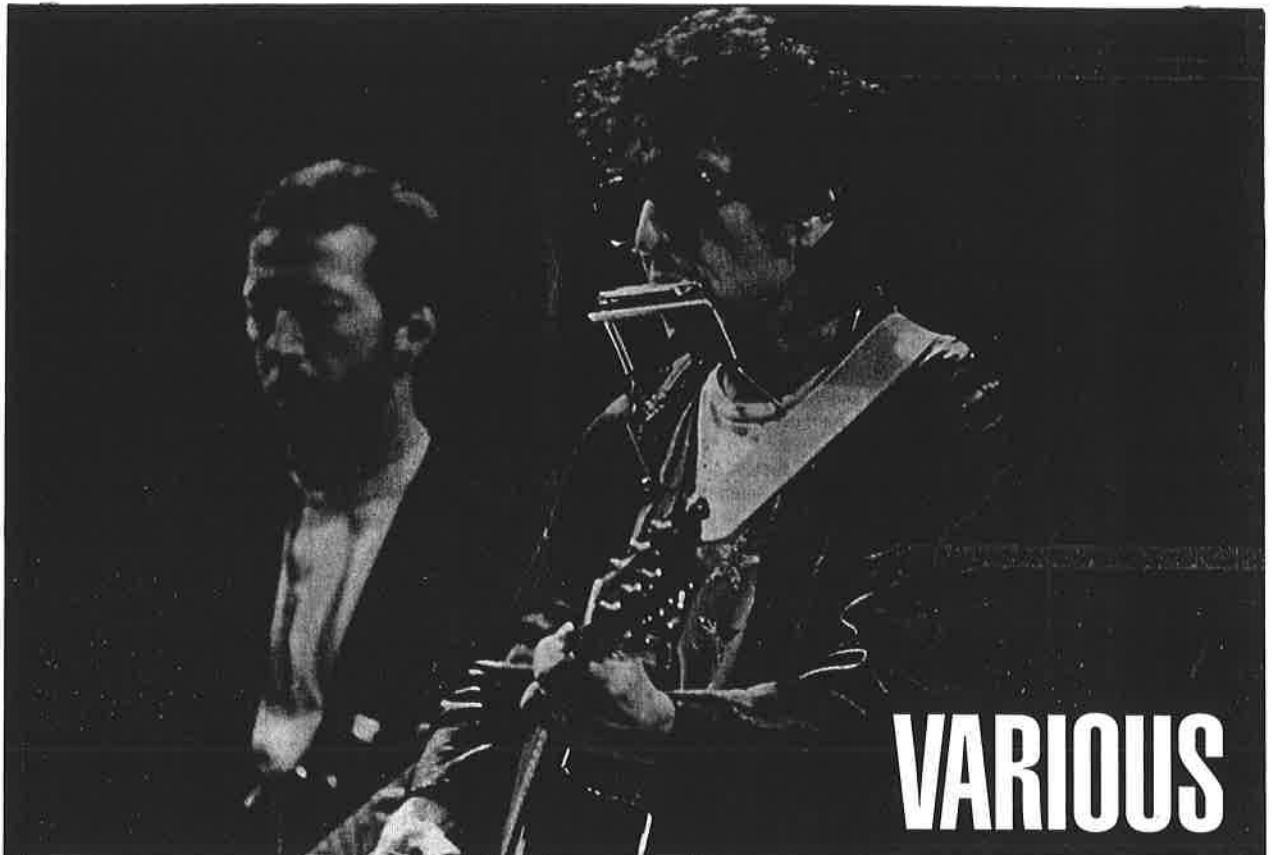
feelings," perhaps because he empathized. As Dylan electrified his music, figuratively and literally, in the mid-'60s, he was greeted by boos, most notoriously at the Newport Folk Festival and then on an epochal tour of England with the Hawks, later known as The Band.

"It was weird at Newport, because you could tell these people were trying to follow me, but I was a bit ahead of them," Dylan says. "You just try and dust yourself off and get on with it. With The Band, it [the audience reaction] would be consistent, every town we played in. It seemed a lot of it was a media thing, where they were telling the audience ahead of the show what to expect. It would cause the audience to react a certain way, instead of deciding for themselves. It was one of those things that was ... very corrosive."

Santana says he has dealt with isolated boo-birds, "but I don't take it personally. It's usually somebody who's in the wrong place. One time in London, I told a guy to come up and handed him my guitar. He choked on his own emotions. I said, 'You have to make love to it, you don't just jump in.'"

Just as Santana put a pretender in his place, Dylan is equally skeptical of the new wave of rock and rap artists whose records bristle with graphic images of sex and violence. In the '60s, Dylan's approach to such subject matter was deemed revolutionary, with its mix of humor and spite, dream-like imagery and shattering directness.

"I'm not saying they should be censored, but it would be nice if there were some kind of quality control," he says. "A lot of stuff out there is just not meaningful. The record companies shouldn't be involved [in censoring artists], but maybe the artist should be made to sign a contract asking, 'Do you mean it?'"



VARIOUS

BOB DYLAN 30TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT

(Columbia 474000)

The highlights of last year's Dylan tribute show were overshadowed by the hostile crowd reception for Sinead O'Connor who appeared on stage two weeks after tearing up a picture of the Pope on American TV. Greeted with a chorus of boos she chose to abandon her performance of

Dylan's *I Believe In You* and launch into an impromptu version of Bob Marley's *War*. The whole fiasco did not go down too well among the backstage luminaries. Regrettably, though less than surprisingly O'Connor is nowhere to be found on this 29 track, two CD souvenir of the event. This album is not without its flaws though there are sufficient highpoints that do the Dylan legend proud. Stevie Wonder, Neil Young, Lou Reed and The Band steal the

show. Wonder offers a gorgeously understated version of *Blowin' In The Wind*; Reed weighs in with some suitably tense growling and the on form Neil Young tears into *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues* and *All Along The Watchtower*. On the downside The O'Jays sloppy *Emotionally Yours*, Tom Petty's *Rainy Day Women* and Clapton's *Don't Think Twice* make you long for the potency of the originals. (BC)

■■■■■□

D.A. Pennebaker's Dylan biopic *Don't Look Back* proved the decade's other key release. Using hand held camera techniques it was the first real glimpse behind the scenes of a rock 'n' roll life. Memorable for Dylan's speed driven stream of semi-conscious babble and the fact that in his transition from folkie to rock legend, the mask often slips revealing a man who plainly doesn't have a clue what's going on but remains cool and aloof throughout.

● It seems **Bob Dylan**, the one-time giant of rock, has been feeling the pinch recently. Tickets for his show in Louisville, Kentucky sold so poorly – just 1200 – his Bobness had to seriously consider whether to turn up at all.

DANIEL LANOIS *Rocky World* (Warner)

The producer of U2, Bob Dylan and The Neville Brothers sits down and chews the fat before the cameras. *Rocky World* trawls through Lanois' past, but—let's not forget the point—gives plenty of space for the disappointing *For The Beauty Of Wynona* album.

Of its sort, this is one of the better recent music videos: Lanois is engaging and articulate, and his sporadic

reminiscences—of Bob Dylan wanting to record 'Oh Mercy!' in New Orleans because he wanted to be "as near the ground as possible"—are gently interrupted by famous friends like Bono and Aaron Neville.

There are home movies, clippings of 13-year-old 'Danny Lanois' in a Quebec guitar marathon and jamming with U2 at a mega gig. In between, there are fragments of Lanois performing solo versions of songs from his haunting debut *Acadie*. Shame the new album isn't up to scratch. ● 7

Patrick Humphries

THE FINSBURY FLEADH

I thought that you'd like to read my thoughts on the London Fleadh; even if you don't want them you're going to get them anyway, so there!

The whole day went much better than I'd expected. I hadn't realized how organized these events had become. It is no longer just burgers and hot dogs on the menu - though, they were around in their hundreds of course - there was Thai, Indian, Chinese etc. etc.

Anyway to Bob. He started OK I thought, though nothing special. Those around me seemed to think he was doing exceptional stuff, so maybe I was wrong. The acoustics weren't good where I was and **Hard Times** came and went - it was lovely to hear it of course. **Memphis** I've had enough of for a while, ditto **All Along The Watchtower**. However he was picking up steam and the last sounded strong as did the following two numbers, **You're A Big Girl Now** and **Tangled Up In Blue**. (But then they always do.) Where it really started getting different was the duet with Van on **One Irish Rover**. (I'm delighted to say that just before he began this I turned to Joe McShame and predicted that if we were to get a 'surprise' it would be now.) Bob started this solo and, to our delighted surprise, knew all the words. He was singing very well by now and was well in his stride when Van joined him on stage. Bob was mid-verse and made Van wait before he let him contribute. They started off on separate mikes but it was going so well that Bob called Van over and they shared Bob's for the next verse. Great stuff - they really duetted, too. Van wandered off - amid smiles apparently though I can't confirm that as my view was blocked at the time. **Jim Jones**, **Watching The River Flow** and **Maggie's Farm** all had their 'spring American' arrangements which are to some people's tastes but not to all. Regardless, however, of which way you viewed any of the songs' arrangements you could not have denied that both Dylan and the band were playing very well indeed. (It may be worth pointing out that John Jackson was in sparkling form from the first minute - you'd almost think he was going out of his way to impress the watching Van Morrison!)

Mr Tambourine Man was another highlight for me, particularly in the way Dylan fought with, and defeated, the conditions. The sound system, which was lousy all day unless you were standing in one small segment of the park, hit a new low on this song. Every time a bass string was hit it reverberated terribly, add to this the wind whipping away at Bob's vocals and a disaster beckoned. Not with Dylan in this good mood however! He adapted his stance and style and fairly belted out the words to tremendous cheers. I'm not sure how this will come out on tape but it was excellent at the time.

Best was saved for last with a staggering performance of **It Ain't Me Babe**. The heavens were really chucking it down by now but everyone - Dylan fan and non-fan alike - stayed throughout a glorious encore. 'What was so good about it?' You ask. It is so hard to put into words but even now, nearly a week later, I get a glow when I think about it. Most of all it was The Voice, of course. He sounded impassioned, subtle, pleased, defiant all within a verse or even a line. The delivery was dramatic and moved from pleasing the crowd to re-discovering the song for himself to still finding something new in it after all these years. Then there was the vision of him in the dark stormy night, that figure up in the lights on the stage that never ceases to intrigue, amaze and move us. One man and his song, shared amongst thousands on a hostile night, a beacon of light in the darkness. How well he looked too! Slimmer and younger looking than he was four months ago and moving freely about the stage in a way I cannot recall him doing for quite some time. Long may it continue!

AFTERMATH

I got very pissed off with one or two of the post-Fleadh reviews and was even ticked off for being "pompous" on the warmline. What got my rather-easily-gotten goat in particular was the review in **The Guardian**. Basically I felt that the review had been written before the event; reasons behind this being that:

- it followed to the letter **The Daily Mirror's** prediction of how the day would go (Van would leave Bob away, in the event Van was barely audible)
- it lied about people leaving
- it lied about what Dylan sang (it complained about his performance of **Blowin' In The Wind**)
- it stank of tabloid hatchet journalism at its worst in a paper that probably reaches a large number of lapsed Dylan fans. They won't be re-entering the ranks if they believe what they read and, surprisingly, most readers of **The Guardian** seem to believe everything written in it.

I know of four people who were there who had never heard Dylan live before - if, indeed, ever on record - two of them liked him very much, two of them broke into giggles when he started **Hard Times** and never recovered! This still constitutes a 50% better response than most papers indicated. (Oh, and all 4 stayed.)

ALL MOD CONS (& PROS)

Pete Townsend was the subject (victim?) of the Q questionnaire in the August issue and he had this to say in reply to the "what do you think of Bob Dylan?" question:

He is a very poor conversationalist. Give me Joanna Lumley or Mariella Frostrup anyday.

Spokesman for at least a bit of a generation, Paul Weller, followed in the next month's issue and was much more positive in response to the same question:

He's a fucking genius and damn all his critics. His new/last LP is great.

Mr Weller also answered the question: "Who would you most like to meet?" with

Stevie Wonder and Bob Dylan.

I may as well give you the other answers to the standard question too. In July's issue Billy Idol retorted:

I love his sense of humour. Those stupid jokes. Like when the journalist says, 'What are your songs about?' and he says, 'About three minutes.'

In October's issue, we get the following reponse from John Lee Hooker:

Bob is a beautiful person. A good, good man. Very sweet, very kind. I met him when I was playing the coffee houses. He wasn't famous then but he came to see me. We played some shows together and he'd come back to my place and we'd stay up all night playin' and drinkin' wine.

MAN OF PROPERTY

There was a ridiculous piece in the *Daily Mail* - how unusual, eh, readers? - which implied Dylan's house hunting in Crouch End was a sign of his demise as all he could afford was a modest property there. This seems somewhat at odds with the report in *Series Of Dreams* (the *Rolling Tomes's* newsletter) which states:

Dylan has a home in Mailbu, an apartment in NYC, a farm in Minnesota, and we now hear (through a cousin) that he keeps a suite at the Trump Towers.

I must admit that the last mentioned there is a surprise to me, but it certainly makes sense given his affection for boxing matches. (Any news on the house in Ireland?)

Incidentally the main thrust of the *Daily Mail's* article was how some sixties stars had prospered and were still successful (e.g. Cilla Black) while others had fallen on hard times (e.g. Bob Dylan).

COUNTRY MUSIC PEOPLE

Jailhouse John has been furnishing me with issues of this well put together magazine. It has surprised me with the amount of Dylan connections and references present in each issue. I'm reading back issues just now and here are a couple of direct references from the November 1992 issue.

At the beginning of his reply to a letter about "divorce albums", Spencer Leigh had this to say:

*In the 1960s I used to go to a folk club in Liverpool and there was a guy who was forever singing bitchy songs about his girlfriends and, in particular, how good - or how badly! - they made love. How peculiar, I thought at the time, but he should have kept at it because this style of song-writing is in vogue, admittedly at a higher level than his cheap shots. The best known 'divorce' album is Marvin Gaye's **Here, My Dear** (1978): the judge had ordered Marv to pass the profits from his next album to the former Mrs Gaye, so Marv recorded a tuneless collection of malevolent songs, doing his own career a great disservice in the process. The best 'divorce' album is Bob Dylan's **Blood On The Tracks**, but honourable mention must go to Bruce Springsteen's **Tunnel Of Love**, Paul Simon's*

Hearts And Bones and two by John Prine: *Bruised Orange* and *The Missing Years*. Prine admits that getting divorced has been good for his songwriting.

The same writer ended his review of two Townes Van Zandt albums - one of which was **Pancho And Lefty (Live And Obscure)** - with:

Steve Earle said that he would stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in his cowboy boots and say Townes Van Zandt is the greatest singer-songwriter of them all. Bob Powell also has a very high regard for Townes Van Zandt's songwriting - it's fortunate for Mr. Dylan's coffee table that he hasn't made the same claim.

CHARLIE DANIELSSHAKESPEARE'S IN THE ALLEY.

The following comes from another Country magazine, this one being, *Close Up*, from the Country Music Association, (July, 1993) :

I kind of compare Dylan in his time and his vernacular to that very unique [Shakespeare's use of the English Language] way with words.

HITS OF THE 60S RADIO 3

Broadcast - 25th May 1993 10.00am

Loudon Wainwright III talks about Bob Dylan's **Visions Of Johanna** from the album *Blonde On Blonde*, interspersed with clips from the record (in italics):

I heard Dylan maybe in 1961 or 2. I had heard his records, *Freewheelin'*, which was his second record, first, and I kind of didn't like it that much. I remember a friend of mine was very excited about it and I was not enthralled. It sounded like an old, black blues singer. It was somebody impersonating those early records to me. But then I went to the Newport Folk Festival at some point in the early sixties, '62 or '63 and I saw him play and that was a kind of a shattering experience because he was so charismatic and just this kind of scruffy, skinny guy.

But *Blonde on Blonde* was a magical record. The songs are great, the lyrics are amazing. It's still kind of painful to listen to, it's just so good, even though it's a young man probably on drugs and the imagery is sometimes a little silly but it's just the power of the performance, the harmonica playing, the singing and the production.

*Ain't it just like the night
To play tricks when you're tryin' to be so quiet?
We sit here stranded, though we're all doin' our best to deny it
And Louise holds a handful of rain, temptin' you to defy it
Lights flicker from the opposite loft
In this room the heat pipes just cough
The country music station plays soft
But there's nothing, really nothing to turn off....*

We had just finished our first year at University, we were attending a drama school called Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. We'd stayed over that summer to work in a repertory company that went around doing mystery and passion plays, when this record came out and we were staying in the director's basement. I just have an image of my friend George Gerties(?) and I hunched near some speakers, under the influence of some substance or other and trying to figure out what Bob was saying, particularly one sentence - 'The country music station plays soft' or is it Sartre, that's a bad French accent. But we kept going back and forth we couldn't figure which 'No, man, it's soft', 'No, man, it isn't - it's Sartre what's the matter with you, man, listen to it again'. 'Here! [Sounds of inhalation of the aforementioned substances!!] 'It's soft, I know it's soft', 'No it's Sartre'

*In this room the heat pipes just cough
The country music station plays soft
But there 's nothing, really nothing to tun off ...*

The heat pipe *coughs* - I think that's the word that rhymes with soft or Sartre *cough* - and heat pipes really do cough in New York.

George and I never tried to come up with 'What is this song about?' We revelled in it's mystery, really. The big overall meaning didn't matter that much. I mean he used to goof on people, if you look at Don't Look Back, that great documentary of his tour, actually, here in England in the mid-sixties probably before this record and people would say - 'What do the songs mean?', 'They mean whatever you want them to mean, man, you know.' [Wainwright impersonates Dylan.] He enjoyed the fact that people didn't know what the hell they meant and I don't think that he really did either. I mean obviously he was inspired by - there probably was somebody that was called Johanna but maybe not, you know.

*The ghost of 'lectricity howls in the bones of her face
Where these visions of Johanna have now taken my place...*

He was nasty and cool and rebellious and everything a young man aspires to, sarcastic, snotty, mean - not in the stingy sense, he was unpleasant to all authority figures and anybody who had short hair.

In the third verse he says - 'Now, little boy lost he takes himself so seriously' I mean that's, again if you're a young man of 19, that's you.

*Now, little boy lost, he takes himself so seriously
He brags of his misery, he likes to live dangerously
And when bringing her name up
He speaks of a farewell kiss to me
He's sure got a lotta gall to be so useless and all
Muttering small talk at wall while I'm in the hall*

The album's a real speedy feel to it. Has a cocaine feel to it, to be honest. It feels that kind of brittle - it's not flowers and strawberry fields and yellow submarines and diamonds in the sky it's, you know, gritty and dirty streets and clanking heat pipes and up for five days. I mean whether you drag drugs into it or not, I mean again I think it doesn't have to have any meaning it is just truckloads of images and atmosphere.

*Inside the museums, Infinity goes up on trial
Voices echo this is what salvation might be like after a while
But Mona Lisa musta had the highway blues
You can see by the way she smiles...*

'But Mona Lisa must have had the highway blues, you can tell the way she smiles.' It's just a great observation. He's commenting on it in a way that nobody had done and yet was very contemporary - the highway blues, you know. He came out of that tradition of Woody Guthrie and Jack Kerouac - the road, hitch-hiking, that long line of male guitar slingers, hitch-hiking with guitars over their back and that was related to the hobo tradition. You knew what the highway blues were but your parents didn't because you'd read 'On The Road' and they were reading James Michener's 'Hawaii.'

The peddler now speaks to the countess who's pretending to care for him.....

He was a middle class white guy like me and yet he was poetic and mysterious and charismatic and exciting to watch that it seemed like a pretty interesting idea to try to be a songwriter.

And Madonna, she still has not showed /We see this empty cage now corrode /Where her cape of the stage once had flowed /The fiddler, he now steps to the road /He writes ev'rything's been returned which was owed/ On the back of the fish truck that loads while my conscience explodes /The harmonicas play the skeleton keys and the rain /And these visions of Johanna are now all that remain.

INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL LANOIS - 30.4.93 BBC RADIO 3 11.00PM

General interview with Lanois about his work with various people including Bob Dylan. The question specific to Dylan was:

Q. How did you find dealing with a notoriously strong sort of individual character such as Bob Dylan ?

A. There's some people that you can't talk about things with so much and it's better not to. And I think when you're dealing with somebody as talented as Bob Dylan the best thing you can do is try and get a sound going as quickly as possible and that's what I did with him. Quite simply we sat around and played instruments until it felt right. He sat in one chair and I sat next to him in a second chair and we played guitars all the time. We would try songs - different tempos, different keys and when something felt real good we would document. Sometimes that's the best thing you can do with people - is start playing.

Then clip from **Man In A Long Black Coat**.

The last two items were sent in by Tony Long and the next two are from Steve Michel

MAKES YOU WANNA STOP AND READ A BOOK

14: Douglas Brinkley: *The Majic Bus*, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993, \$19.95

Doug Brinkley is a history professor at Long Island's Hofstra University. In the spring semester of 1992, he takes 17 of his students on a bus ride across the country and back, stopping along the way to visit national historic shrines-- as varied as Graceland, a visit with William Borroughs, and the home of Harry Truman, among many others. The crew was accompanied by a busy CD that always seems to have appropriate music playing. Brinkley takes us on a magic tour of America, giving us his own view of what constitutes the country. There's a lot here for Dylan fans: Brinkley knows Dylan's music well, always seeming to play an appropriate Dylan song (as well as other songs) depending on where they are. One of the last stops on the trip is to see the 1992 Dylan concert in Seattle.

Over the years I had seen Dylan perform in over a dozen venues in Europe and North America, but to be able to share in his music with my students tonight beat all the other occasions hands down.

MAKES YOU WANNA STOP AND READ A BOOK

15: Greil Marcus: *Ranters and Crowd Pleasers: punk in pop music, 1977-92* (Doubleday, 1993).

From New West, January 1981 (from an article called **Real Life Top Ten**, of which one appears for each year covered by the book):

*Like a Rolling Stone at Longhi's, Lahaina, Maui, February 22. Longhi's is the ultimate laid-back watering-hole; as I sat there that morning, the house radio tuned to KQMQ-FM and playing pop tunes that function strictly as unregistered background, Bob Dylan's greatest song came on. The languid crowd slowly turned from its pineapple and Bloody Mary breakfast; feet began moving, conversations died. Everyone listened, and everyone looked a bit more alive when the last notes faded. It was a stunning moment: irrefutable proof that **Like a Rolling Stone** cannot be used as Muzak.*

*As for Dylan himself, his return to the Warfield Theater in San Francisco far outstripped similar appearances in 1979. The previous shows were one hundred percent holy-writ rock; this time the ads promised nostalgia: all your favorites! For Dylan now so fervently committed to Jesus, it seemed like the first real sellout of his career: a sad concession to his once dotting audience, or a pathetic admission that he couldn't live without it. That was not how the music came across. Ending a two-week stand, Dylan gave a gruff, good-humored performance of what, that night, was on his mind: hard and syncopated gospel, an Appalachian ballad complete with autoharp, Little Willie John's *Fever*, Dave Mason's startlingly apt **We Just Disagree**, a few of his own, older numbers. It was the seventeenth anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination; Dylan closed with 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall,' which was written during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 -- as far as most history books go, Kennedy's finest hour. It was steely, mean, implacable, and forgiving, and it sounded as if Dylan had written it the night before. Maybe ninety-nine-and-a-half won't do, but it did.*

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

I invoked the full wrath of Jailhouse John - not a pretty sight - in the last issue for failing to tell you about **Buzz Buzz Buzz** by The Hollywood Flames. The day after we'd heard young Bobby in the Highway 61 TV special singing in his bedroom, John presented me with the said track on a Rhino CD entitled **Best Of Doo Wop Uptempo**. (Original to be found on US Ebb label, original UK release on London.) It has a bit more 'swing' to it than the one on the programme, incidentally.

MAKES YOU WANNA STOP AND READ A BOOK REVISITED

9: {see also Issue Seven} *Small World* : David Lodge: Penguin, 1984.

OK I stop feeling guilty for never 'phoning my mother, she obviously doesn't read **Homer**, *The Slut* closely enough. I quoted from page 208 of this book in *Issue Seven* and passed a rather unfavourable opinion on it. I'm glad my mum ignored my opinion though, because she persevered further in the book and found the following on page 293:

{Performing in Karaoke pub in Tokyo} He begins to weaken. "Have you any Dylan songs in that book?" he asks. They have some of the most popular ones, Tambourine Man and Blowin' In The Wind and Lay Lady Lay. Perse doesn't need the album with the lyrics, since he knows these songs off by heart, and frequently sings them in the bath, but undoubtedly his performance is enhanced by having the original backing tracks as accompaniment. He sings Mr. Tambourine Man nervously at first but gradually warming to the task, and putting on a plausible imitation of Dylan's nasal whine. The applause is rapturous. He sings Blowin' In The Wind and Lay Lady Lay as encores.

MAKES YOU WANNA STOP AND SAVE YOUR MONEY

16: Chris Williams: *In His Own Words* Omnibus Press £7.95

Another go at *Bob Dylan: In His Own Words* has hit the shelves. I do not like these things, they take quotes out of context and string together entries from various eras as though to make a point. The photographs are nice, of course, but the rest is sloppy. In three quick glances I came across the same quotes repeated in different sections. Rip off city, but we're all here to be ripped off, I suppose. (I went back and bought it later.)

ZIMMERMAN LEADS

A report in *The Daily Telegraph* on 23/7/93 opened as follows:

Bob Zimmerman, who gave up playing on the regular tour in the United States in 1967 because of leg problems, shot a two-under par 69 in the British Senior Open.....

Thanks to those who pointed this and similar reports out to me. Note that it was leg problems though, not back, ones as in The French Open.

SPIKE LEE

In an interview with *Empire*, March 1993, Spike Lee said:

SLI don't think I met Bob Dylan, I don't recall that.

Q He's a bit mad Dylan, isn't he?

SL *That's what they say. He's as nutty as a fruitcake. What's that phrase you have in England? Bonkers? hahaha. I like that. Bob Dylan is bonkers mad. I like that.*

CHRIS ROBINSON

Of The Black Crowes if you didn't know, "who are they?" - oh, ask your children. Anyway in the *NME* 26/6/93 we had the following exchange:

NME What would you say to Bob Dylan?

CR I've no idea! I mean he's the man! I could sit in a room with him but I don't think I could initiate a conversation. I'd probably just talk about folk music - where did it go and why don't young people even know that it existed. Y'know, why is Appalachian sacred music and old-timey grand Ole Opry stuff and bluegrass music totally forgotten?

JOAN BAEZ

In April's *Folk Roots* there was an interview with Joan Baez, the relevant section was:

There's an audible sigh - or is it a groan - when you introduce the inevitable question about Mr. Dylan. No, she says matter-of-factly, she hasn't been in touch for a couple of years or so, must give him a call. No, she wasn't at the Dylan tribute show in New York, though she was invited but unfortunately couldn't make it because she was playing a gig herself that night. She'd like it known, though, that she fully supports Sinéad O'Connor in her right to tear up photos of the Pope, or anyone else who upsets her, and thinks her treatment at the hands of the audience at the Dylan show was totally outrageous.

I admire her courage for standing up for what she believes in. The fact that people should show such intolerance towards her at a concert for Dylan, when everything he stood for was against intolerance is a little ironic.

And has she heard *that* album?

Er,..... no, I haven't yet. I must get a copy. I've heard it's quite interesting.

WHO THREW THE GLASS

In the last issue I brought news of a new fanzine from the US, well this time it is a new fanzine from Australia. Homer's best wishes go to them. Assuming the friendliest of tones they have said I can re-print anything I wish from their pages. If I were to take something from their first issue I would make it the excellent piece on **Jim Jones** by Gail Smith who lives in Botany Bay. I would rather, though, that credit went where credit is due so, if you want to read that and other pieces contact: Peter Gilmer, GPO Box 3203 Sydney, NSW, Australia, 2001. Tel (02) 660 8389. Issue one had 18 pages, I believe issue two will be approximately double this and will be out by the time you read this.

MSG TRIBUTE CDs AND WORLD GONE WRONG

Never can I remember being so unexcited by the arrival of a Dylan product than by the MSG tribute CDs. They more than lived down to my expectations. It is the least effective I've heard Dylan since a couple of the 1991 European festivals, as to the others, even things I quite liked on the TV special (The Clancy Brothers/Lou Reed) sound dreadful. Of the tracks I've played only Neil Young emerges with any credit. Enough of that, it isn't a real Dylan album anyway. It is, however, all songs written by Dylan, unlike the Dylan album about to be released:

Title = **World Gone Wrong**; Cover = Shot of Dylan in Camden, 21 July 93. 10 tracks; all covers, [Sleeve Notes by Dylan]:

World Gone Wrong
Love Henry
Ragged & Dirty
Blood In My Eyes
Delia
Broke Down Engine
Stack-A-Lee
Two Soldiers
Jack-A-Roe
Lone Pilgrim

All listed as trad. arr. B Dylan except the last which is credited to B. F. White and A.M. Pace.

I have literally just heard about this album/these tracks so, I'm afraid, it'll not be until the next issue I can produce anything on it for you. However, initial thoughts are as follows:

Ragged & Dirty is associated with Sleepy John Estes, one of whose LPs was called **Brownsville Blues** and who wrote topical, hard-hitting blues songs. **Blood In My Eyes** was playing in Camden as Dave Stewart was videoing Dylan. (See my introduction to this issue.) There's a Mississippi Shakers's song from 25/10/1931 that is titled **There's Blood In My Eyes For You**. **Delia** and **Two Soldiers** are songs we are used to hearing Dylan sing, of course. If he does them to the best of his abilities I will be a very happy Andrew. Hell, he may even sing all the words. **Broke Down Engine** is associated with a certain Blind Willie McTell. **Jack-A-Roe** is discussed in Michael Gray's **A NOTE ON** column in this issue, well anticipated Michael! **Stack A Lee** is a mouth-watering prospect. **Love Henry** is a Child Ballad. I hope he was in the mood for really doing these and not just churning out a contract filling album. We'll all know soon enough!

You can expect a full analysis in **Issue Eleven**, along with all the reviews from around the world.

NEWSPAPER REACTION TO THE FINSBURY FLEADH

If the media response to February's gigs bordered on overkill, then the attention given to Dylan's return to London - a mere four month's later - was more muted but far greater than expected.

No matter how they try to write him off and dismiss him as a relic only slightly younger than the stars of Jurassic Park, at the end of the day the media can't resist his presence. The Fleadh was not a Bob Dylan gig, he was one of dozens of artists - albeit the headliner - yet it was Dylan who took the lion's share of the newspaper space.

The fact that he looked even healthier than at his February shows and turned in a set that, in places, reached the heights of those gigs, seemed to be of little interest to the press. They went, if not to bury him, then at least to kick a little dirt in his face. Dylan, though, won some of them over - as he did the audience - and left with his reputation still restored and intact.

Critics say that he put on a "spirited" show. I think this means that it was loud and there weren't too many ballads. They call it "spirited" when they cannot think of anything else, or whenever they spent the duration of the gig at the bar. Call it "spirited" and you can't go far wrong - even when he's crap Dylan is usually spirited. Another point often raised was that Dylan is not Irish. No shit, Sherlock. Dylan is not Irish and he put on a spirited show. Thank you and another pint of Murphys, please.

The Melody Maker, having delivered a scathing review in February, ignored him totally this time around, while the *NME* despatched someone called Johnny Cigarettes to do the honours. Mr. Cigarettes's sense of humour is not merely restricted to assuming silly surnames, he fancies himself as a dab hand at the old comedy routine as well; "we're best off ignoring heavyweights of yore like Dylan as they slowly decay..... for Dylan rigor mortis is rapidly setting in". Ho, ho. He complains that Dylan sings all old songs then singles out **Hard Times** and **Jim Jones** as welcome exceptions, even though they were probably amongst the oldest songs performed by anybody on the day.

David Cheal, obviously not in a good mood, offered the information in *The Daily Telegraph* that Dylan sent thousands of the crowd home early while "wheezing away in the strangulated whine that is all that remains of his voice while inflicting GBH on some of his best songs". Well, that's news to me. Drove of people leaving early - if true - probably had more to do with the lateness of the hour and the famous unreliability of public transport than anything else. Remember, we are translating "popular" journalism here, so for "thousands" read "dozens". As for the comments on his voice, well, we know it's pretty rough and limited these days, but Dylan is using it to far greater effect than at any time since February 1990. It's still an easy target for any critic, though, especially those that don't listen.

Antony Thorncroft, reviewing for *The Financial Times* found Dylan to "find relevance and rhythms in his music with the right aura to make a damp depressing evening an occasion." Very true, and who else can you think of who could do that? Guns 'N' Roses? Madonna? I think not.

James Johnson in *The Daily Express* obviously rifled through his dictionary of musical clichés before putting pen to paper or finger to keyboard. Thus **Mr. Tambourine Man** was "honky tonk", **It Ain't Me Babe** "plaintive", **Maggie's Farm** was "heavy metal" and **All Along The Watchtower** was "zippy". How many of us stood there that night as Dylan ground "Watchtower" to a reluctant halt and thought, "hey, what a zippy version"? Not me, babe.

Tracey MacLeod for *The Guardian* had obviously made her mind up beforehand. We can safely assume she is not Dylan's most avid fan. She didn't like his voice, his guitar playing or the way he looked. Other than that, he could do no wrong. The reliable Adrian Deevoy, on the other hand knew exactly what to look for, and his *Times* review accurately pointed out Dylan's strengths. **One Irish Rover** was "touchingly ramshackle" and a "magnificent" **It Ain't Me, Babe** found Dylan achieving 'the unimaginable feat of transforming the vast soggy field into somewhere warm, intimate and just a little magical."

Max Bell, in *The London Evening Standard*, did a Paddy Ashdown and sat on the fence and Andy Gill's better-late-than-never piece in *The Independent* found Dylan to be better than expected; "his seat-of-the-pants approach paid handsome dividends...It looked more fun than usual for him, too."

So there we have it. Not as widely celebrated or received as the Hammersmith residency, and many of the usual criticisms reared their ugly heads. If you don't like Bob Dylan you can sit at home and pen a review as

predictable as many of those I've mentioned. It's obvious that he'll look older, that he won't follow any original melody and that his voice will never appeal to the brain-dead imbeciles who consider Whitney Houston to be the true embodiment of rock & roll. But, despite it all, Dylan was still the main focus of attention, however reluctantly donated. Of the other acts - including Van Morrison - there was very little mention.

For us who were there, we each have our own special memories. Mine are glorious, despite the conditions and the surroundings. Dylan pulled off a tremendous show against all the odds, and despite a sulky Van Morrison. For me, *It Ain't Me, Babe* soared above everything else - a wonderful, sweetly-perfect five minutes. As for any "zippy" songs, well, I guessed I must have missed them.

DIGRESSION: A PERSONAL REACTION TO THE FINSBURY FLEADH

I think that we should have some T-shirts printed up for the next convention that read *I went to Finsbury Park and survived*, because that's pretty much how I felt.

The view some 20 yards from the stage was excellent - especially for someone as tall as me - but the conditions were horrendous. Yes, the obligatory mud was there (even before it rained) and so were the drunken hordes who were there only for the Murphys beer and to tick off two names on their lists of "Legends To See".

If Wembley Stadium in 1984 was uncomfortable then this was something else. Tempers all around me were fraying even before Van Morrison ambled on and fist-fights were narrowly avoided only because there was no space to raise your arms. Really Bob, talk about suffering for your art - I sure did.

The Shane-less Pogues have rarely sounded less impressive, Runrig were ~~okay in a banner-waving~~ kind of way and the Hothouse Flowers have replaced UB40 as "crappiest band to be endured while waiting for Bob Dylan to come on". Van the Man presented a fine set if you happened to be sitting in a comfortable, intimate theatre, but, unfortunately, Finsbury Park was neither of those things and, coupled with all the aches and pains gathered through standing for five solid hours plus a shoddy sound mix, meant that tedium set in after approximately five minutes.

So the omens were not good for Dylan, whom I expected to rush through a few half-hearted greatest hits and then split with the cash in a couple of Sainsbury carrier bags. But there I was, some 90 minutes after he stepped on-stage, feeling highly satisfied that I'd witnessed a very creditable gig and quite possibly the best *It Ain't Me, Babe* of his career.

If *Hard Times* was rather shaky and left most of the crowd scratching their heads (spot the real Dylan fans by the whoops of recognition), then "Mobile", "Watchtower" and *Maggie's Farm* were incendiary enough to get them going. *Tangled Up In Blue* went on far too long, but *You're A Big Girl Now* was impressive enough, given the circumstances. *Jim Jones* I found to be as lovely as ever and *Mr. Tambourine Man* gave the legend-tickers their first real chance to sing along.

One Irish Rover was ragged yet somehow it worked far beyond the confines of merely seeing two living legends together sharing the same microphone. Somehow it transformed my surroundings into something more intimate and special than a muddy park, and it was good to see something of a rapport between them.

By the time *Maggie's Farm* crashed to a finish the rain had started to fall, and the magic was in danger of evaporating. But, of course, trust Dylan to come back and give us such a stately, delicate and simply gorgeous *It Ain't Me, Babe*. Clearly enjoying himself, he managed to make us all forget the rain and our aching limbs and he swept away all fears of him being a spent force with quite possibly the best five minutes that I've ever seen him deliver. At the end of the day, it was worth all the hassle and discomfort just for that one number, and the final proof after February's shows that he has reached the heights of truly great live art again.

My favourite quote from a girl as we were leaving was; *I'd heard that he was supposed to be pretty crap, but I thought he was quite good.*

Other than that, I thought that Lindisfarne were far better than all of the supposed main attractions, with the obvious exception of Dylan of course. I had considered going back to Finsbury for Neil Young's night in July, but, having been through it once, I've thought better of it. Let's not tempt fate, eh? I've already earned my T-shirt.

Sorry Neil, I like you a lot but.....well, you're not Bob, are you?

NEWSPAPER REACTION TO "CROUCH END"

Last month's British media coverage concentrated on one main topic - Dylan's interest in purchasing a house in Crouch End. It began with a video shoot in Camden with Dave Stewart, with Dylan decked out in black like a Wild West preacher (and I swear he did look great), and ended up with the kind of press avalanche usually reserved for his Hammersmith residencies.

Being Dylan, of course, it wasn't that straight-forward. Depending on what day it was, a different rumour circulated. Firstly, he was dumping Columbia and moving near to Dave Stewart to sign with his independent label. Secondly, he was retiring completely in order to prepare himself for Armageddon - which was apparently pencilled in for the turn of the decade. Quite how you prepare yourself for the end of the world is beyond me. Do you pray a lot? Grit your teeth and wait? Put your head between your legs and kiss your arse goodbye? Whatever, that was Dylan's plan. Then again, *The Mail On Sunday* reckoned that he wasn't moving to Crouch End at all, but he did have his eye on a place in southern Ireland. Er, hang on.....wasn't he supposed to be looking for a place in Nashville? No, well what about New Orleans? Nope, not there either. At least, not according to today's rumour. What day is it, anyway?

Well, there it was, splashed across the newspapers and tv. screens; Dylan to buy house in Crouch End. *The Hornsey Journal* broke the news on August 12th, and estate agent Steve Herman was almost spending his commission on that brand new Porsche already. *We've sold to a few stars like Mandy Smith and Charles Dance*, he gushed, *but he's probably the biggest*. Bigger than Mandy Smith? Wow, then the Spokesman For A Generation labels weren't hype after all. Anyway, Dylan was apparently looking for a place with four or five bedrooms and a secluded garden.

The Independent On Sunday speculated that one of the attractions was the Indian restaurant Shamrat - an apparent favourite of Dylan's. "He was here two weeks ago," confirmed owner Faruque Ali, "I recognized him from the telly." Nick Jones, though, whose shop Rock Around The Clock supplies guitars to, amongst others, Bob Geldof, was less than impressed; *Bob Dylan's past it*, he declares, *He used to be good but he's rubbish now*. I guess we can safely assume that Mr. Jones will not be at the head of the queue of autograph hunters, then.

Other neighbours, according to Lesley Gerard in *The Observer*, were equally unimpressed. "I'm a heavy metal and punk enthusiast," commented one, *I suppose it'll be okay as long as he doesn't have his band round for rehearsal*. No worries there, then. Dylan doesn't rehearse.

The Times, in a rare (failed) attempt at humour, told us that Dylan was particularly taken by the solid granite worktops and intergrated appliances in the kitchen. I guess that waiting for the end of the world is made that much more palatable if you can put your hands on your intergrated appliances when you need them.

Jonathan Cooper interviewed Faruque Ali for *The Daily Express*, and we learn that, yes, Dylan is a regular customer, favouring medium hot madras chicken and Carlsberg beer, and that he recognized him because *I saw him in that film with James Coburn*. Mr. Ali, though, is somewhat blasé about having living legends frequent his restaurant. Why, only the other day he had comic actor Bill Maynard in for a spot of lunch. Impressive, no?

Current owners of the house - Stephen and Sandra Pavlous - breathlessly recount their story to anyone who will listen. They're big fans of Dylan, even though she didn't recognize him at first (presumably she hadn't seen him in that film with James Coburn), and would consider it an honour to have Dylan buy their house. Dylan was particularly taken to their German Sheperd dog Khan - though not as much as the integrated appliances, probably - and seemed very shy. Perhaps he was still in awe at having eaten in the same restaurant as Bill Maynard.

By August 19th the Pavlous were fed up with all the media attention and with the Spanish fans who had already flown over for a chat with Bob. They granted *The Hornsey Journal* a final interview and admitted that they thought the excessive press coverage had frightened Dylan off for good. But that was okay, since they were thinking of hanging onto the house anyway. Or so they said.

For the estate agent who blabbed in the first place, he probably earned a slap on the wrists, and that shiny new Porsche will have to stay in the showroom. For the Pavlous, they probably enjoyed their 15 minutes of fame - realising too late that they had blown the sale anyway - and their 22 year old daughter, who thought Dylan looked *old and wrinkly*, will probably glance at the photo on one of her parent's albums and wonder what all the fuss was about.

And Dylan, currently on tour with Santana, probably thinks that it's all too late anyway. After all, if you have to sit through Santana's set every night it must seem like the end of the world is already here.

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Reading a comparative piece on Dylan and Charles Dickens by Glenn O'Raw in a privately circulated fanzine prompted me to think more about the many similarities I had noticed between Dylan and Dylan Thomas, the Welsh poet whose name Robert Zimmerman used. Further reading indicated that there are scores of similarities covering a tremendous breadth, from individual psychology to attitudes to women, approaches to work etc. Of course when you're looking for similarities you're bound to come up with some. After all, many people share psychological traits, basic attitudes and so on. But some of the common features between the two Dylans are so remarkable that I thought a comparative study might be of interest to a wider audience. It is especially appropriate as this year marks the fortieth anniversary of Dylan Thomas's death.

I have to admit that some of the similarities documented below may be put down to mere coincidence, if you believe in coincidences. Some, I think, arise from deep-seated roots and common features of artists or artistry - but that's another article/book! Before we consider some let's first pause to look at the name that now signifies so much to many of us, Dylan.

Ferris (1987, p25), whose book of Dylan Thomas's letters has been invaluable to this piece, says:

The word 'Dylan' means nothing more than 'sea', or possibly a sea-god. As a proper name it occurs but briefly in the Mabinogion - the Welsh medieval prose romances which have echoes of older narratives - where it is bestowed on a child born to Aranrhod: 'a fine boy-child with rich yellow hair'. It was virtually unknown as a name before D J Thomas disinterred it for his son.

Dylan Thomas was born in Swansea, South Wales, on October 27, 1914, two years after Woody Guthrie. He died in New York on November 9, 1953. There are some similarities in the social and cultural background of the two Dylans. The English language is an obvious starting point, for although Dylan Thomas is famous for being a Welsh poet he spoke no Welsh. Indeed his father was the English master, as well as being Headmaster, at Swansea Grammar School. He had a passionate interest in the English language, especially Shakespeare, on which he exercised his considerable powers of oratory. The bible was also part of this cultural heritage which influenced the young Dylan Thomas. From an early age then he, like Bob, had a fascination with words, not simply because of the images they could evoke but also with the sound, the feel, the colour even, of the words and phrases themselves.

Another common feature of their formative artistic years was that each belonged to a minority sect and culture within a wider society (Jewish/Welsh). I think that in their different ways the feelings and the effects on their psychologies of belonging to a minority social group possessing a strong cultural heritage were significant influences on their artistic development.

They both grew up in middle class families, though living in mining communities: iron ore and coal respectively. An interesting connection here is that Dylan Thomas was a friend of Idris Davis who wrote **Bells of Rhymney**, a protest poem-song about the capitalist mine-owners. Bob Dylan was singing it in 1961, possibly hearing it from Pete Seeger who subsequently recorded it. I hear echoes of those bells in **Chimes of Freedom**.



In his most intense creative period many thought that Dylan Thomas had a kind of death-wish: similarly many of Bob Dylan's friends thought the same in the mid-sixties.

They both share artistic genius, though for the most part expressed through different media. However, their preoccupations in general are the same: love, death, life, sexual relationships ... So also is their use of words, employing them sometimes almost as colours or counters to express feelings, occasionally willing to sacrifice meaning if the word gives the right 'feel' or colour; or as a collage collapsing time or the life process into a concentrated distillation of a few stanzas. Though short, Dylan Thomas had a charismatic stage presence ...

Okay, now for the test-your-Bob Dylan-knowledge-quiz. The following statements are either about Bob Dylan or Dylan Thomas, illustrating the many similarities between them over a range of categories. If I were to ask you to choose from each of the following sections one statement referring to Bob Dylan, which would it be? Take your time. ('Dylan' is used to denote either Bob Dylan or Dylan Thomas.)

WHICH DYLAN?	
	<u>Women</u>
1	'I don't like to wake up alone in the morning.'
2	Dylan had real charm; he could get round anybody, chiefly when he was doing this little-boy-lost act he was so pathetic... and sweet.
	<u>Work</u>
3	'I am in the path of Blake'.
4	"The greatest single word I know is 'drome' which, for some reason, nearly opens the doors of heaven for me. 'Drome', 'bone', 'dome', 'doom' (are) visionary; God moves in a long 'o'."
5	"'Chime' is a beautiful word."
6	Little things would worry him, but he was never sensitive to criticism of his work. Dylan was so deeply convinced of himself and what he had got that he never cared a damn what other people thought.
7	He rarely explained his (work) to anyone; he always thought it should speak for (itself), and that it wasn't for him to explain how he'd struggled with structure (etc.).
	<u>Personal</u>
8	The persona that he created for himself was the familiar one of the individual at odds with the world, whose aim in the end was merely to survive in hostile surroundings, a Charlie Chaplin-like figure who seemed without pride.
9	One expects a recluse to remain in his cell ...someone hiding to remain out of sight, not even showing himself in a mirror. But Dylan's life presents an extraordinary paradox. While remaining hidden, he sent into the world a counterfeit image of himself. This other Dylan became part of the outer setting for the world of his own, Dylan's much more real and worthwhile world under the world-of-others. The counterfeit was accepted by many as the one and only Dylan... and it has a corresponding degree of importance or unimportance.
	The counterfeit Dylan was part of the false deluding 'outside world', and his place in it was that of a young devil, unscrupulous (but understandably so), ruthless (but forgivable), a liar (but expecting not to be believed), a cheat (only in matters that really didn't count), and a cynic (how dull to be otherwise!). This was the part he set himself to play, and he played it convincingly. Described coldly on paper, the role sounds repulsive but, in spite of this, Dylan was warmly accepted by almost everyone who met him.
	<u>Religion</u>
10	Dylan had a simple religious faith of his own, but it wasn't an orthodox religion.
11	His are not so much influenced by, as soaked in, childhood experiences of the Bible.
12	He was strongly attracted by the poetry of belief and repelled by the poetry of unbelief.
	<u>Fantasy</u>
13	When we first met, he invented a lot of whimsical fantasies about himself which I didn't take in much. Because it was Dylan I was very tolerant. To me, he was so endearing, lovable and comforting that I could overlook this unreality, but I think many people were deceived by the stories he told. He was always very careful with his fantasies.
14	Reporter: 'Why have you come to ... Mr ...?' Dylan: 'In pursuit of my life-long quest for naked women in wet mackintoshes.'
	<u>Appearance</u>
15	He looked like an unmade bed - but the precise way in which the bed was unmade was not solely a matter of chance. The sleeper had made sure that it bore his very personal imprint.
16	Yes, he was vulnerable and very sensitive to obvious things, like his height, his appearance and even his clothes (which was odd, because he always dressed like a rag-bag).
	<u>Creativity</u>
17	He wouldn't share his real self with anyone, and that is the mark of the supreme artist.
18	I am sure he never meant to hurt me or anyone else; he was creating lasting works ... while hurting all around. When you are creating it takes up all of you and you are not aware of the way you are treating other people: you are totally absorbed. Genius is selfish; the creative process itself is selfish.
19	He was always restless, unable to stay in one place for long ...
	<u>Other</u>
20	He stole my ... collection
21	Dylan had an endearing quality which you couldn't possibly deny. He was made to be loved, and everybody loved him.

What do you think? It seems to me that each and everyone of these could be about Bob Dylan. In fact, they are all about Dylan Thomas, quoted from his wife, Caitlin, his close friend, Dan Jones, and a biographer and editor of Thomas's letters, Paul Ferris. The books are listed at the end for those who are interested in following up some of these aspects of Dylan Thomas. In terms of their artistic creations both Dylans also share several essential artistic interests: a preoccupation with the constraints and pre-set parameters of human existence, a retrospective view of lost youthful innocence, the 'doomed' aspect of humanity, the human condition, and relationships with women. I want to consider these aspects of their work in the spirit of exploring some of the sources of these shared interests to see whether they are temperamental and perhaps endemic to any artist, or the personal psychologies/experiences of these two individuals.

I am not setting out to show that Bob Dylan and Dylan Thomas wrote in the same style or about the same things. Nor am I attempting to critically compare their work. They belong, after all, to different generations, using different artistic media. Dylan Thomas was dying in New York when Bob Dylan, artistic performer, was still eight years from being created, Robert Zimmerman being only twelve in 1953. It is worth remembering, though, that the media differences are not always as great as they may seem, for Dylan Thomas felt that his poetry should be read aloud and he usually wrote with this in mind. Much of his prose was, in any case, written for radio - and, although prose, it contains more poetic rhythm and language than many people's poetry. In comparison, many Bob Dylan songs are poems, and although written as songs and best appreciated in performance, they can be analysed using the same artistic criticism as for poetic appreciation. Of course, we have to be careful not to push that sort of comparison beyond its reasonable limits.

Equally, it is fair to say that they each deal quite distinctively with some other aspects: in the case of Bob Dylan, lifelong themes have included social comment over a range of moral and political issues, whereas Dylan Thomas rarely made such forays; Bob Dylan has always, with the exception of his explicitly religious albums, written personalized love songs of one sort or another, whereas Dylan Thomas rarely wrote in that vein, except in personal letters.

Before dealing with these themes it's worth noting that both Dylans share an ironic view of life, with a humorous and acute sense of the ridiculous. Compare these letters, for example: a real one from Dylan Thomas to Robert Pocock, BBC producer and friend, and an imaginary one from Bob Dylan to 'Puck' (from *Tarantula*)

(To Robert Pocock) ... The landlord of the Fleece has nearly lost his eye, our dog Mabli has eczema, our cat Satan had mange and is now dead, Caitlin has gone to London with Margaret Taylor and left me quite alone, the house beer has run out, I am three weeks behind with my film-script, not having started it yet, my gas fire has just exploded, I have flooded the kitchen with boiling soup, I am broke, Caitlin has taken the cigarettes, I was suddenly sick in the middle of the night, Phil has just sent me his 25 shilling book about Hampton Court, rabbits have eaten the lettuce, and seven cows, who have opened the gate, are trying to get into the lavatory. There is no news.
(Ferris, 1987, p673.)

*dear Puck,
traded in my electric guitar for what you call a gut one... you can play it all by yourself - don't need a band - eliminates all the fighting except of course for the other gut guitar players - am doing well - have no idea of what's happening but all these girls with moustaches, they're going crazy over me - you must try them sometime - weather is good - threw away all my lefty frizell records - also got rid of my parka - you can keep my cow as i now am on the road to freedom*
(Dylan, 1976, p111.)

Some rhythmic patterns, although not exactly the same, do illustrate, I think, the same thought processes employed by the two Dylans - the image building, sometimes of conflicting images, and the use of alliteration and internal rhyming to dramatic effect. Although dealing with very different subject matter, these extracts from *Under Milk Wood* and *Subterranean Homesick Blues* do have similar effects and, I suspect, the same creative motivations.

... gobstoppers as big as wens that rainbow as you suck, brandy balls, winegums, hundreds and thousands, liquorice sweet as sick, nougat to tug and ribbon out like another red rubbery tongue, gum to glue in girls' curls, crimson coughdrops to spit blood, ice-cream cornets, dandelion-and-burdock, raspberry and cherryade, pop goes the weasel and the wind.
(Thomas, 1976, p60.)

*Get sick, get well, hang around an ink well
Ring bell, hard to tell if anything is goin' to sell
Try hard, get barred, get back, write braille,
Get jailed, jump bail, join the army, if you fail.
Look out kid you're gonna get hit by the losers, cheaters,
Six-time users, hang around the theatres.
Girl in the whirlpool lookin' for a new fool
Don't follow leaders, watch the parkin' meters.*
(Dylan 1986, p60)

... starless and bible-black, the cobblestreets silent and the hunched, courtiers'-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeback, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat-bobbing sea ... Hush, the babies are sleeping, the farmers, the fishers, the tradesmen, the pensioners, cobbler, schoolteacher, postman and publican, the undertaker and the fancywoman, drunkard, dressmaker, preacher, policeman, the webfoot cocklewomen and the tidy wives.
(Thomas 1976,p1)

YOUTHFUL INNOCENCE

A recurring theme in Dylan Thomas's work is that of lost childhood. For him it is more than the loss of innocence and of those carefree days, it forms part of his life-view of predetermined constraints, of that inexorable doom to which all life is subjected. Bob Dylan casts only sporadic backward glances, though when he does they are typically vely poignant. (In cases where Dylan has not, or rarely used phrases as printed in 'Lyrics', I have taken the commonly performed version.)

In **Bob Dylan's Dream** Dylan reflects on a simplistic, idealistic time of innocence:

*With haunted hearts through the heat and cold
We never thought we would get very old.
We thought we could sit forever in fun
But our chances really was a million to one.* (Dylan, 1986, p62)

In **Poem in October** Dylan Thomas, on the occasion of his 'thirtieth year to heaven', is walking and reminiscing:

*And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
Through the parables
Of sun light
And the legends of the green chapels...
... And the true
Joy of the long dead child sang burning
In the sun.* (Jones, 1974, p178)

Reflecting on childhood dreams and expectations Dylan says:

*Someday little girl, everything for you is gonna be new
Someday little girl, you'll have a diamond as big as your shoe.*
(Under the Red Sky. Dylan, 1991)

In **Fern Hill** Dylan Thomas writes:

*Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry,
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes...*

*Nothing I cared in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand ...*
(Jones, 1974, pp.195-196)

In **Return Journey**, the prose piece for radio, Dylan Thomas revisits his past as far back as childhood and there touches upon a couple of themes also used by Dylan - escaping from the place, and later, putting the world to rights:

Promenade Man: ... He used to dawdle in the arches, you said, and lark about on the railway-lines and holler at the sea. He'd mooch about the dunes and watch the tankers and the tugs and the banana boats come out of the docks. He was going to run away to sea...

Narrator: ... Then I went on my way from the sea, up Brynhill Terrace and into Glanbrydan Avenue where Bert Trick had kept a grocer's shop and, in the kitchen, threatened the

annihilation of the ruling classes over sandwiches and jelly and blancmange.

Park-keeper: ... Oh yes, I knew him well. I think he was happy all the time...

(Thomas 1974a, pp86/88)

PREDETERMINED CONSTRAINTS

Both Dylans have, I think, a profound sense of the great desire for freedom, especially in the creative sense, yet at the same time knowing that real freedom does not exist. We are programmed, railroaded through life to death, we have to act, by the very nature of existence, within fixed parameters. There may be choice and a degree of 'freedom' within the boundary - though even here there is more 'choice' for some than for others - but no-one can act outside that boundary - or can they? Both of these artists wrestle in their work with the conflict of the necessity of freedom and the iron constraint of the facts of human existence and of death itself. In **It's Alright Ma Dylan** says:

*For them that think death's honesty
Won't fall upon them naturally
Life sometimes
Must get lonely.*

He often uses death or the doom factor as a weapon against human injustice, greed and violence, and his 'hero', Jesus, did when facing inequality and oppression. We shall return to this aspect when we consider doom as a theme in its own right. Dylan refers to this conflict between freedom and natural constraint in **Ballad in Plain D**, choosing the epitomy of freedom, the bird:

Are birds free from the chains of the skyway? (Dylan 1986, p142.)

A similar reference from Thomas is made in **Fern Hill**:

*Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.*

Also using the sea metaphor, Dylan says in **Oh Sister**:

Time is an ocean but it ends at the shore. (Dylan 1986, p382.)

Both Dylans imply that they write for lovers or for those open to love, and yet, in the end, they know that they write because they are driven to it - they are themselves in chains, the chains of the muse. In **Eternal Circle**, for instance, Dylan writes:

*As the time finally folded
I laid down the guitar
Then looked for the girl
Who'd stayed for so long
But her shadow was missin'
For all of my searchin'
So I picked up my guitar
And began the next song.*

And in **In my Craft or Sullen Art** Thomas says that he writes:

*Not for the proud man apart ...
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages
Who pay no heed or wages
Nor heed my craft or art.* (Jones 1974, p196.)

Thomas develops this theme of programmed existence, not just for humanity but for every living thing in **The Force That Through The Green Fuse Drives The Flower**:

*The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees*

*Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever...'*

(Jones 1974, p77.)

Dylan makes numerous references to fate and destiny throughout his work.

For example:

It was destiny which pulled us apart .. (Idiot Wind. Dylan 1986 p367.)

The foggy web of destiny.. (Born In Time, Dylan 1991.)

'Blame it on a simple twist of fate.' (Simple Twist of Fate, Dylan 1986, p360.)

Thomas says in **Poem On His Birthday**:

*Under and round him go
Flounders, gulls, on their cold, dying trails,
Doing what they are told,
Curlers aloud in the congered waves
Work at their ways to death...*

The voyage to ruin I must run ...

(Jones, 1974, pp. 209/211.)

DOOM

For both Dylans doom, the end of the railroad line, death and all its implications for the living, is the natural source of recurring themes and artistic influence. *Slow Train*, *Saved*, and *Shot of Love* are replete with examples of Dylan's heightened awareness of this influence. Indeed, it took over his stage performances at one point and made him overstep the line of artistry into the overtly philosophical arena, something he had shied away from in the Sixties - such was the strength of his feeling of the 'doom factor' at the time. It appears to me that the ever-present doom scenario was brilliantly focused in that period in a particular direction, giving a specific outcome - answer even. Before then and since, although always lurking in the smoky rings of his mind, it is never so focussed, though often nonetheless effectively employed in creating artistically worthy song-poems. Giving answers is not typically the forte of Dylan, or of any artist. Framing awkward questions/situations and posing them in often exquisitely painful ways is what mainly constitutes creative artistry.

Dylan Thomas, as we saw earlier, actually liked the word 'doom'. He employed the concept too in terms of humankind and what we might make of our existence. A sadness, a terrible pity seems to epitomise Thomas's feelings about the doom scenario, whereas Dylan more often than not uses the *Old Testament*, threatening, approach to it. Thomas says:

*Where a boy
In the listening
Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.*

(Poem In October)

Dylan says:

*Are you ready for the judgement?
Are you ready for that terrible swift sword?
Are you ready for Armageddon?
Are you ready for the Lord?'*

(Are You Ready? Dylan, 1987, p450)

Sadly, the prophetic final line of Dylan Thomas's finished poems is:

As I sail out to die. (Poem On His Birthday)

WOMEN

Dylan's artistic use of women is usually very personalized: he is often addressing them individually and directly, sometimes by name - Sara, Hazel, Johanna, Ramona ... Dylan Thomas, on the other hand rarely addresses women so personally. His language is much more abstruse, and even when it appears that the subject of the piece is an individual woman, it seems to me that more often than not the feelings in the poem are meant to be generalized to relationships between the sexes. Whilst Dylan's feelings are naturally internalized by receptive listeners, I always feel that the subject is very personalized to Dylan, and that we are, almost voyeuristically, eavesdropping on a very personal relationship.

In both cases, there is little doubt that sexual relationships play a vital part in their creative art, differently focused though it is. It is also true that the form and language of some of Dylan's earlier song-poems such as **Visions of Johanna**, **Temporary Like Achilles**, and **Fourth Time Around** are similar to some of Dylan Thomas's poems, as in, for example - **In the White Giant's Thigh**, **Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait**, and **Lament**. The use of metaphor and allusion, in particular, is similarly poetic.

*I stood there and hummed,
I tapped on her drum and asked her how come.*

(**Fourth Time Around**, Dylan 1987 p237)

*Strike and smoothe, for my decks are drums,
Sing through the water-spoken prow ...*

(**The Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait**, Jones 1974 pp.161)

*Well, I rush into your hallway,
Lean against your velvet door...*

*Achilles is in your alleyway,
He don't want me here,
He does brag,
He's pointing to the sky...'*

(**Temporary Like Achilles**, Dylan 1987 p234)

*He stands alone at the door of his home,
With his long-legged heart in his hand.*

(**The Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait**, Jones 1974 pp.161)

*Well, your railroad gate, you know I just can't jump it
Sometimes it gets so hard, you see
I'm just sitting here beating on my trumpet
With all these promises you left for me ...'*

(**Absolutely Sweet Marie**, Dylan 1987 p233)

*Through throats where many rivers meet, the women pray,
Pleading in the waded bay for the seed to flow
Though the names on their weed grown stones are rained away ...*

(**In the White Giant's Thigh**, Jones 1974 p2)

*We see this empty cage now corrode
Where her cape of the stage once had flowed...'*

(**Visions of Johanna**, Dylan 1983 p223)

Dylan's artistic dealings with womankind have usually been more direct, then, than Thomas's, though often, especially from *Desire* onwards, open to other, often mystical interpretations. Examples are **Isis**, **Oh Sister**, **New Pony**, **Precious Angel**, **In the Summertime**, **Let's Keep it Between Us**, **Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight**, **When the Night Comes Falling From the Sky** ...

HUMAN CONDITION

Dylan has always written songs that could be described as concerning the human condition, in the sense that Dickens wrote about Victorian London: a concern for human life, justice, fair treatment, yet recognizing that life must go on. Dylan Thomas's work is generally about the larger issues of life, death and, as we have seen, doom. There are a few poems, however, especially during the second world war, which, although drawing

wider inferences, were prompted by specific tragedies. So a few points of comparison are, I think, instructive as to where both Dylans are coming from.

Dylan first:

*A blanket of newspaper covered his head,
As the curb was his pillow, the street was his bed.
One look at his face showed the hard road he'd come
And a fistful of coins showed the money he bummed.'*

(Only A Hobo, Dylan 1987 pl 19)

*A solitary mister
Propped between trees and water
From the opening of the garden lock
That lets the trees and water enter
Until the Sunday sombre bell at dark*

*Eating bread from a newspaper
Drinking water from a chained cup...
..followed the hunchback
To his kennel in the dark.*

(The Hunchback In The Park, Jones (ed.) 1974. pp. 171)

*There's seven people dead
On a South Dakota farm
Somewhere in the distance
There's seven new people born'*

(Ballad of Hollis Brown, Dylan 1987, p92)

*Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death there is no other.*

(A Refusal To Mourn The Death, By Fire, Of a Child in London, Jones (ed.) 1974 pp.192)

In summary, then, the two Dylans share many creative aspects, whilst it is also true that they have significant differences. I hope this piece may have stimulated interest in their interconnections and raised some questions that you might wish to pursue by reading/listening to Dylan Thomas.

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 Thomas C 2 pl, 3 p3, 6 p6, 7 pl25, 10 p87, 13 p56, 16 p6, 17 p57.
 18 pl24, 19 pl29, 21 p6.

The following interview took place - (in a Dylan/Nelson fashion?) - via fax. (September 1993) The only omissions are concerned with the details of sending/receiving via the faxes.

WHY WRITE

AM *Let's start with the basics: Why write? What was the first thing you remember writing, and can you remember how it felt when you'd finished it?*

PW I was always inclined towards writing and publishing, not sure why, put out my first dittoed newspaper (*The Sunlight Herald*) when I was barely eight years old, and was already pegged as a future professional writer when I graduated from sixth grade. It's the form of expression that made itself available to me--no good at art, no aptitude for acting or music (I took guitar lessons from Spider John Koerner for a few weeks)--I got good feedback for my efforts, attention and praise from adults (and even peers sometimes), and I'm sure that was a big factor. I remember in high school once formulating some idea about the purpose in life being experience, digestion, and expression, and I do think for those of us who produce work in the creative or communicative fields there is a kind of compulsion about expression, a need not just for attention (although that's certainly part of it) but for getting these feelings and thoughts *out*, as in that Dylan line I quote so much, "I might go insane if it couldn't be sprung." And then after awhile (or maybe right from the start) it becomes a companion, also, someone to talk to and in a funny sense someone to listen to too, writers are kept company by their own writing voices, a voice most of 'em don't hear I think except when they're in the act. I know that even now I get uncomfortable if kept from the act of writing for too long (how long "too long" is depends a lot on whether I have a particular project that's percolating or that I'm in the middle of). Irritable, out of sorts, no fun to be around. So I write for a lot of reasons, but perhaps the strongest of these is that, once engaged, I'm driven to by some internal demon. This need is more basic and real than any highfaluting "purpose" I might dream up.

AM *OK, so why Dylan in particular and rock music in general?*

PW Well, circumstances directed me towards being someone who writes about music (combined with a keen interest and natural enthusiasm), insofar as my "rock and roll magazine" came along at the right time and got an enthusiastic reception...it was too much fun for me to stop doing it, and what's more it gave me a sense of purpose and identity at a time when I greatly needed one. But then I drifted away from music writing, and eventually came back to it, not through circumstances this time primarily but, again, an inner need, in a sense I invented a language in order to do this work, and it's a language that happens to work well for me, I can talk about all sorts of things that matter to me in the course of writing about music in my particular way. As for Dylan in particular, I first listened to Dylan in August 1963 (was thrilled by **Davey Moore** at a Pete Seeger concert a month earlier however) and first saw him perform in October 1963, when I was 15. The first time I remember writing about him or about music for that matter was a long track-by-track review (got my basic style right at the beginning) of *Bringing It All Back Home* written in the spring of 1965. I turned it in as a creative writing assignment and got scorn from my English teacher (I think he made me write something else); I remember I also gave a copy of the piece to Larry McCombs, a friend of mine from science fiction fandom who had started a folk music fanzine called *Folkin' Around*. He didn't publish the review, but I was soon doing a (mostly white blues) column for him called **Not Fade Away**, and had one of the thrills of my young life when my first column, a long review of *Snaker's Here*, elicited an enthusiastic and supportive letter from my hero, Dave "Snaker" Ray.

Dylan's key role in my development as a music writer can also be seen in the fact that the earliest piece of music writing I did that really felt successful to me, the moment where I felt I found my voice (and, therefore, the earliest piece in my collection *Outlaw Blues*), was the cover story of *Crawdaddy!* 4, my July 1966 essay about *Blonde on Blonde* entitled **Understanding Dylan**. Like my later piece *Dylan--What Happened?*, this title was meant to reflect the need or question I felt coming from other people--in a sense my intention was to elucidate why "understanding" Dylan was beside the point. Anyway, that piece was some kind of breakthrough, for the first time I really felt good about my music writing as writing. And the piece was well received. It was reprinted in *Hit Parader* and as the introduction to a Dylan songbook. People were responding to me like I had something to say that wasn't necessarily being said somewhere else. Most encouraging. That article also kept *Crawdaddy!* alive, because I was broke and not too motivated by the response to the magazine up to that point, and then with \$100 I earned by writing a "bio" for Simon & Garfunkel, I mimeographed the fourth issue of *Crawdaddy!* on a friend's mimeo, with a printed cover (Dylan photo with bass guitar from the "Sooner or Later" ad in

Billboard I think, later used in a Fender ad), and a couple of acquaintances hitch-hiked with me to the Newport Folk Festival (I was living in Cambridge Mass), we slept on the ground and sold copies of **Crawdaddy!** at 25 cents apiece and managed to sell 400 copies or so that weekend. And I met Jac Holzman of Elektra who liked the magazine and took out an ad in the next issue. So I was stoked, and **Crawdaddy!** was off and running, and I knew at the time that it was mostly because we had Dylan on the cover at the right moment.

AM And so....

PW Um, as for your question, well, Dylan because I loved his music and found I had a lot to say about it. That really hasn't changed over the years. I'm thinking of putting together a collection of my Dylan essays, including **Dylan--What Happened?** and the **Crawdaddy!** pieces and other reviews and articles I've written over the years, maybe it'll give me a little breathing room because I don't want to start on **Volume 3 of Performing Artist** yet. Dylan inspires me, there's always a mystery in the quality of his work and in the impact it has on me and others. The same might be true for someone writing about Duke Ellington or Beethoven or Van Gogh or Shakespeare or Martha Graham, you find yourself writing about the nature of art and that means the nature of human experience, it's a good subject I think. As good as baseball or royalty or whatever else there is to write about.

And rock music--you know, it could be jazz, but in my case rock and roll or whatever you want to call it is the music I know and have focused my attention on. There's a lot to say about it, as long as I stick to what really moves and inspires me, and try to listen deeply before I write ("know my song well...").

AM *The story of **Crawdaddy!** is pretty well known, you document its genesis very well in **Heart of Gold** (pp61-62, WCS books paperback)*

*And something else - it wasn't just love for the music - I wanted to start a magazine. And I'd read in a (sf) "fanzine"....that what you need most of all is a subject that a lot of people are into that nobody is doing a magazine about. I read that & believed it & even mentioned it to some people in Cambridge in the summer of '65 before I went to Swarthmore, when a folk music paper called **Broadside** was the best-read publication in town, that somebody ought to start a magazine about rock 'n' roll. I couldn't do it 'cause I was about to go off to college and get involved in that, but whoever did pick up the idea would meet with certain success.*

*The common question from this is normally along the lines off: 'Was the phenomenal success of **Rolling Stone** just outside your grasp here because you elected to go to college? I must admit, though, that I'm more intrigued by the first sentence in that passage from **Heart Of Gold**. It reads as though the primary aim was to start a magazine, its subject secondary.*

PW I started **Crawdaddy!** at the end of my first semester of college, and never finished the second semester, so it wasn't a matter of college getting in my way. And it's true that starting **Crawdaddy!** was a reflection of my interest in publishing a magazine more or less equally with my enthusiasm for the music. The two things came together for me at that point and really couldn't be separated--wow, here's this exciting thing I could do, like I had a vision and started chasing after it. And at first I was floundering around, writing reviews of singles that tried to predict whether the song would be a hit or not, because I'd been reading the trade magazines I guess.

It took a while to find out what **Crawdaddy!** wanted to be--really it was the Dylan article in #4 that gave me the clue. And the news column, which I think started in #5. But my ambition was not to make money or to be famous--my ambition was to play, to be a part of things. Jann Wenner of **Rolling Stone**, which came along in Nov. 67 (**Crawdaddy!** started in January 66), definitely had an ambition to create the new **Time** or **Newsweek**, and so from the beginning he was headed in a somewhat different direction. My impulses were more along the lines of the underground press, I admired the **San Francisco Oracle** and Boston's **Avatar**, by 1967 I was smoking grass and taking LSD and taking part in political demonstrations just like the musicians and the people listening to the music. I wasn't really a business person. I had to be to keep the magazine going, and it was tough (I was 17 when I started it), and I did it poorly but just well enough to always get the next issue out somehow.

Anyway, I would never have had **Rolling Stone's** success even if I'd wanted it, because that was a reflection of a special gift or talent that Jann Wenner had and has that I don't have, having to do with

business and running a magazine and tapping into what the public will buy etc. Just something different than what I was up to. I was a natural hippie. I wanted to be a part of whatever was exciting and important to me, I wanted to write my own way and publish people whose writing excited me, even when it irritated and alienated much of the readership.

AM *Can you remember the buzz when the first issue of **Crawdaddy!** came out? Whilst we're on the subject, what was the reason for resurrecting **Crawdaddy!**? And is the buzz the same?*

PW The new **Crawdaddy!** is more similar to the original than I realized when I first started it. Basically, I started **Crawdaddy!** again because I felt like writing a really long piece about R.E.M.'s **Automatic for the People** and I couldn't think of anywhere to get it published. It sounded like fun and I convinced myself it might help publicize my new book (**Rock and Roll: The 100 Best Singles**) and next thing I knew I'd announced it in the last issue of the **PKDS Newsletter** and was writing an essay about six albums I'd been listening to, including R.E.M. and **Good As I Been to You**. And right away, even before I put out the first issue, the response I got was encouraging and surprising, basically along the lines of "we've needed something like this." So I began to realize that diving into the personal impact of a new album and really talking about it apart from the never-ending business of music is something that isn't done much, and really it's just what I set out to do and did do with **Crawdaddy!** the first time around. The idea I had then was that these new records coming out were something that people like me felt very connected to, and by writing about them one had the opportunity to write in a very intense and personal way and hold people's attention because there was a common interest uniting us, the reader is also listening to the new Dylan album or (in 1966) Beatles album or Jefferson Airplane album and is interested in what someone else feels when they hear it. I saw it as a pre-existing community of listeners that could be tapped into, and the possibility of building bridges, breaking through the solitariness of listening to a record and letting people know that someone else was also having these intense experiences.

In 1966 there was no publication in the U.S. that wrote about new rock music "seriously," that is as something important to our lives. What's surprising to me is that now that rock journalism is a big established business, there's still something missing, still a funny kind of a gap that allows my particular way of writing to find a niche. It doesn't mean the new **Crawdaddy!** is going to be big in any sense--my intention is to keep the same scruffy format, no ads, stapled pages, no longer than 14 pages most of the time, mostly written by me. I have about 500 subscriptions now and would be thrilled to see that grow...I know there are enough interested readers out there so that I could have a few thousand subscriptions, and that would really work out. Right now I'm not sure how to reach those people, or even how to make sure the present subscribers renew, but anyway the challenge is to stick to my vision, once again, and not try to write what I think the audience wants. I do get the occasional letter from readers that indicates that there's something going on here that really connects for them.

AM *On a personal note, my first contact with your name, with your editorship, was in another context altogether. I was in London (for the Wembley 84 show, I suspect) and I heard about a Philip K. Dick Appreciation Society from my good friend Dave Wingrove. Would you mind telling us a bit about how that got started.*

PW The Philip K. Dick Society and its Newsletter were started in 1983, the year after Dick died, as a way to make contact with his readers, give them information about newly published books and thus help make it possible for small presses to publish those books (by creating a reachable market), provide a visible place for people to get in touch with the Estate, lay the groundwork for publication of Dick's letters and unpublished novels, provide information to people who would promote Dick's work by writing about him in the press or elsewhere etc. I came up with the idea and proposed it to the Estate, run by Dick's daughter Laura, and she hired me as Literary Executor to publish the Newsletter and serve as a consultant and co-ordinator of posthumous publications and spin-offs (operas, plays, etc).

AM *Do you see many parallels between Dick and Dylan? I love both of them so much but, other than that they both work in genres that are considered "low brow" and have created the most compelling art and asked the most serious questions, I don't really feel a strong connection.*

PW I don't necessarily see a lot of parallels between Dick and Dylan, though I'm sure people could come up with some. For me they're just artists whose work has touched me deeply and continues to connect for me, so much so that I've ended up writing about them and have at this point become identified as a sort of "expert" on the person's work. I'd rather be a fan than an expert, though.

DIRECT DYLAN

- AM *Can you tell us what you remember feeling about hearing **Like A Rolling Stone** for the first time - in a Manhattan Police Station! (As referred to in **Heart Of Gold**)?*
- PW I wasn't actually hearing **Like a Rolling Stone** for the first time in that police station, it was already a hit at that point, but it was certainly an experience of having it reach out to me in strange circumstances. I don't actually remember the first time I heard it-- maybe on the radio in incomplete form, and then I bought a copy of the single the day it arrived in the store.
- AM *You write at length in **Heart Of Gold** of the way **Hard Rain** was dismissed and the tragedy of an audience only wanting old reality and growing deaf to the vigorous, innovative artist. This struck me most forcibly when that show was broadcast in the UK. I remember watching it with my parents who had to get out of bed to see it, but were pretty impressed. I remember the power, the fun and the sheer quality of the music. There was a glorious sound on that day. Next day I remember the newspapers panning the show and pillorying Dylan. This was my first experience of this. I would say that most Dylan fans, at least, would acclaim the album's virtues now, but do you think there are any albums currently suffering from "deaf ears" from a "generation clinging desperately to old truths"?*
- PW I had some big arguments with other rock writers and Dylan fans about **Hard Rain** (record and tv film) when it came out. People couldn't hear the merit of the sound Dylan and the band had created, the innovative musical ideas, the intensity of the performance. Some people still can't, of course. As for currently underrated Dylan albums, it depends on who we're talking about. All Dylan albums since **Blood** are underrated by the public in general, and even by many people who would still call themselves Dylan fans. Even **Oh Mercy** and **The Bootleg Series** have been heard by only a small fragment of their potential audience, I mean people who would love them if they listened a few times in the right frame of mind. As for among us fans, everyone has different favorites, and even while people criticize me for being too positive about too much of Dylan's work, they'll still shake their heads at my seeming lack of appreciation for **Street-Legal** or **New Morning**. There is no absolute truth here, obviously; it's a matter of taste and personal preference (but needless to say, I was delighted by Paula Radice's comments on **Where Are You Tonight?** in **Homer 9**. At least I know I'm not crazy, or not alone in my craziness). In general, I think the kind of Dylan fans who read **Homer** and the other zines have learned to listen to Dylan in a way that makes them fairly open to new sounds and ventures on his part--to the extent that we realize that even when we have a negative reaction to something at first, we may end up liking it a lot once it breaks through our defenses. See my praise of the "long endings" (sometimes they're a mess, but other times they can be truly transcendent) of '92-'93, in **On the Tracks #1**.
- AM *Is there a danger of this being used as an excuse for poor quality output? (The 'No-one likes it but that's because Bob is so far ahead of the game it takes years before he's properly appreciated' syndrome?)*
- PW Certainly the "Bob can do no wrong" state of mind can lead to another kind of deafness on the part of us, his fans. But judgment as a way of life is overrated. I don't care for **Budokan** and don't think it represents Dylan very well, but I have to acknowledge the listener who chooses to listen to it carefully and with fresh ears and who is as a result genuinely moved by what he or she hears. Even bad Picasso is full of interest and resonance for a student and fan of Picasso's oeuvre. After a while who knows what "good" and "bad" really mean? In my books I try to distinguish what I truly recognize as great work from other stuff that maybe is very good, maybe is pretty bad, maybe is brilliant but I can't hear it or haven't yet. In other words, I try to tell the truth about what I hear, which requires that I listen with an open mind, and, if I'm writing about something, usually I have to listen a lot, and at a time when I'm able to give my attention to what I'm hearing. I don't like to have music going in the background, actually. I probably listen to music a lot less than many of my readers. One of the great things about this job, writing about music I like, is that it gives me an excuse to spend some time listening intently, to really dive into a particular song or album or tape or concert tour. And finally I can't write about a record, or a concert tape, with any energy or conviction or even much intelligence, unless I find myself truly moved by it at the present moment in a deep and immediate way. So the question of whether something is "good" or "bad" is mostly a confusing one. One thing I keep in mind is that I have often disliked things only to learn to appreciate them at another time, which means anytime I'm negative about something it could well be my ignorance speaking. I'm on much safer ground when I write about what I truly like. That doesn't change, or if it does it's not so much that I was "wrong" as that my situation or tastes have altered. But hopefully what I wrote when I was feeling that enthusiasm continues to have truth and insight in it. (I did try to rekindle my enthusiasm for the early Jefferson Airplane stuff recently, without success, except that **Volunteers** still strikes me as an excellent album.)

AM *You are known for being a great enthusiast, are there any areas of Dylan's work that you heartily dislike?*

PW The difficult thing is that we can be righteous and criticize Dylan (or anyone) for sloppy work, say, and be right in one sense, and yet a broader view may well indicate that that sloppiness also is what makes possible so much of the greatness of this particular artist. **Another Side of Bob Dylan** is a very flawed record, really. But it isn't a bad record. It's wonderful. I certainly wouldn't want it not to have been recorded or released. And to talk of him recording it "better" is so hypothetical as to be almost meaningless. And in the end we'll probably have to say something similar about **Down in the Groove**—it's not wonderful, but it has some wonderful moments, and if it hadn't been recorded those moments would not be available to us. And if Dylan censored his impulse to record, say, **Silvio**, that willingness to censor and be self-critical might also deny us **Blind Willie McTell** or **Good As I Been to You** or **Series of Dreams**. Because for the artist these are not rational matters, I think, but emotional. They have to do with one's relationship with oneself, and with the muse.

AM *I remember reading that Dylan was delighted with **What Happened?** and gave some out as Christmas presents. What do you know about that?*

PW Shortly after **Dylan-What Happened?** was published, Barbara Moldt from Dylan's office in Santa Monica called me and arranged to buy 17 copies. I figured that was for the attorneys, since I hadn't asked permission to quote lyrics. Then a few weeks later she called back and ordered another 100 copies. I knew Dylan didn't have that many attorneys, so that was when I began to think he might have found some value in the book. What he did with them, if anything, I don't know, but I do know he encouraged Howard Alk to read the book. And a year later, Dylan's Warfield stand in November 1980, Dylan did let me know during our conversations backstage that he was impressed by certain aspects of the book and that it had meant a lot to him. He never said this very directly, of course, and when he read **One Year Later** he regretted (I have this from Howard) having encouraged me at all. And I would agree that **One Year Later** is compromised in a sense by my awareness that Dylan would read it, so that I found myself perhaps talking to him instead of to my usual imaginary listener. Writing Dylan essays to be read by Dylan is not a good idea. You (or anyway I) end up sounding like his mother, or somebody's mother. ("Don't forget your galoshes! Why didn't you release **Blind Willie McTell**?")

AM *You talk of meeting Dylan in 1980, how many times have you met him and which was the most interesting meeting?*

PW I met Dylan on February 24, 1966, and talked with him for a few hours in his hotel room in Philadelphia (he had his people invite me after reading the first two issues of **Crawdaddy!**, which I'd sent to the theater); I was his guest backstage that night and the next night. The next time we met was at the Warfield, Nov. 10, 1980, backstage after the show; I was able to spend time with him (several hours each night, though of course there were other people hanging out as well) for a total of four evenings during that set of concerts. He told me about **Caribbean Wind** when we spoke the first night, and later said if I wanted to hear anything particular I could call his valet Bob Meyers before the show on a day when I was going to be there, and make my request. So I did, on November 12th, and of course I requested **Caribbean Wind**. The other particularly memorable moment (still can't remember all the best things he said, actually) that week was when he read me the lyrics of **Every Grain of Sand**. The next and only other time I saw him was a quick hello and handshake backstage (between the bus and the building, actually) at Shoreline, June 1988.

DIRECT HOMER

AM *What is your favourite part of **Homer**?*

PW My favorite part is probably **Focus On**, which can be a lot of fun and quite stimulating as well.

AM *What is your least favourite part of **Homer**?*

PW My least favorite? Nothing comes to mind, except that it embarrasses and frustrates me that I don't get around to reading all of it (same with **The Telegraph**), not because I don't want to but because I'm always distracted by something, like giving long-winded responses to interview questions. Oh well. But don't make it shorter on my behalf.

AM What would you like to see **Homer** start covering/doing?

PW In fact, I have no special requests because what I like especially about **Homer** is its idiosyncratic nature, its originality, its willingness to follow the editor's impulses and be a large, energetic, enthusiastic mess. Very soulful. Keep on as long as you are so moved. I appreciate the letter column, and the clippings, and Michael Gray...a table of contents and continuous numbering would be nice, but it wouldn't be **Homer**, would it?

AM Er, well, no! Let's move on to something else, shall we?

ON ANOTHER PLANE ENTIRELY

AM In **Heart of Gold** you ask:

"And isn't that at least one of the places where dead people live - in the memories of their friends? Maybe "the spirit world" is just another name for the collective unconscious."

In the one long and serious discussion I've had with Joe M^CShane (you may have seen photos of him in the last issue) he answered my complete lack of belief in life after death by stating that such memories constitute a person's "spirit" - it is the one definition I've ever heard that I could acquiesce to. On the other hand, I'd just call it "people's memories" where you (and he) I suspect mean something more. Any comments?

PW Uh, the collective unconscious, whatever it is, is something other than "people's memories" for sure. Or it's unconcious memories, but that creates a very broad field, which as the word "collective" suggests is in some way "out there" rather than in here. If ya wanna be scientific, those memories are in the DNA, but I think there's more to it than that (well of course there is, like art, music, history etc, but more than that too), and even in terms of DNA I think Sheldrake's morphogenic fields or whatever point in the direction of something that exists and influences outside of or beyond just the DNA that's in your or my particular cells. We are part of a fabric. What this has to do with life after death, or even life before death, is open to endless late-night speculation after a few beers or a joint, right? I sure loved **Hard Times** and **Emotionally Yours** and **God Knows** in Portland a couple of weeks ago...

END OF PART ONE

AM *I'm going to conclude part one of the interview here; part two concentrates on **The Performing Artist** books. If you think this is a shameless attempt to force those who are due to renew their subscriptions to do so pronto, well just let me tell you thater, you could well be right.*

Crawdaddy!

Crawdaddy! is available from **Crawdaddy!**, Box 611, Glen Ellen CA 95442 USA, \$16 for 4 issues airmail overseas, \$12 surface, or \$4 for single issues. Please indicate if you wish [*Trust me, you do wish it*] #1, which contains Paul's review of **Good As I Been to You**. Current issue is #3, focusing on the Beach Boys box set, **Good Vibrations**. You can also order various of Paul's other books from this address, including **Heart Of Gold** which is mentioned throughout this interview. Please send IRC for full list.

*It may puzzle some of you why I proudly claim to publish every letter sent in and then you find that your missive has not appeared in the next issue. The answer lies in sheer bad planning on my part! I either forget to include some because I file them in the wrong place or I call a halt to the letters section just before more letters arrive! I will try to improve on this in future; in the meantime, in what is becoming a normal occurrence, I start this section with letters in response to **issue eight** that properly belonged in the last issue. I'll start with Carol Bedford's letter which, actually, was in response to **issue seven** but arrived the week I was posting issue eight out and has just been discovered incorrectly filed away.*

CAROL BEDFORD

I enjoyed Homer 7 immensely. I just wanted to say that despite being 41 and therefore of the age group who emphasize Dylan's writing ability above all else, I liked the new album. I think the record company, press and public should come to the conclusion that the knowledge of songs and music of someone in Dylan's position is to be valued, treasured. After all, these people won't be with us forever and, once they go, many older songs will disappear.

I agree with you, **Hard Times** is wonderful. I also loved **Tomorrow Night** and **Arthur McBride**. (Thanks so much for the lyrics. This enlarged my enjoyment of the song.) But it is **Froggie Went A-Courtin'** that I want to get maudlin about.

When I was about ten my dad bought me an album that I'd love to find again. It had a purple background with a woman (black hair & wearing a white dress) and child sitting on a bed. It was called **Songs Of Enchantment** and had **Froggie Went A-Courtin'** on it. I can't remember the woman's name but she was a popular main-stream singer of the time. I was wondering if any of your readers would know of it - the whole album was classic children's songs.

Anyway, I saw Dylan on the concert for Clinton's inauguration and fear that he will be the one artist that the papers will criticize for turning up. (I've seen no press reports so I'm writing in the dark here. No doubt Issue 8 will fill in my gaps.)

Gramsci wrote extensively on hegemony and most people accept that it's just a matter of time until the avant-garde is incorporated into the dominant system (i.e. the dominant ideological, political, economic system). I, too, found it generally depressing that a music once questioning of society (rock & roll) is now so accepted as to be endorsed by the President but, as I said, it was just a matter of time. (As Dylan himself did in various 1985 quotes about "the new music" - see the **Biograph** booklet and **Rolling Stone** piece by David Fricke.)

What I am not sure that people realize - which also has to do with time, i.e. the fact that Dylan is 51¹ not 21 now - is the strong desire all these artists would have to be endorsed by a President. Dylan had said he wanted to meet Ronald Reagan, and Michael Jackson had performed at the White House for the Reagans, along with Frank Sinatra. And don't forget Dylan's endorsement of Bing Crosby, Gershwin and other main-stream singers. (AND Dylan was peeved that, after quoting from his songs, Carter didn't invite him to the inauguration.) I have not lived in America for 23 years, nor visited since 1978 - I am one of those Americans who don't like America. (Again age may be involved, i.e. Vietnam etc.) But I realized this country never realized the attraction Americans had to the Reagans. Even the comy saying "Do one for the Gripper" has a resonance for Americans. It is not just the superficial appeal of Hollywood, but cultural significance of various components contained in those films have tentacles that reach deep in the consciousness of the country. For instance, believe it or not, no matter how succesful Dylan is - he'll never get over not being captain of the football team in High School! Similarly, no female accepts not having been a cheerleader. Silly, I know but the effects of public school in this country pale into insignificance beside the social framework of US High Schools! (Madonna's whole career can be seen as a reaction against her earlier unpopularity in High School.)

So, while Dylan will be singled out for attending there is no way that a man of his age would not attend or be pleased to do so. None of this even touches upon the fact that he has children. Just as an aside, while Diana Ross and most of those at the end were so show business as to make most people think of Mickey Mouse and want to throw up, Dylan maintained (I felt) his dignity. Of course, being a fan I'm likely to see him in a good light but his dress and manner were certainly not cloying. What really pissed me off was the Clinton's and Gores chatting and passing papers through part of his performance!

¹ This was written before his last birthday.

What also got me was ole Tipper Gore sitting there listening to any of this music after her many attempts to muzzle the entire industry with her stickers! I'm sure Clinton will prove as much of a disappointment as anyone who holds the office but at least it can be said 'The Times They Are A-Changin'! At last America has gotten to Vietnam and away from World War III! I'd best go, this is turning into a political treatise. Just wanted to let you know that the album is much enjoyed.

Also, I wanted to say again that *Homer, the slut* is, I feel, the best fanzine on Dylan. Your fanzine, with the discussion of the songs and collection of the articles actually gives the most news and information. It is so nice to see the main articles reprinted so the readers can make up their own minds. And your magazine, alone among the others, gives the fans/admirers a chance to have a voice. Surely that's what it's all about instead of individual aggrandizement.

P.S. Just a thought, it could be argued that Michael Jackson is inconsistent by supporting Reagan, a Republican and Clinton, a Democrat. At least Dylan appears consistent with Carter and Clinton. There is an established link between Jews and Democrats. The Democrats do more for civil rights and welfare issues. But, just as some Jews in Germany voted for Hitler and blacks in America support Governor Wallace, Dylan was not adverse to meeting Reagan, a Republican. So, like Jackson, he may simply be flattered.

The reason stars back certain politicians is complex. Much was made of Elvis meeting Nixon and being made an honorary FBI drug-enforcement agent. Few cited Elvis's main reason: his dislike of the Beatles (who he saw as major drug-takers) as they knocked him out the charts. Just as he made comments against Lennon, so John insisted he had been emasculated by going into the army.

And if business concerns seem too mundane to influence one's political affectations, just recall that Frank Sinatra's almost manic ravings against rock & roll (Elvis especially) arose from the fact that Elvis kept him from the charts.

Hello Carol, and apologies for missing this letter last time around, it was simply due to its arrival just before issue eight went out. I filed it as 'printed' at some point in February. We have had long discussions on your main points above so I won't go over them all again, this is not to deprive any of the readers of your further thoughts on hegemony and rock (Dylan, in particular) as you have now written a lengthy article on the piece. I still have doubts about the Clinton inauguration - see my answer to Phil Rigby - but I did stress in issue nine that it was probably difficult for a non-American to comprehend the whole ethos of the situation.

JOHN JOYCE

I feel obliged to write to you, albeit briefly, in relation to *Homer, the slut*, and also, my views on my one visit to Hammersmith this year, for the Monday night concert - well, I can't help it if I'm lucky!

With regards to *Homer*, all I can say is that it is an absolutely first-class publication, put together with great care and affection - the honesty and love shines through. Keep up the great work!

Well, it is nearly a week now since that Monday night concert and I still cannot remember all the best things that he said, but I can remember my wife swooning to *Tomorrow Night*, I can remember Bob going to pick up a harmonica, to rapturous cheers, and then putting it down again, not playing it, also to great cheers! I can remember some great drumming, some of it, I thought, so akin to Ken Buttrey on *Blonde On Blonde*. I can remember a tender and beautiful *Simple Twist Of Fate*, in fact his diction was so clear (and it's true those *Blood On The Tracks* songs come over so well in concert). I can remember saying to my six year old son, on leaving Newcastle, that I would ask Bob to play his favourite song *Mr. Tambourine Man* and lo and behold he did, and it simply amazed me yet again, why do I never tire of it? I can remember his dancing spell on me for *Cat's In The Well* and *Highway 61* and *Everything Is Broken*. I can remember the high drama of I & I and he sang that melody to *Jim Jones* just like all tough sailors do when they are far away at sea! I can remember the exquisiteness of *She Belongs To Me*, while *Don't Think Twice, It's Alright* proved he was being as good as he has been to me.

On a night like this Bob was impeccable, his singing was so clear, his phrasing, his timing?!? all on song. In such terms, I still can't remember all, but to paraphrase again, I'll say, 'Bob, I'll remember you, when I've forgotten all the rest.'

Keep on opening that door, *Homer*.

Thanks for the very kind words, John. God only knows how I missed your letter out last time, I was so pleased with your comments I typed it up straight away. Imagine picking the Monday night as the only one to go to. Astonishing. I believe, however, that if you'd picked any other night you'd have been almost as pleased and found it hard to believe people saying Monday (or Thursday) were so much better. Just read the following letter's view of the much maligned Sunday show.

SIMON BARRAS



I'm not too hot at the written word but I'm going to have a go and jot down my thoughts on a couple of points.

First of all I've just come back from seeing Bob live at Hammersmith on Sunday night (7th). It was the first time I've seen Bob live and my word what a breathtaking performance, the vocals were amazing, this guitar work was superlative and he looked brilliant. (Was this the same man everyone said was close to the grave?) Okay, I suppose I am a little bit biased but anyone who was there must surely agree with me. A stunning show delivered in full Dylan power. I'm so glad I was there. Cheers, Bob - you're wicked.

My second point is a briefish reply to Carl Ewen's letter in *Homer* 8. Something about Donald Duck covering **Arthur M^cBride** I think?

The unique thing about Bob Dylan and the unique thing about *Good As I Been To You* is the way in which Bob manages to manipulate his voice to suit the differing style of all the album's songs - which I think makes Mr. Dylan's voice quite amazing. This is what makes Bob the best male vocalist both past and present. His voice has matured so brilliantly over the years. Am I the only person who realizes this? Am I crazed? Should my wife call for the men in the white coats? (Janet was there with me on the 7th and thought Bob was fantastic too!) Or should I call for the man in the long black coat to discuss this subject further!?

So Carl, switch your hi-fi on and listen to a genius at work.

Many thanks for issue 8 of *Homer*, another excellent read and, Andrew, were you the guy at the front on Sunday with the feather in his cap?

Hello Simon, there is always something very special about the first time you see Bob live, it will live with you forever. I was not the guy at the front with the feather in his cap (I was four seats to his left, I think) but I'm very flattered that you thought it might be me.

STEVE KING

Well it has been a while, has it not?! I have managed to get hold of the issues of *Homer*, *the slut* I hadn't seen properly. Namely, the special subscriber issue 1, plus issues 5,6,7 and 8. The 'zine certainly has come a long way since those first few issues. I especially enjoyed the dialogue between Mark Carter and Mike Jackson. The **Focus On** is still, I think, essential. The cuttings, even with, perhaps, some duplication with *ISIS* is always worthwhile.

*Yes, it has been a while, Steve. very good to hear from you again, you were so enthusiastic when *Homer* started I was concerned at you 'leaving the fold'.*

LUCAS STENSLAND

I hope my last letter didn't discourage you in any way, I was angry, sorry, (not that you even probably remember it). After three long years of listening, thinking and questioning, I've decided to dub *under the red sky* a good album. I used to dismiss it as Lucky Wilbury's first solo outing, oh, I was so much younger then. You hardly speak of *Oh Mercy*, why? It's my second favourite Dylan album. Let me also add that *Good As I Been To You* is my fifth. I hope you don't think less of my opinion now. I believe that the gruffy, lower, mystic vocal style he adopted since 1988's *Traveling Wilburys Vol. One* is his best to date. When two of my five favourite Dylan albums were recorded in the past four years, we must conclude that he is nowhere near slumming.

Bob should have recorded *Born In Time* for the *Oh Mercy* album. The album should have started with *Most of the Time* and ended with *Born In Time*. And the album should have been called "From Time to Time", better, eh? Well, maybe not. I subscribe to *On The Tracks*. I love it very much, but it still does not have the personal touch of *Homer, the slut*. Reading *Homer* is like visiting a friend; Andrew adding in a little dab of conversation here and there, makes it more fun. Though you should put your own comments in in the *Bits & Bobs* section. What exactly are you doing for *On The Tracks*?

Just some more free thinking here. Why don't you and other collectors get your tapes together and remaster them, and then get Columbia to remaster a Never Ending Tour album? Pick just the superb performances and reassemble Bob's acceptance as a stage performer for the '90s. It wouldn't be that difficult, would it? I thought I'd let you know my five favourite Dylan albums, so you know what kind of fan I am.

Blood On The Tracks

Oh Mercy (this makes you angry, I bet)

Blonde on Blonde

Street Legal (this makes you angry, I bet)

Good As I Been To You (this makes you pissed off, I bet).

1992-93 must be a musical highlight of my life. So many great albums from great artists: Bob, Neil, Willie, Bruce, Lou Reed and Daniel Lanois. That's probably in fondness order, too. All the issues have been great, truly, no bullshitting you.

I can remember all your letters, Lucas, and I can assure you that none of them unduly 'discouraged' me. I'm glad you've now taken to under the red sky. I wasn't aware I was 'neglecting' Oh Mercy - if I have been it is not intentional. Certainly it could have seemed like this in the second and third issues of Homer, as I was 'defending' under the red sky from what I saw as misdirected attacks from those who seemed to want an Oh Mercy part two. I think Oh Mercy is pretty damn wonderful, in particular the three consecutive songs beginning with Ring Them Bells, and the glorious ending track, Shooting Star.

I'm even more glad to read your description of what reading Homer, the slut is like. It seems I am successfully conveying the intended impression. My Bits & Bobs section was only omitted last time around due to the way the days leading up to publication suddenly lost an average ten hours a day!

As to your top five - why you think any choice you make should make me angry, I do not know. I find Good As I Been To You at number five incomprehensible, but it is your choice after all! (In addition Mark Carter, for one, places Oh Mercy higher than you do and, if Dylan is like most other artists in preferring his most recent output, he'd probably find more favour with your top five than mine.)

I've already listed my top ten in a previous Homer and I think I had Street Legal at number ten but that could have been Oh Mercy or under the red sky or any of a number of others. What has not - and I suspect now never will be - changed is my top four of Blood On The Tracks, Blonde on Blonde, Highway 61 Revisited and Bringing It All Back Home. In many ways I think the amount we agree on is more remarkable than what you anticipated we'd disagree on.

I'm a contributing editor to On The Tracks and, so far, my contributions and editing have been flawless! Most of the artists you mention in the last paragraph did much better things in 1989 in my opinion - but I know what you mean.

P.S. what makes you think I'm a tape collector?!

GUY BORG - TWO LETTERS



How's it going? Many thanks for **Homer 9**, it was interesting to read other views on Hammersmith, and I agree that my initial misgivings were probably more theoretical than practical. Actually I now look back a lot more fondly on the shows; maybe it just took me some time to accept the direction Bob's going in at the moment. I loved the **Fleadh** performance. The band sound benefits greatly from Bob playing electric guitar and Tony Garnier electric bass. Also was it my imagination or had those instrumental passages been restricted? Certainly interest was maintained throughout, and I thought that Bob seemed to be less weary and more committed - he really seemed to enjoy it. The highlights for me were **Mobile**, **Big Girl Now**, (which I'd never seen live before), and **It Ain't Me, Babe** which was even more glorious than at Hammersmith the voice and phrasing astonished me. I certainly can't recall hearing a better performance of the song.

How's things? I'm just about recovering from an almost surreal trip to Europe - something like four days in hell and one evening in heaven. You just don't know what it's like to share a lift with a London Calling Music rep who informs you, 2 hours before Bob's due on stage in Lyon, that he's ... er ... in Lisbon. When you're then told that the Swiss show the next day's off too, quick death or gradual intoxication become the only options you face. Thankfully I chose the latter - even if it did mean duetting with Joe M^cShane on **It Ain't Me, Babe** in a run down Lyon bar at 2 a.m.! Add to this interminable hours on a stuffy coach driven by a tortoise-impersonating Cornishman, with a viewing choice that ranged from Travelling Wilburys videos to "vintage" episodes of **Last of The Summer Wine**, and you've got something approaching your worst nightmare. But ... Bob saved the day - and, believe me, it took a lot of saving. This was the greatest Dylan performance I've been lucky enough to see. From the first note of **Hard Times**, he was utterly focussed on the job. His guitar playing was unrecognizable even from the Hammersmith shows, as was his voice - he was relishing every line. He looked relaxed and seemed to be loving it all, smiling occasionally and interacting with the audience. This seemed to me to be a return to the mood of the Hammersmith '90 shows. I won't talk about individual songs 'cos I know how much you wanted to be there yourself.

*Hi Guy, thanks for both letters. You can read my view of the (London) Fleadh in **Bits & Bobs**.*

You are, of course, correct that I "do not know what it is like" to suffer the calamity you did at Lyon, however, for Joe M^cShane's sake I have often tried. I am glad, though, that you enjoyed Berne so much. Everyone that was there seemed to think it made up for the "four days of hell" that preceded it, mind you that would be the only way you could look at it without going insane! (Thanks, too, for the Brentford fanzines.)

PAUL WRIGHT

I spoke to someone, in the hotel at Merida, in some detail regarding the reasons for the places Bob was playing in Spain and from what I could gather it very much comes down to questions of logistics, proximity of airports, relatively feasible bus rides for the next day, etc. Interestingly he did say that the San Sebastian concert was cancelled because the Mayor refused to allow the concert to go on due to the proximity of the election to the concert date. He felt Dylan was still too much of a political figure and the concert could be used as a focus for ETA trouble (which strikes me as nonsense what with certain other places Dylan plays). You may have heard that one of the Basque newspapers reported that Dylan dedicated **Baby Blue** in Waterford to Paul Hill, the IRA guy who was implicated in the mainland bombings? Of course the reporter simply had an imaginative mind but there is of course a more sinister and low angle to that kind of fabrication, especially using someone like Dylan to manipulate the minds of the younger (and older come to that) sections of the Basque community who are able to countenance the old leftist, nationalist, romantic savagery that is so much a part of Spanish politics (nice rant, eh).

The Vitoria, Huesca and Gijon shows were wonderful, in that order, although as usual it will be interesting to check out the tapes.

Thanks for the news from Spain, Paul, and I'm very pleased for you that you finally got to see Dylan in a country where people can sometimes understand you. I enjoyed the rant but cannot see too much wrong with "leftist, nationalist, romantic savagery" - in fact it conjures up most of Scotland's finest qualities for me!

GRAHAM ASHTON

Many thanks for **Homer 9**, I must apologize for making so little contribution to a magazine I like, although maybe a few of the press pieces I pick up filter through to you via Mark.

Did you get close at Finsbury Park? A small group of us established an enclave right in front of the barrier and we were doing OK until Stiff Little Fingers came on and all hell was let loose. Not being used to football crowd behaviour I was shaken, but our hard pressed group clung together as best we could and were rewarded by a magnificent performance by Bob. He seemed in high spirits, didn't seem to care that Van Morrison was annoyed by the way Bob sang **One Irish Rover**; (one of the funniest moments I've ever witnessed was at the end of the song when Bob looked around to - presumably - give a thank you to Van, only to be told by John Jackson that The Man had already walked off). Little moments like that were worth all the cramp and fatigue of standing in that crowd for 12 hours, the last 8 of them being barely able to move. As someone who's been following Bob since late '64 I'm probably getting too old for these events. Give me Hammersmith Apollo any day.

I enjoyed Buzby's write up of the Petange concert. I suspect one editorial problem you might have is that **Homer** might become too England orientated, so it's good to remember, and hear about, shows from other places. Anyway, sure you're as busy as I am, so will cut it there for now.

*Yes, I do get cuttings from you via Mark, Graham, so your conscience is eased. You do enough to 'spread the word' anyhow. You can read my comments on The London Fleadh in **Bits & Bobs**, I'll just say here that: no, I didn't get too close (I didn't reckon it was worth all the waiting, pushing and shoving etc). However I was pretty close and, interestingly, did not see **One Irish Rover** as you did. I never noticed Van was annoyed - mind you I hardly took my eyes off Dylan - and therefore have a very different memory of the duet to you. (I haven't seen a video of it yet, either.)*

Buzby's piece has come in for a lot of praise - see Elaine Owen's letter later - and I'm hoping for a similar description of her recent Spanish trip.

BERT CARTWRIGHT

Congratulations on another great issue. Keep on keepin' on. I imagine it gets tougher as time goes along. You are filling a great gap. And I particularly appreciate the cuttings which furnish me with material I would not otherwise see.

I am enclosing an article that appeared in our local paper last Sunday that I thought you might enjoy.

*Thank you very much, Bert, both for the letter of encouragement and the very fine article which readers can find reprinted in **Bits & Bobs**. It looks much better in the original broadsheet format, of course, and you must have been very pleased with it.*

PHIL RIGBY

I continue to enjoy Homer with each issue and, once again, number nine was full of interest, energy and wit. It always leaves me wanting more when I read your magazine.

I was pleased to see the thoughtful, challenging, original piece by Dave Phillips in this issue. Although I'd read this article it still retains it's appeal for me. In my view, it is a worthwhile avenue of study to hear Dylan's songs as having a spiritual dimension to them. I think that it was probably this article that convinced me of the clear influence of the Bible in Dylan's lyrics and the important work done by Bert Cartwright and others certainly bears this view out.

I am not suggesting that it is just biblical truths that Dylan expounds, because his philosophy on life has a broader landscape, I believe. But it is surely apparent in his songs that he has investigated a wide spectrum of paths leading to truth, be it the mystical, magical, spiritual or chemical. Anyway I'd like to say that *Pony Ride Past The Gate* helped to open a whole range of possibilities to my understanding of Dylan's songs.

I actually see Dylan as one of those *poets and painters* that are *protectors of the mind* mentioned in *Chimes Of Freedom*. The poets and the painters are the foot soldiers, if you like, that keep crossing that borderline which helps to broaden our individual minds. The artists, through their experience and knowledge, are shaping the universal mind, the pool of consciousness, and we, (through Bob's songs) can benefit greatly because we can dip into this pool. It has to assist our development in this sphere of existence (whilst on Earth).

So when Dylan is asked to appear at a new president's inauguration, he uses the situation to make a point, and this has nothing to do with the endorsement of any policies. When he chooses to sing *Chimes Of Freedom* the irony is irresistible. The words to this song are surely way above politics. The song encapsulates, or stops time, whereas politics is about movement, and the working out of issues or problems using time. I mean fancy having the opportunity of singing the line 'tolling for the searching ones on their speechless, seeking trail' to a bunch of talking heads (sorry, politicians).

To echo the words of that other great poet of the record groove, Leonard Cohen, 'everybody knows' including Dylan, that the game of politics is rotten and getting murkier all the time. I don't know about you, but I can't see any politician around that is working to alter this situation (was there ever such a person, I ask?) Anyway the words of *Chimes Of Freedom* read like a catalogue of the dispossessed in society but Dylan doesn't offer any solutions to their problems, he just describes the conditions in which mankind must live out their earthly existencies, but he can also perceive the greater picture, the spiritual realms encompassing this life, the 'mad, mystic hammering'. It is my belief that Dylan has always lived his life in the world but not of the world and it's on this basis that his songs are so compelling for me. As far as I am concerned Dylan's songs are constantly prompting the listener to develop our understanding of the main issues of life; beliefs, our purpose here, our destiny, etc. I therefore feel that the freedom that Dylan speaks of in songs like *Chimes Of Freedom* can only be found outside the politicians' realm. Make no mistake, Dylan can see through the masks of the politician, for they can only take from Peter and give to Paul, can't they?

I'd like to conclude with a statement that I read some time ago which helps me to frame so many of Dylan's songs. Most of them are operating within this structure, I believe:

*God exists
Every soul is a portion of God
(You are a soul, you inhabit a body)
Life is purposeful
Life is continuous
All human life operates under law
(Karma:reincarnation)
Love fulfils that law
The will of man creates his destiny
The mind of man has formative power
The answer to all problems is within the self.*

Hello Phil, glad you liked issue Nine so much; I felt it dipped a bit in comparison with 7 & 8. I sincerely thought ten would be the best yet, and I hope it is but I'm already worrying about/working on eleven so I'm - as usual - the worst judge of these things.

I'm particularly glad you liked the David Phillips piece as one of your Midland fellow citizens sent me a letter decrying its inclusion in no uncertain manner. I chose it for three reasons:

- 1 *It complimented the FOCUS ON of that issue*
- 2 *I thought there would be lots of people who had never seen it - since proven true.*
- 3 *It has some startlingly original thoughts.*

I say the last despite the fact that I hardly agree with any of his interpretations. It stimulated my ever-ailing brain cells into some kind of action and obviously did something similar for you. (Not that I'm suggesting yours needed as much of a kick-start as mine!)

As for your remarks on politicians, what are you trying to do - out-cynic the editor?! I'd go as far as to hazard a guess that there may have been one or two "working to alter the situation" at some time - not too many, though! Nowadays, in this country I cannot think of any; unless dear old Tony Benn?

If the 'freedom' in Chimes Of Freedom can only be found "outside the politicians' realm" why then sing it at a politician's presidential inauguration? I upset Carol Bedford by the remark in my last editorial too, but I can only call it the way I see it. Hell, I'd a damn sight rather have Clinton than Bush myself but...but, but, but. I was videoing Dylan's performance at the event for someone the day after Baghdad was bombed recently. I'd just watched the news on which terrified civilians were describing the carnage. I searched for the correct bit of the tape: the first images I saw were of flying machines of death being saluted by the President...wrong place... spin the tape forward - next up was an horrendous rendition of GLORY! GLORY! HALLELUJAH. Weapons of massive destructive capability, Tunes of righteousness and death and finally I find Bob singing for every misbegotten soul in the whole damn universe. I wonder if one or two of those had died the day before from one of the planes I'd just seen flying overhead?

I suspect I'm in broad agreement with your definition of what 'poets and painters' provide us with. Certainly I think they see 'a greater picture' and are in touch with a 'higher realm'. We may differ, though, inasmuch as I see what they 'tap into' as the highest realm of humanity. I have no quibble in calling this realm 'spiritual' but for me that connotes a human realm, however rarefied the air; if you are referring to a religious-mystic realm we are differing in interpretation - though not in the importance of the 'realm'.

ELAINE OWEN

Another terrific issue of Homer (No. 9) which I have just waded through. As usual, I love Bob Forryan's article, so thoroughly and so sensitively written - except that like many here among us, I'm a big fan of Angelina. So. Tell me, tall man, where would you like to be overthrown? Nuneaton or Argentina?

And I enjoyed Jim Heppell, and Mark Carter who writes very amusingly. And Buzby. A rose by any other name? I really liked her laconic, laid-back style; straightforward, and written with guts and heart and humour.

But - I'm going out of my mind, with a pain that stops and starts. I can't sleep at night for worrying about its and it's. Lately it's gone from bad to worse. I know, you didn't do it consciously. But someone's got to set it straight. I guess it must be up to me.

1 Don't Think Twice, It's Alright

(because it is the present tense of the verb 'to be'.)

2 But not, for example, and there were several:

..."February 93 certainly had it's moments"

(The correct word here is its. It is a pronoun, free of the encumbrance of an apostrophe, because there's nothing to apostrophise. It is not two words abbreviated.

We could look at it another way. Think of a pig's tail.

Its (pronoun) tail is curly.

It's (verb -it is) a curly tail.

Of course, I could just screw up this stuff, put on a Dylan tape, shoot a few holes and blow my mind!

I accept your criticism of my errors in the "it's/its" area but I think it is a bit too much that:

*a: you single out **Homer**, the slut for such criticism*

and

b: you automatically assume it is ignorance of punctuation on my part.

By point A, I mean that surely my fanzine is less guilty of such errors as the vast majority of others? In fact, I think I do better than many publications in the mainstream press or, indeed, the "Teletext" services on TV who can differentiate neither between "dependant/dependent" nor "drawer/draw". Since these errors are based on phonetic (mis)-spellings common amongst natives of the South-East they are usually brushed under the carpet.

By point B, I mean that your "Janet and John" explanation of the difference between the usages of "its" and "it's" is taught in all Scottish schools at an early age. I was aware of it by the age of seven and would have been in serious trouble if I had not mastered it by the age of nine. Twelve years later, when I graduated with an honours degree in English, I would have been expected to remember it. In addition, if I'd ever forgotten, my father, who is a professional grammarian, would have been at hand to prod my memory. Thankfully, however, he didn't need to do so - not even during the years I was an English Language teacher.

*How then can such errors creep into my hallowed pages? Firstly I could blame computers, but since I have taught people how to use these for six years now, I had better not! It would be more accurate to blame myself for putting **Don't Think Twice, It's Alright** into my word-processing glossary incorrectly and then never getting around to correcting it. The main reason for this is that there always seems to be a million and one things to do and very little time to do them in. Some things never seem to get done! This pressure of time is also to blame for me not correcting submissions properly or for typing errors. The pages that come out error free are those that I have time to check and then pass to Pia for final proof-reading. If, however, she is too busy 'cutting and pasting' I sometimes have to print them off right away. (It has also been known for Pia to proof-read an article, me to change it on computer disk, and then me to print the original mistake-ridden file - this does not go down too well!)*

Notwithstanding all these reasons/excuses: "must do better" would seem the appropriate comment, as would "take your tongue out of your cheek, Andrew!"

RONNIE: "CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FRUSTRATING KIND"

Living In Crouch End with my son managing a record shop opposite Dave Stewart's studio I felt that I had a good chance of realizing a long standing ambition - meeting Bob Dylan.

Ezra, my son, is not a Dylan fan. Nevertheless on meeting Dave Stewart locally, he mentioned that he would be glad to get Bob's autograph for me. To my amazement Dylan responded to this message by going into the Harum record shop. As fate would have it, Dylan went on a day when I was out of London and Ezra had the day off! Hopefully the Harum staff appreciated their visitor!

Yes, let us hope so, I must say I've been very impressed with the enthusiasm shown for Dylan by the staff at Selectadisc in Brewer Street, Soho, London despite the fact that they all seem to be born after Planet Waves came out - so maybe there's hope.

Wasn't it pretty damn good of Dylan to drop in on the shop?!



At the moment of writing this there is still no decision on whether Dylan has bid for the house in Birchington Road - I'm slightly fearful the publicity will put him off. (Wasn't it a bad idea to have the house on TV and in the 'papers?') Still, if he does move there you should 'realize that long-standing ambition', after all. You may have to wait hours to get into Birchington Road or the Shamrat Indian restaurant, though - I'm told they've become very popular recently! (Are London Calling running buses, yet?)



Homer, *the slut*

Awful though she is in many ways (especially when she tries to dance on stage), Joan Baez should not be discounted as a conduit of traditional material to Bob Dylan. Once he accepted her voice, and listened to her, she might have drawn his ever curious attention to more than one or two of the songs with which we can now associate him. I don't say he couldn't have heard them all from any number of other sources - but Joan Baez's early recordings just happen to assemble quite a few of them conveniently together. Her first album includes **East Virginia, Fare Thee Well, House of the Rising Sun** and **Little Moses**. Her second offers **Wagoner's Lad, The Lily of the West, Barbara Allen** and **Railroad Boy**. On the third Baez album we get **Copper Kettle** and **House Carpenter** (plus **Pretty Boy Floyd**), and on the sixth **Wild Mountain Thyme** and **Satisfied Mind**. (1)



What do you think it would've been like if we'd danced together?

Many further connections and comparisons arise on the same albums. **John Riley**, a broadside ballad collected by G. Malcolm Laws Jr., and featured on the Baez debut LP, belongs with **Belle Isle** in telling of a soldier or sailor returning in disguise to test his lover's fidelity. **Rake And Rambling Boy**, on the same LP, has a final verse that melds together the **I'm Riding Old Paint** format (*when I die, don't bury me at all / Place my bones in alcohol*) and the ending of **Railroad Boy** (*at my feet place a white snow dove / To tell the world I died for love*). (2)

Jackaroe, on the fourth Baez album, is, like **Female Rambling Sailor** and **Canadee-i-o**, the story of a female dressing as a sailor to be with her lover. **The Trees They Do Grow High**, on her second album, is an alternative title for **Young But Daily Growing**. **Matty Groves**, a Child ballad on the third album, shares its theme with that other Child ballad **Blackjack Davey**, while **Geordie**, a part-Child and part-broadside ballad also on the third Baez album, reminds us of both **Blackjack Davey** and Dylan's own **Seven Curses**:

*Ah my Geordie will be hanged...
Go bridle me my milk white steed
Go bridle me my pony
I will ride to London's court
To plead for the life of Geordie
The judge looked over his left shoulder
He said fair maid I'm sorry.* (3)

(1) That other pure-voiced young songstress Judy Collins, whom Dylan saw perform at the Exodus in Denver, Colorado, in 1959, was, as Robert Shelton reports, including **House Of The Rising Sun** and **Maid Of Constant Sorrow** in her set at this time.

(2) This last formulation is found widely - as for instance in the Lincolnshire folk song **Died For Love (I Wish My Baby It Was Born)**, which not only ends the same way -

*Dig me my grave long, wide and deep
Put a marble stone at my head and feet
But a turtle white dove put over above
For to let the world know that I died for love*

- but also offers this recognisable prefiguring of a portion of **Bob Dylan's Dream**: *I wish, I wish, but it's all in vain / I wish I was a maid again*. (Published in the pamphlet **Twenty-one Lincolnshire Folk Songs**, from the Percy Grainger collection, ed. Patrick O'Shaughnessy, Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts, 2nd edition, 1983 [drawn to my attention by Homer regular Jim Heppell]. Incidentally, Percy Grainger died in New York City in the midst of the folk revival in 1961.

(3) The Baez albums cited are: **Joan Baez**, Vanguard VRS-9078; **Joan Baez, Vol. 2**, Vanguard VRS-9094; **Joan Baez In Concert**, Vanguard VRS-9112; **Joan Baez In Concert Part 2**, Vanguard VRS-9113; and **Farewell Angelina**, Vanguard VRS-9200 (stereo VSD-79200), all NYC. All these are published in **British Ballads & Folk Songs From The Joan Baez Songbook** (with illustrations by Eric Von Schmidt), Ryserson Music Publishers Inc. (a division of Vanguard Records), NYC, 1964 and 1967

"IT USED TO BE LIKE THAT"

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A SUICIDE IN THE CHAPEL OF LOVE
(But its only a Funeral in the brain)

*Have we, as 'twere
 ... with a defeated joy,
 with an auspicious and a dropping eye,
 with mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
 in equal scale weighing delight and dole,
 Taken to wife.*

(Claudius to Laertes and gathered throng at the King of Denmark's Court, Elsinore). (1)

The best song I ever wrote.

(Bob Dylan to Robert Shelton and gathered throng at 3 a.m. in the morning in a Denver Hotel bedroom on the 13th March 1966).

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this Congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and the first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprized, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discretely, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God.... (3)

For the majority of his fans, it is probably just as well that none of these testaments to marriage rang loudly in Dylan's ears as he faltered on the steps of the State Supreme Court Building in Nassau, New York on the 22nd November 1965. The danger was that such sentiments would have bullet-barked their way into Dylan's head and thus caused him to suffer a God-fearing attitude towards the business of marriage. In that case perhaps Dylan would have forever after his wedding day remained a faithful and loyal husband, becoming tied to the kitchen sink and consequently being drained of the temperament that prompted him to write some of the core songs for the *Planet Waves*, *Blood On The Tracks* and *Desire* albums. If it was a case of washing dirty linen in public then, with some of the songs from these albums, Dylan became the owner of a launderette which may have been eminently beautiful but did nothing to clean up his reputation of being far from a perfect husband.

Dylan's marriage certainly seems to have been a hastily arranged affair. He was heavily engaged in a concert tour, indeed the night before his wedding he was performing in Syracuse and within a few days thereafter he was off to Chicago and back on the merry-go-round of dates and demands that was his life in 1965 and 1966. His bride, the former Bunny girl, Miss Shirley Noznisky, who later became the model, Ms Sara Lowndes, was, at the time of her marriage to Dylan, a divorcee with a daughter and probably pregnant with the couples' first child, Jesse, who was born in the first half of 1966.

Perhaps it was therefore a shot-gun arrangement or perhaps just a spontaneous desire to make a commitment that caused Dylan to enter into the holy state of matrimony on that dark winter Monday. Who knows? ... the truth it seems is that not many people did know that Dylan had got married at all and, if the bridegroom was sure and proud of his newly betrothed state, he certainly wasn't letting on.

Jack Elliot, for instance, who was a good friend of Dylan's at around this time is reported to have recalled: "I saw him right after he was married and I said: "Congratulations, I heard you got married". And he said: "I didn't get married. You'd be the first cat I'd tell, man, if I got married"." (4)

Dave Van Ronk also apparently recalled bumping into Dylan shortly after the wedding: "There was this lovely woman with him. Bobby introduced me to her and we talked for about a half-hour before they left. The next day I discovered he had married her, and he never said a word about it." (5)

Then came the denials to the press. On the 26th November 1965, just four days after his wedding, Dylan was interviewed by a newspaper reporter for a feature to be included in "Panorama", the weekend supplement to the *Chicago Daily News*.(6)

The interviewer skated round all sorts of issues before plunging through Dylan's icy surface, to ask some questions about his personal life. The exchange went as follows:

INTERVIEWER: What about your family?

DYLAN: Well, I just don't have any family, I'm all alone

INTERVIEWER: You talk as if you are terribly separated from people.

DYLAN: I'm not disconnected from anything because of a force, just habit, it's just the way I am. I don't know, I have an idea, that it's easier to be disconnected than to be connected. I've got a huge hallelujah for all the people who're connected, that's great, but I can't do that. I've been connected so many times. Things haven't worked out right, so rather than break myself up, I just don't get connected.

INTERVIEWER: Are you just trying to avoid being hurt again?

DYLAN: I haven't been hurt at the time, the realisation is afterwards. Just looking back on it, thinking about it, it's just like a cold winter.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever hope to settle down to a normal life, get married, have kids?

DYLAN: I don't hope to be like anybody. Getting married, having a bunch of kids, I have no hopes for it. If it happens, it happens. Whatever my hopes, it never turns out. I don't think anybody's a prophet.

INTERVIEWER: You sound quite pessimistic about everything.

DYLAN: No, not pessimistic. I don't think things can turn out, that's all, and I've accepted it. It doesn't matter to me. It's not pessimism, just a sort of sadness, sort of like not having no hopes.

Hardly the words of an enthusiastic newlywed setting sail for a married life of bliss with his new bride on board !

You can't however keep a good story down and after the rumour was hinted at in a December 1965 edition of *Melody Maker*, the truth of Dylan's marital status was confirmed in an article in the *New York Post* in February 1966 under the heading: "Hush! Bob Dylan is wed". (7)

Dylan though, continued with his denials but by the time he took his travelling circus on a hectic tour of the world, his answers to the direct question: "Are you married?": changed from straight repudiation to a more ambiguous stance, implying that Dylan himself wasn't sure if he was married or not. At a

press conference in Denmark in April 1966 for instance, the question was put:

REPORTER: "Are you married?"

DYLAN: "I'd be lying if I answered that question, whatever I told you. You'd make me tell lies and you wouldn't want that would you?" (8)

When the merry-go-round stopped in London, the hard-nosed journalists of the English press would, quite naturally, push their enquiries with a little more endeavour:

JOURNALIST: "Is it true you're now married?"

DYLAN'S ANSWER: "It would be very misleading if I said, yes, I was married, and I would be a fool if I said no. It would be very misleading if I said no, I wasn't married, and I'd be a fool if I said yes. I'm not going to answer that because I don't want to lie to you. I might be married, I might not. It's hard to explain really."

J.: "May we assume that you are married?"

D.: "You can assume anything you like. I was born married - forty five years ago."

J.: "So you are married then?"

D.: "I'd be a liar if I answered that."

J.: "But you just said you had a wife."

D.: "That depends on what you mean by "married"."

J.: "Is she a common-law wife?"

D.: "I don't know what you mean by "common-law"."

J.: "Do you have any children?"

D.: "Every man with medical problems has children." (9)

In Paris, the question was again put and again came the somewhat mysterious response:

INTERVIEWER: "Are you married?"

DYLAN: "I'd be lying if I answered you." (10)

If Dylan was in two minds as to whether or not he had actually committed himself to marriage, his actions indicated that he had not. He seemed to be seeking out old and new flames to light his fire. Whilst in Minneapolis at about the time of his

marriage, he called up his old girlfriend, Echo Helstrom. This is how Echo related the incident to Anthony Scaduto:

I had gone home from work sick that day, for the first time the whole year, and as soon as I got home the phone rang and he said: "Hi, it's Bob". I told him: "You put a hex on me. I haven't been sick all year". And he said: "Yeah, I did, but after a while you'll feel a lot better". He asked me to come to his concert that night, and I said I couldn't because the guy I was going with was very jealous of him, going out of his mind knowing Bob was in town. So we just talked for a long time. He said he wanted to see me and I told him I just couldn't, and he said he was lonesome in the hotel room with just the company of the guys in the band. But I couldn't see him, so that was that. He didn't really talk much. As usual, I did most of the talking, as usual, he was pretty secretive about what he was doing. I told him something like: "The happiest people are those that are married and live an ordinary life and have the sense to appreciate what they do have", and he said: "Yeah, I've always felt that's true. But I never expected you to become a philosopher." I think he was married at this time but he didn't say it and I knew better than to pry into his affairs.(11)

It was however a new flame that Dylan searched out when the "66 Tour" got underway. The Australian poet, Adrian Rawlins, recounts some of Dylan's activities down under (if you'll pardon the expression). The day after Dylan's entourage had arrived in Melbourne on the 17th April 1966, Rawlins, Dylan and a couple of others toured Fitzroy, Melbourne's slum area. Rawlins remembers:

As we had driven from Fitzroy, Bob had spoken about a girl who had been thrown out of the press conference the day before, and I had said I thought she was a university student. I now suggested, as we were only two minutes from the University, that we drive there. This would enable us to possibly kill... oops, correction, fondle... two birds with the one caress. We could maybe find the girl and see the campus. (12)

Although his companions couldn't seem to find the right girl, Dylan obviously did because after the Melbourne show the following night, in the Tour Manager's hotel room "where a guy was rolling huge hash joints" Dylan turned up with the girl they had all been searching for the day before. (13)

A further "brush" with the female kind occurred when the party stopped at Perth. Like a private investigator Scaduto files the following report. The date is the 23rd April 1966 and the "beautiful actress" is Rosemary Garrett:

An Australian actress, 20 years old and very beautiful, who wrote occasional newspaper pieces,

spent several days with Dylan in Perth, before and after his concert at the Capitol Theater. Dylan had a press conference scheduled on the afternoon of his concert and she attended. When it was over she saw Dylan alone and managed to break through his defences. He invited her to see his show and to visit him backstage later. She saw the second half of the concert and when it was over Dylan told her he had to go to a party. He asked her to meet him in his motel room in a couple of hours. She agreed. (14)

Perhaps Dylan just wanted some female company for long conversations about the meaning of "wife"; and perhaps that was what he was also after in that scene from *Eat the Document* when, following the arrival in Sweden in late April 1966, Richard Manuel is seen bartering for the services of a Scandinavian blonde. For him or for Dylan? There is also the subsequent picture of Dylan practising the technique of French kissing with the Chanteuse Françoise Hardy (15) whilst, back in London, Dylan was asked:

Are you still in touch with Dana Gillespie.

To which he excitedly responded:

Yeah. Where is Dana? Come on out Dana. I've got some baskets for her. Put your clothes on!

Dana obviously did "come on out" thereafter as she turned up later that night at Blaises Night-club, escorted by... Dylan. (17)

Even after the continuous flight of the '66 tour had landed, Dylan was still having a high old time. Describing a post-tour visit to *Bob's pad in the Chelsea Hotel*, the painter, Brice Marden, found a scene that resembled *ancient Rome around the time of Caligula*. There was: *A lot of drinking, a lot of drugs, everyone was comfortably involved in his own excess. Dylan appeared to be asleep on the floor dressed in black-and-white striped pyjama bottoms and a red, brown and gold polka-dot top... when Brian Jones wandered in along with a willowy nymphette attired in an outrageously revealing body-stocking. Dylan's sleeping, and this party girl crawls all over him, sticking her tongue in his ear and who - knows - where - else....(18)*

Dylan it seems, had a habit of taking things lying down on these occasions. Another incident from these wayward times is described thus:

At a sort of folksy party, down around MacDougal Street... stepping over Bob Dylan who happened to be lying on the stairs looking smashed and having a great time, reaching up under some girls' skirts when they walked over him up to the party. Some of them liked it, some didn't, whatever, he just laughed.(19)

A high old time indeed!

Then, of course, throughout this period there was the strange affair of Dylan and Edie Sedgwick. Edie Sedgwick was a chemical waif, a volatile remnant of a New England Chateau that had found it's way into Andy Warhol's crazy vineyard where Dylan visited for a brief wine tasting during this heady period between winter 1965 and spring 1966. (20)

Some background information as to how these two vintage '60's icons became bottled with the same label is provided by both Dylan and Edie's other "Bobby", namely Bobby Neuwirth, who always seemed to be involved in what was going on at the time and who ultimately became another of Edie's lovers:

Bob Dylan and I occasionally ventured out into the poppy night life world. I think somebody who met Edie said "You have to meet this terrific girl". Dylan called her, and she chartered a limousine and came to see us. We spent an hour or two, all laughing and giggling, having a terrific time. I think we met in the bar upstairs at the Kettle of Fish on MacDougal Street, which was one of the great places of the '60's. It was just before the Christmas holidays; it was snowing, and I remember we went to look at the display on Houston Street in front of the Catholic Church. I don't remember how the evening ended. I'm sure it ended logically, or maybe it didn't, who knew? Edie was fantastic, she was always fantastic. She believed that to sit around was to rot, an extension of the '60's pop culture from a Bob Dylan song "He Not Busy Being Born Is Busy Dying". (21)

After that initial introduction Dylan and Edie were spotted by the Bloodhounds of the New York press attending at nightclubs together. Gerrard Malanga, one of Warhol's right-wristed men, mentioned the Dylan and Edie connection in his interview with John Bauldie October 1989:

Edie was attracted to Dylan. Edie took an interest in Dylan, Dylan took an interest in Edie Chuck Wein, who was Edie's sidekick, was kind of cultivating the relationship to get the fire going between them. I am sure she slept with Bob....(22)

So, according to this witness, the old married man was sleeping around; but perhaps Edie was special. Another witness to the affair, Jonathan Taplin provided an explanation as to why Dylan had chosen this particular lady for his mistress:

Dylan liked Edie because she was one of the few people who could stand up against his weird little numbers: She was much stronger than the sycophants who were hanging around him at the time. He was always in an adversary relationship with women. He tested people... perhaps to find out about himself. His transition from folk purity to the rock insanity was overwhelming him. He needed to know: Who was he? Dylan respected Edie's spirit, and her strength in being able to deal with him, and

that she didn't whither. You know that song of his Just Like Woman? They say he wrote it about Edie (23)

Elsewhere it has been suggested that Dylan wrote other songs about Edie Sedgwick. One source contends that the song **Leopard Skin Pill Box Hat** was written about Edie "because she sometimes wore Leopard". (24)

And also, although it does seem a little way off and out of sync, another source suggests that: "Edie had been the principal inspiration for **Like A Rolling Stone.**" (25)

So who really was she, this mystery blonde who stepped from the shadows to steal the affections of a newly-wedded husband? Well, Edie wasn't all that she seemed. She came from a very well-to-do New England family and had high office relations in the politics of Massachusetts, indeed her Great Grandfather a couple of times removed was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts at the beginning of the 19th Century; so from solid Harvard stock she came. Yet Edie was a beautiful paradox: She had perfect skin but if you looked more closely you would find the delicate layer of lanolin punctured by hundreds of needle marks; to the outside world she appeared as a Vogue "youthquaker" the epitome of cool yet her insides were held together by chemicals and despair. The ultimate paradox of course was that Edie's fame as a playing piece in Warhol's magnificent set of '60's starlets was shrouded by the same infamy that ultimately led to her downfall.

The Warhol scene of the '60's has been likened to the decadent art-for-arts sake, transsexual society that existed in England seventy five years before and which had Oscar Wilde as it's figure head. But Max's Kansas City was no Cafe Royal and whereas the Wilde society were known as the "aesthetes" it would perhaps be more appropriate to dub the Warhol set as "anaesthetics" for, according to the reports and memoirs of those close to the action, the majority of the human oddities that found their way into Warhol's crazy collection spent most of their time in an anaesthetized state. The desire it seems was to become anaesthetized against all manner of pain: The pain of obvious rejection for being like they were; the pain of failure because they hadn't turned into who they were expected to become; and the pain of the reality which comes with the knowledge that, whatever is going on within the Fantasy Factory world of silver walls and silk screen images, a mundane life outside really does go on all around you.

Edie became a Warhol movie star and the following is taken from the tapes of a subsequent movie she made namely **Caio! Manhattan**. These tapes have been used as biographical material for this relevant period of Edie's life:

It's hard to choose between the climactic ecstasies of speed and cocaine. They're similar. Oh, they are so fabulous. That fantabulous sexual exhilaration. Which is better, coke or speed? It's hard to choose. The purest speed, the purest coke, and sex is a deadlock.

Speeding and booze. That gets funny. You get chattering at about fifty miles an hour over the downdraft, and booze kind of cools it. It can get very funny. Utterly ridiculous. It's a good combination for a party. Not for an orgy, though.

Speedball! Speed and heroin. That was the first time I had a shot in each arm. Closed my eyes. Opened my arms. Closed my fists, and jab, jab. A shot of cocaine and speed, and a shot of heroin. Stripped off all my clothes, lept downstairs, and ran out on Park Avenue and two blocks down it before my friends caught me. Naked. Naked as a lima bean. A speedball is from another world. It's a little bit dangerous. Pure coke, pure speed, and pure sex. Wow! The ultimate in climax. (26)

Clearly not a great advertisement for a long and healthy life! But if any Dylan song really was about his relationship with Edie Sedgwick and his involvement with the Warhol set then surely it must have been **Just Like A Woman**. For a start, in the opening words of the song, Dylan refers to this situation of everyone being constantly anaesthetized. This is what he finds on his visit to the Warhol emporium: *Nobody feels any pain/tonight as I stand inside the rain*. Then later in the song, he confesses that the reason he can't stay "in here" is that, unlike everyone else, he himself feels the pain: *But what's worse is this pain in here/I can't stay in here/ain't it clear that... I just don't fit*.

It is somehow appropriate that Dylan should use the word "fit" because what he was endeavouring to explain was that he was unable to "fit" like a set piece in a jigsaw or become a person who could "fit" squarely into Warhol's set.

Dylan was thus able to walk away from the Factory walls and leave behind that beautiful paradox: Someone who could make love just like a woman but who would then break just like a little girl. Edie herself had been duped into thinking that she was more than someone who could be introduced as just a friend of Dylan's. The story of the break-up is told by another of Warhol's cohorts Paul Morrissey:

Suddenly it was Bobby this and Bobby that, and we realised that she had a crush on him. We thought he'd been leading her on, because just that day Andy had heard in Sy Litvinoff's office - our lawyer - that Dylan had been secretly married for a few months - he married Sara in November, 1965. Everything was secret in those days for some reason... all phoney secrecy. So Andy couldn't resist asking, "Did you know, Edie that Bob Dylan has

gotten married?"

She just went pale. "What? I don't believe it! What?". She was trembling. We realised that she really thought of herself as entering a relationship with Dylan... that maybe he hadn't been very truthful. (27)

Things didn't however stop there for poor Edie and soon the ribbons and the bows fell tragically from her curls. She was committed to Psychiatric Institutions where she suffered from delusions including that the reason for her admission to Hospital was because she had been "riding a motorcycle with Bob Dylan and they'd had an accident". She also confessed that she was "bearing a baby and they made her abort it in the Hospital because in her condition she couldn't give birth to a child."(28)

Thereafter Edie took a brief snort at matrimony which lasted just four months before she exhaled into the ever blowing wind of eternity. Edie died on the 16th November 1971. The Coroner's Register for the County of Santa Barbara, California, stated that the cause of death was "acute barbiturate intoxication". Edie was twenty eight years old when she died.

A lovely epitaph to the beautiful paradox that was Edie Sedgwick comes from the words of the poet Patti Smith. Bob Neuwirth called her to confirm the sad news. Patti explains what happened next:

*I hung up the phone. I felt really bad. I feel a real responsibility to the images I get attached to. I had the phone in my hand, just putting it down, and I just got this thing... dah, dah, dah, dah, and I thought, "Oh, oh, I'm going to write a poem." The rhythm persisted and the poem, **Oh Isn't It Fair, Oh Isn't It Fair, How Her Ermine Hair Turned Men Around**. It was like it was not even my own voice. I was alone at the Chelsea Hotel holding the phone and babbling this poem. I just copied it down. It was like tracing a face. It came in perfect rhythm without any effort from someplace. It had to be written. If I would have held my mouth, it probably would have come out of my ears. I always think these kinds of poems are important... I don't mean important to art or to anything except maybe to some lost soul that needed some classification or some peace. When I finished it, it was like somebody could go to sleep.*

EDIE SEDGWICK (1943 - 1971)

*I don't know how she did it. Fire
She was shaking all over. It took her hours to put her make-up on.
But she did it. Even the false eye-lashes. She ordered gin with triple limes. Then a limosine. Everyone knew she was the real heroine of
Blonde on Blonde.
oh it isn't fair*

oh it isn't fair
 how her ermine hair
 turned men around
 she was white on white
 so blonde on blonde
 and her long long legs how I used to beg
 to dance with her
 but I never had
 a chance with her
 oh it isn't fair
 how her ermine hair
 used to swing so nice
 used to cut the air
 how all the men
 used to dance with her
 I never got a chance with her
 though I really asked her
 down deep
 where you do
 really dream
 in the mind
 reading love
 I'd get
 inside
 her move
 and we'd
 turn around
 and she'd
 turn around
 and turn the head
 of everyone in town
 her shaking shaking
 glittering bones

second blonde child
 after brian jones
 oh it isn't fair
 how I dreamed of her
 and she slept
 and she slept
 forever
 and I'll never dance
 with her no never
 she broke down like a baby
 she suffocated
 like a baby
 like a baby girl
 like a lady
 with ermine hair
 oh it isn't fair
 and I'd like to see
 her rise again
 her white white bones
 with baby brian jones
 baby brian jones
 like blushing
 baby dolls

(29)

Ms Smith certainly knows how to weave a poetic thread or two but what about those words: "Everyone knew she was the real heroine of *Blonde on Blonde*"? Sure, Edie's picture was on the

album's sleeve but if there had to be a heroine of the album at all, let alone a real one, wouldn't she more likely to have been the subject of the longest song on the album, indeed one of Dylan's longest ever songs, and the song that was originally set apart from the rest by having it's own space and surface of shiny black grooves. Of course I am talking about the classic Dylan song of this period: **Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands**. However, as Dylan's former Woodstock gardener/bodyguard, who knew Dylan and his ex-wife very well, asked of Robert Shelton: "Who do you think his **Sad-Eyed Lady** was?" (30)

First, to explode a couple of myths about this particular song: Dylan didn't write it whilst staying up for days in the Chelsea Hotel as he wanted his ex-wife Sara to believe during a rocky period of their marriage, and he didn't write it about his said ex-wife.

The first myth then: Where the song was actually written. In his somewhat vitriolic attack on Dylan's 1976 album **Desire** the journalist Lester Bangs encompasses some comments on the lies/truth concerning the writing of **Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands**:

*Desire is a sham and a fake-out. Ignoring the El Paso re-writes and Ersatz Kristofferson plodders like One More Cup Of Coffee (which is easy), we come at length (and it is reflective of neither generosity nor inspiration that side two of this album is almost thirty minutes long) to Sara, wherein Dylan, masks off, naming names, rhapsodises over his wife in mawkish images ("Sweet virgin angel... radiant jewel"), cheap bathos (when in doubt, drag in the kids playing in the sand on the beach), simple grovelling ("you must forgive me my unworthiness"), and, most indicatively of **Desire** as a whole, outright lies. To wit: "I'd taken the cure and had just gotten through/Stayin' up for days in the Chelsea Hotel/writin' Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands for you".*

*Bullshit. I have it on pretty good authority that Dylan wrote **Sad-Eyed Lady**, as well as about half of the rest of **Blonde on Blonde**, wired out of his skull in the studio, just before the songs were recorded, while the session men sat around waiting on him, smoking cigarettes and drinking beer. (31)*

The "good authority" may have been Al Kooper who was called into the **Blonde on Blonde** sessions. Here is what he had to say about them:

*We worked at Columbia Studios. Dylan had sketches of most of the songs, but he completed the bulk of the writing there in Nashville, most of it in the Studio. When he felt like writing or re-writing, everyone would repair to the ping-pong tables in the canteen. Sometimes, in the case of **Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands** or **Visions of Johanna**, he*

would sit in there for five hours without coming out and just play the piano and scribble. (32)

So much for where the song was actually written. As for the second myth, well Dylan never really did say that he wrote the song about Sara, what he did say was that he wrote it for her. And that, as we all know, is a completely different matter.

So if this song is not about Sara, then what exactly is it about. Well, to answer that question we have to enter the nether, nether world of interpreting a Dylan lyric and here, dear reader, you have been set up because all the foregoing preamble, all the historical background, has led me to where I intended to be at the start of this exercise: i.e. to give my own view of what the classic Dylan song **Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands** is really all about. But first let me set my path straight in case I should, along the way, happen to fall before your very eyes.

Interpreting a Dylan lyric is like walking on the edge of reality for nothing, nothing I can say will ever explain the entire being of a Dylan song; it isn't only in the words, or the way that they're sung or the musical accompaniment - and of course there are so many truths outside the recording studio. And anyway, how I perceive a song as I sit in a wooden cabin in my garden looking out at two blackbirds playing fast and loose, will be entirely different to how you perceive the same song as you sit in the kitchen of your council flat overlooking Upton Park; as you sit in the front room of your terraced house facing an abandoned pit-head; as you sit on your patio in your des. res. somewhere safe in suburbia; as you sit in the study of your Cockfosters' home writing kind messages from a daughter to her Father; as you sit and listen to a radio playing in a motorway cafe; and as you sit with your head in your hands outside your cardboard box home in Lincoln's Inn.

So here I go again, bungee jumping into the open sky of interpreting a Dylan song, and praying that the elasticity of reality will save me from drowning in a sea of self importance or being carried away by a current of self doubt.

Firstly, it is interesting to carry out a kind of reverse William Burroughs exercise to the opening and closing lines of the song, for it is my view that these lines provide a fundamental guide as to what the song is all about. So instead of taking key words and building sentences around them, I have extracted the key words from their surrounding sentences. What we are left with is, in the first few lines of the first verse:

missionary
prayers
silver cross chimes,
 bury you

and in the last few lines of the last verse:

holy medallion fingertips fold
saintlike face ghostlike soul,
 destroy you

Taking these key words and placing them in conjunction with the song's slow-march tempo and the spooky-sparse musical accompaniment makes for a very solemn scenario; indeed to my mind the majority of the song reeks of corpses, burial and death!

In the second part of the first verse, Dylan sings:

And your flesh like silk, and your face like glass, who among them do they think could carry you?

Now I know you can get silk in all the colours of the rainbow but don't you usually think of silk as being white, and, with regard to the "face like glass" - don't you usually think of glass as being cold? So you have someone with cold, white, flesh; yes, my thoughts exactly.... a corpse. And if you accept the interpretation of this line as referring to a corpse, then the following line about being carried becomes suitably appropriate.

The second verse continues the descriptions:

With your sheets like metal....

Then the third line:

And your basement clothes and your hollow face

It would be somewhat uncomfortable to rest beneath "sheets like metal" unless of course you are resting for all eternity in a metal casket; and thus, being placed underground, you would naturally have "basement clothes" and a "hollow face".

The second verse continues with the somewhat dark imagery:

With your silhouette when the sunlight dims into your eyes where the moonlight swims.

While the fourth verse opens with the following lines:

*Oh, the farmers and the businessmen, they
all did decide
To show you where the dead angels are that
they used to hide
Why did they pick you to sympathize with
their side?*

Presumably, if the farmers and the businessmen know where the dead angels are, then they must themselves be dead and the person whom they have chosen to be with them would therefore have

to die himself to be able to "sympathize" - or join - "their side".

Keeping to this theme then, it is little wonder that Dylan opens the fifth verse with: -

With your sheet-metal memory of Cannery Row.

- because, in his novel **Cannery Row**, which is an awesome diary of down and outs in Monterey Bay, California, John Steinbeck seems to be obsessed with death; there are so many deaths: The former owner of the lot - Horace Abberville - who shot himself on a heap of fishmeal; William the watchman who drove an ice pick into his heart; the Chinaman who represented Death to the locals; the teenager Frankie who died at the bottom of a trash heap; the haunting tale of the face of a girl who had drowned and surfaced amongst the algae and seaweed; the golden haired little boy who had his throat cut and the father of the character Joey who took rat poison to achieve some finality to his life of despair. If you wanted to get a coded message through that you are concerned with the matter of death, then **Cannery Row** would be an ideal place to stand and flag your signals.

In the third line of the fifth verse, Dylan sings:

And your gentleness now, which you just can't help but show,

The emphasis here being on "gentleness" and perhaps denoting the state of being motionless or lifeless. Another poet with "Dylan" in his name, i.e. Dylan Thomas, referred to the condition of being "gentle" prior to death but, in typically aggressive fashion, he warned vehemently against succumbing to that state at the crucial time of passing on:

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light*

Dylan Thomas
Collected Poems (1952)

So, if you accept my interpretation that the song has many references to corpses, burial and death, just who was it that was dying at around this time? We have to look no further than the interview Dylan had with Robert Shelton shortly prior to the Artist telling Shelton that the song now under scrutiny was the best song he ever wrote. The interview took place aboard Dylan's private plane as it headed towards Denver that Saturday in mid-March 1966. Shelton firstly described Dylan's condition:

His eyes were nearly slits, but he told me he wouldn't have slept even if I hadn't been there. He just had too much to do.

It takes a lot of medicine to keep up this pace, Dylan said, It's very hard, man. A concert tour like this has almost killed me. (33)

From there, the conversation turned to death:

You know, I can think about death openly. It's nothing to fear. It's nothing sacred. I've seen so many people die. (34)

And then to:

I have a death thing, I know. I have a suicidal thing, I know..... (35)

Other people noticed this "death thing" about Dylan too. Richard Farina is reported to have commented that Dylan *didn't burn the candle at both ends, rather he used a blow torch in the middle.* (36)

The following extracts from Scaduto also tell a somewhat dangerous tale:

He looked like death during that tour, friends say. Baez had felt that Dylan was on some kind of death trip. Ochs was saying in an interview: "Dylan is LSD on stage. Dylan is LSD set to music... I don't know if Dylan can get on stage a year from now. I don't think so. I mean that the phenomenon of Dylan will be so much that it will be dangerous. One year from now I think it will be very dangerous to Dylan's life to get on the stage. Dylan has become part of so many peoples' psyches and there are so many screwed up people in America, and death is such a part of the American scene now... I think he's going to have to quit. (37)

The Australian actress that I have previously mentioned considered that Dylan was on a self sacrificing death adventure. This is how she put it to Scaduto:

I came to believe that Dylan was Christ revisited. I felt that everything fitted, without being Christian-religious or anything, I felt that what he had to say about living and communication with people was the truest, most honest and most Christ-like thing I've ever heard. I began to feel that Dylan was sacrificing himself in his whole philosophy, his thinking. That he would eventually die or that something horrible would happen to him. I felt it psychically, I felt it strongly. I must have been going slightly unhinged. But I know that other people felt Dylan was a Christ, sacrificing himself. Dylan knew it, and he was so afraid of it. (38)

These comments made by the actress that Dylan was aware of this self sacrificing mode adds greater credence to Dylan's confession to Shelton that he had a "death thing", a "suicidal thing".

Am I saying then that the song **Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands** is about Dylan's perception of his

imminent death? ... Well... yes... but no. Not death as in "shuffling - off - this - mortal - coil - in - a - final - never - to - be - seen - in - the - flesh - again" type situation. For here is the twist - and with Dylan there is always a twist. The nature of "death" that I find coming through in this song is a kind of psychological death, a death in the mind: A perception that something has changed or is about to change that will terminate a certain way of life, an end to a set of circumstances, an envisaged death of, possibly, some kind of personal freedom.

At the end of each verse of the song, Dylan sings a "chorus" about the "Sad-Eyed Lady" who seems to reside in the "Lowlands". Dylan repeats this chorus five times:

*Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,
Where the sad-eyed prophet says that no
man comes,
My warehouse eyes, my Arabian drums,
Should I leave them by your gate,
Or, sad-eyed lady, should I wait?*

Firstly then, where is this place that the sad-eyed prophet says that no man comes, and who is this sad-eyed prophet anyway?

The Arabian poet and philosopher Kahlil Gibran wrote about a melancholy teacher in his book "The Prophet". As Gibran's prophet "descended the hill, a sadness came upon him" because he was leaving the city where he had lived and taught for the last twelve years. The people of the city gathered around him for some final lessons on the ways of life, living and ... death. When questioned about death the Prophet indicated that it was a place that no earthly body could experience:

*Only when you drink from the river of silence
shall you indeed sing.
And when you have reached the mountain
top, then you shall begin to climb.
And when the earth shall claim your limbs,
then shall you truly dance. (39)*

This place where Gibran's sad-eyed prophet says that no man comes is, in fact, death; and, in Dylan's song, it is the place where the sad-eyed lady hangs out. And of course, because she hangs out in this death-like place, she is bound to be sad-eyed isn't she?

Now, remembering the introduction to this article, Dylan had become married by ceremony but he obviously had great difficulty in accepting his betrothed state. He couldn't admit it to anyone, he gave ambiguous answers about it and he carried on a life style whereby he seemed to be fighting against the death of his personal freedom. A committed married life to the sad-eyed lady, lived in accordance with the testaments of holy matrimony, would have resulted in the death of Bob Dylan: Bob

Dylan the rock star who would try anything, take anything, screw anything, who lived permanently on the edge and who made music that had that wild mercury sound.

Dylan was suffering from indecision in gigantic Hamletesque portions: *my warehouse eyes, my Arabian drums, should I leave them by your gate?*, he asks over and over again.

For "my warehouse eyes" read that part of the wedding ceremony where the bridegroom has to vow that he will: "Forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live"; and for "my Arabian drums" read that further part of the ceremony where the bridegroom asserts: "With all my worldly goods I thee endow". And for "your gate" read the biblical expression, i.e. the brink, or mouth of the grave.

It was a case of to be or not to be married, and it gives a new emphasis to those scenes in *Eat The Document* where Dylan visits Hamlet's castle and is seen pondering upon his rotten state of indecision. For if he ignored his newly married position he could remain as Bob Dylan but if he committed himself to his wife and expected child then the person who was Bob Dylan would have to become a corpse; metaphorically speaking it would be Bob Dylan himself who would have eyes like smoke, flesh like silk, a face like glass, sheets like metal (as in a casket), a hollow face, who would be taken to the dead angels, and who would lay with fingertips folded beneath a saint-like face and ghost-like soul. Although, of course, as Dylan so rightly sings: *who among them do they think could carry/bury/destroy you?* But, as I have said, this is all metaphorically speaking; there is no physical death, just a perceived, envisaged, death of a way of life, a psychological death - a death in the mind.

There is a poetical precedent for treating marriage as a kind of death, i.e. the end to a certain way of life. I put it no higher than a precedent at this stage although I do find it somewhat important to note that two great poets have centred on a similar theme derived from an experience in their lives and treated that experience in like manner in their poetry. The "authority" that Dylan has followed in what, in my view, is the way he has created a kinship between marriage and death, is the supreme authority of the poet Emily Dickinson.

The poet Emily Dickinson, who was born in 1830 was, like Edie Sedgwick, a native of New England and she also had high office relations in the politics of Massachusetts. As her father was a member of the legislature and a Congressman, he no doubt rubbed shoulders with Edie Sedgwick's ancestors. But whereas Edie liked to venture the highways of life in the wildest of company, Emily lived the life of a recluse in Amherst, a quiet village in the Connecticut valley of Massachusetts. Her poems

were unpublished in her lifetime and at the occurrence of her death she was unknown. However, at her sister's instigation, a volume of her poetry was later published leading to the disclosure that, in her solitude, Emily had written a total of over one thousand seven hundred poems. One critic has described her work thus:

At her best, she writes as Thoreau wished to live - close to the bone; concentrating the very essence of what she saw and felt in phrases that strike and penetrate like bullets, with an originality of thought unsurpassed in American poetry. (40)

The success that Emily posthumously achieved carried with it the desire to scrutinise and analyse her life and work. A great deal of this scrutiny centres on a period of Emily's life when she became married. But hers was no ordinary marriage. The story goes that Emily was seriously affected by a severed love affair and became mystically married on the rebound. The poet Ted Hughes explains the circumstances in a little more detail:

In 1862 alone it has been calculated that she wrote 366 poems. Those years coincided with the national agitations of the Civil War, with her own coming to mental maturity, and with the beginning of her thirties - when perhaps she realised that her unusual endowment of love was not going to be asked for. But the central themes of the poems have suggested to many readers that the key event was a great and final disappointment in her love for some particular man, about this time. There are two or three likely candidates for the role, and some evidence in letters. This theory supposes that the eruption of her imagination and poetry followed when she shifted her passion, with the energy of desperation, from this lost man onto his only possible substitute - the entire Universe in it's Divine aspect. She certainly describes this operation in her poems several times, and it's hard not to believe that something of the sort happened. Thereafter, the marriage that had been denied in the real world, went forward in the spiritual - on her side - as dozens of her poems witness:

*Title: Divine - is Mine!
The Wife - Without the Sign!*

She was devoted, she led the life of a recluse for His sake, she wore white, proper for a bride of the spirit, and she daily composed poems that read like devotion. (41)

Perhaps sensing that this new 'married' life had caused the death of the old Emily Dickinson, the reclusive poet became obsessed with death and treated her transformation as a kind of death. Many of her poems relate to this subject, for example:

*I died for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,*

*when one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.*

*He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
"And I for truth, - the two are one;
we brethren are," he said.*

*And so, as kinsmen met at night,
we talked between the rooms,
until the moss had reached our lips,
and covered up our names.*

Then there are two poems which always seem to be together in any collection of Emily's verse. Perhaps they were written on the same day, one after the other. The first poem deals with a kind of death in the mind, a psychological death; and the second heralds a passing through the gate to life on the other side. The situation of passing through a wedding ceremony perhaps: The spinster is dead - long live the bride:

*I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
and Mourners to and fro
kept treading - treading - 'till it seemed
that Sense was breaking through -*

*And when they all were seated, a Service, like a
Drum -
kept beating - beating 'till I thought
my Mind was going numb -*

*And then I heard them lift a Box
and creak across my Soul
with those same Boots of Lead, again, then Space -
began to toll*

*As all the Heavens were a Bell
and Being, but an Ear,
and I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here -*

*And then a Plank in Reason broke,
and I dropped down, and down -
and hit a World, at every plunge
and Finished knowing - then -"*

*What if I say I shall not wait!
What if I burst the fleshly Gate -
and pass escaped - to thee!*

*What if I file this Mortal - off -
see where it hurt me - That's enough -
and wade in Liberty!*

*They cannot take me - anymore!
Dungeons can call - and Guns implore
unmeaning - now - to me -
As laughter - was - an hour ago -*

*Or Lace is - or a Travelling Show -
or who died - yesterday!*

In my view, these twinned poems of Emily Dickinson where she firstly refers to her perceived death-like state as a result of her "marriage", and she secondly talks of the "gate" through which she has to escape, are echoed in Dylan's song, i.e. his treatment of marriage as a kind of death and his "gate" being the entrance to the "grave" where the sad-eyed lady is waiting. Both Dickinson and Dylan have to "die" metaphorically that is, before passing through the "gate".

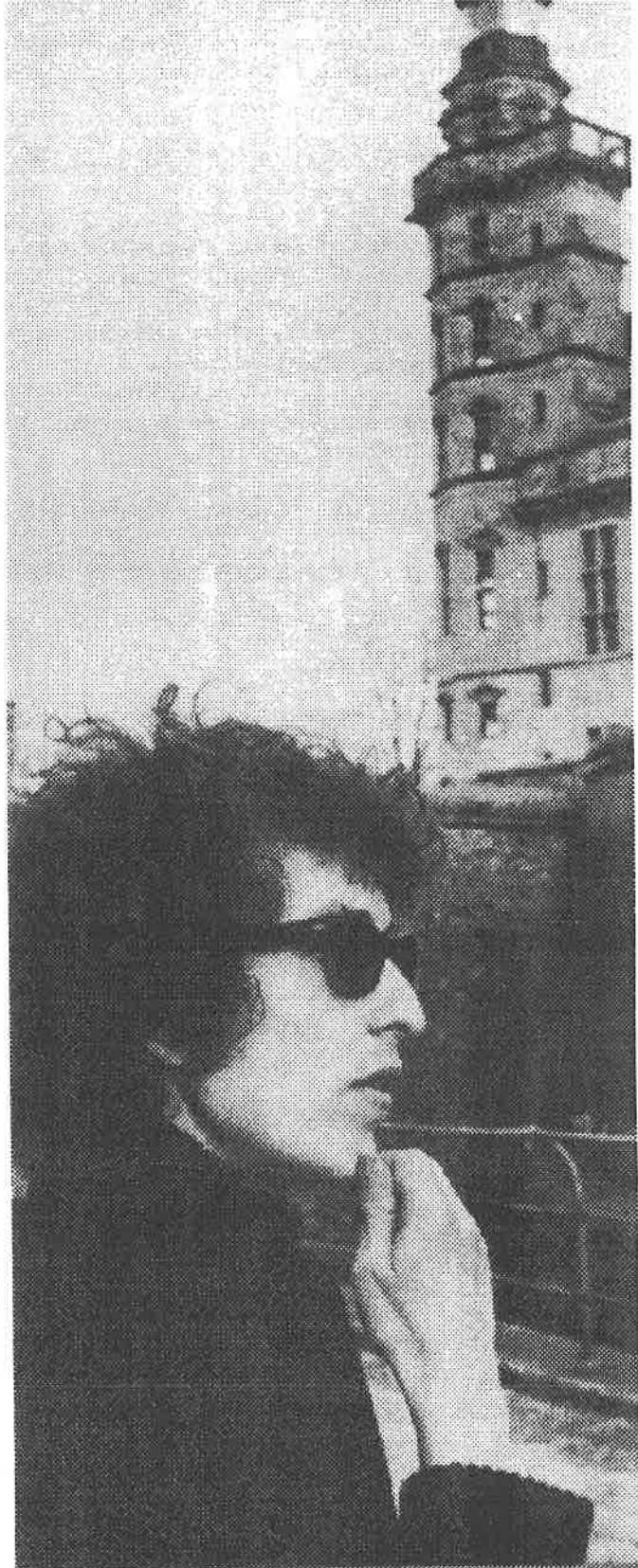
Emily passed through gate, safely; she became happily "married" in a mystical union, and she continued to wear white, the dress of a bride, until the day she died in solitude and obscurity on the 15th May 1886.

Almost eighty years to the day later, the album **Blonde on Blonde** was released and Dylan was still suffering the indecision as to whether to be or not to be married. However the deliberations were soon to be resolved as, a couple of months later, he burst through the "fleshly gate" on a Triumph 500 motorcycle. He was no doubt carrying on his shoulder his "warehouse eyes" and his "Arabian drums" and at last the wedding vows could be implemented as he landed in the arms of the lady he had married all those months before. It is probably just an absolutely ridiculous co-incidence but when Dylan appeared again in concert under his own name, at the Isle of Wight on the 31st August 1969, he was wearing a white suit, the dress of a bridegroom!

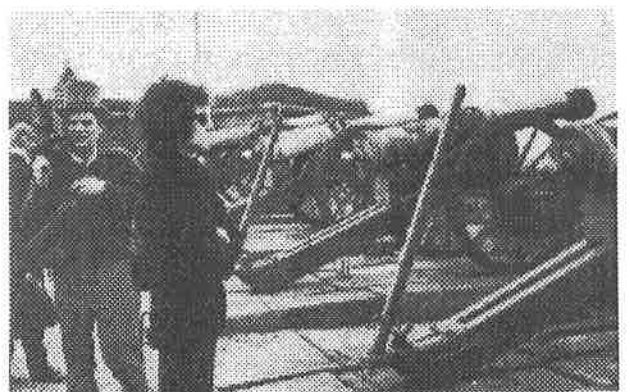
Even someone with a beautiful launderette however cannot possibly remove every stain caused by restlessness and dissatisfaction. And many stains make huge dirty marks. When Dylan re-appeared for a proper concert tour in Chicago on the 3rd January 1974 he wore black. It was just what we, his audience, had clamoured for though; we were hungry, it was our world and once more he put food on our table. He had been to the bottom with a sad-eyed lady and he was now out to please the crowd: Back up where he belonged. Yet you can't help asking the question: Was that where he really wanted to be or was everything a little upside down? When he was at the bottom was he really on top? Whatever the answer you may give to this question, one thing is certain: For Bob Dylan death is never the end.

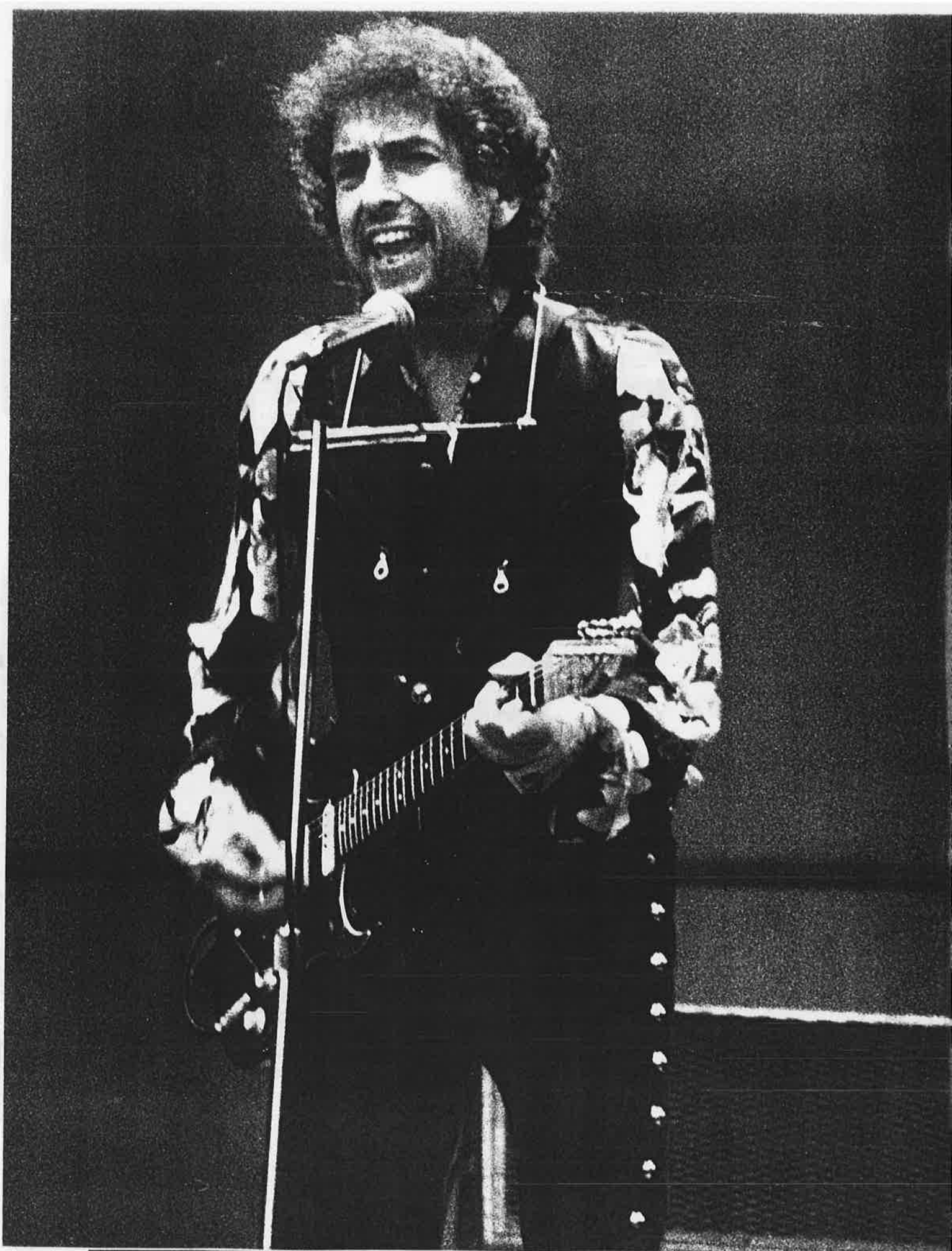
NOTE: I have purposely omitted any reference to the third verse of the song, largely because I don't get the feeling that this verse was shuttled down the same inspirational conduit as the other four verses. Mind you, I'm not the only one who has had difficulty with this third verse. In the circulating tape that is mentioned at (2) above, Dylan says to Shelton "I am

missing the third verse" and then proceeds to sing the song, omitting the third verse. Thereafter, in Chapter 9 of the book mentioned at (30) above, it is reported that when Richard Goldstein cited the lyric of **Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands** in his 1968 book, *The Poetry of Rock* Dylan denied him permission to quote the third verse of the song. Perhaps I am therefore keeping good company by omitting reference to this third verse!

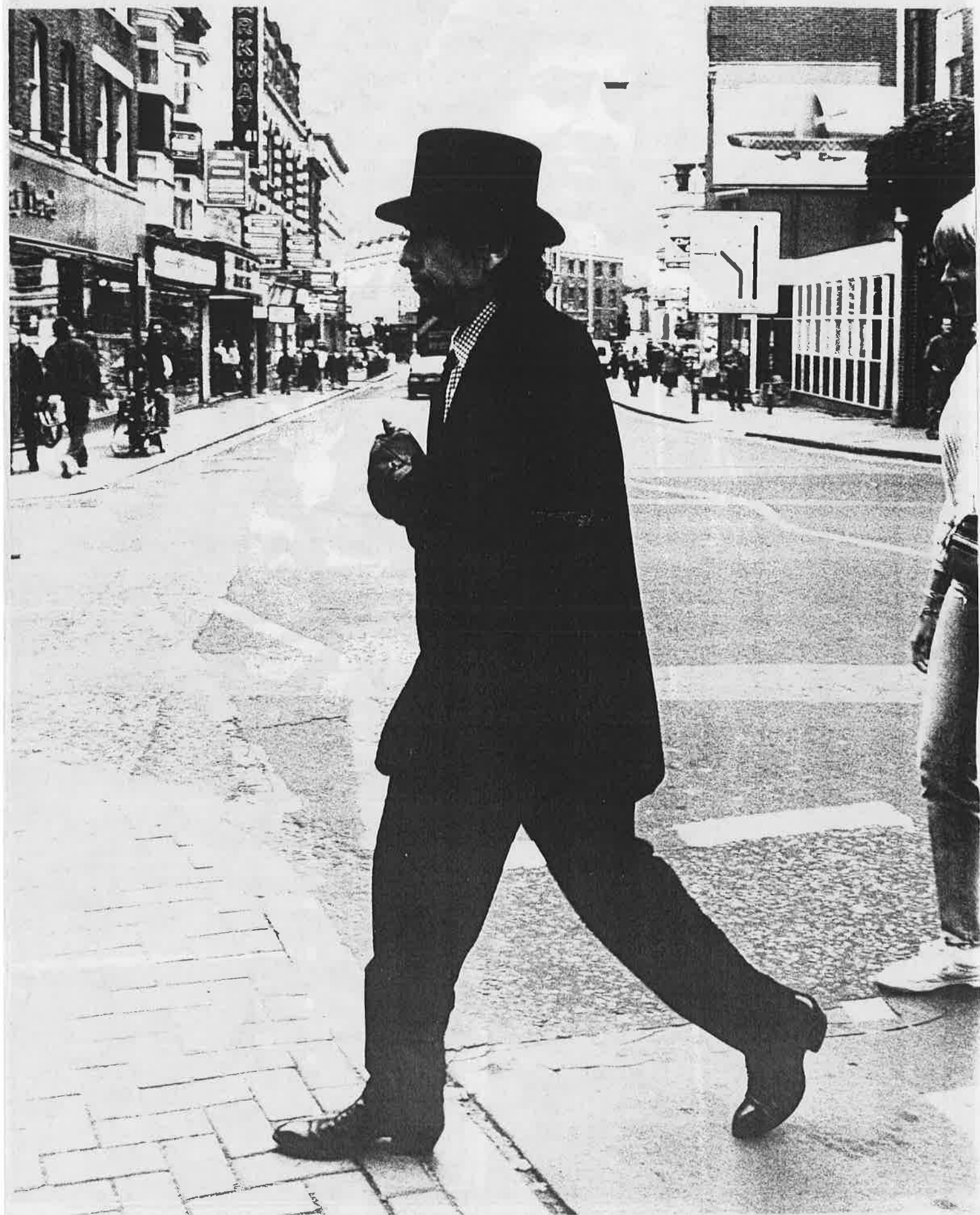


- (1) William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Act 1. Scene 2.
- (2) Transcription of a significant "new" tape that surfaced during 1992 - see *The Telegraph* 44, page 142; and *Isis* iss. 46, page 46.
- (3) The opening to the **Form of Solemnization of Matrimony**, taken from the *Book of Common Prayer* - 1947 Edition.
- (4) *Bob Dylan - An Intimate Biography* by Anthony Scaduto. Chapter headed: "1965 - 1966. I pity the poor immigrant."
- (5) *Bob Dylan - A Biography* by Bob Spitz. Chapter 19.
- (6) Interview with Joseph Haas which was published in "Panorama", *Chicago Daily News*, 27/11/65.
- (7) Article by Nora Ephron published in the *New York Post* on 9/2/66.
- (8) Press Conference, Hotel Marina, Vedbaek, Denmark: 30/4/66.
- (9) London Press Conference, Mayfair Hotel, 3/5/66.
- (10) Paris Press Conference, Hotel Georges V; 23/5/66.
- (11) As (4) above.
- (12) Adrian Rawlins account of his encounter with Dylan as re-told in Chapter 5 of John Baudie's *The Ghost of Electricity*.
- (13) As (12) above.
- (14) As (4) above.
- (15) See page 61 of *Bob Dylan - An Illustrated History* by Michael Gross H/B.
- (16) As (9) above.
- (17) *The Ghost of Electricity* by John Bauldie - Chapter 9.
- (18) As (5) above - Chapter 20.
- (19) *Popism* by Andy Warhol.
- (20) The best reference article on the Edie Sedgwick/Dylan/ Warhol connection is by Patrick Webster in *The Telegraph* 17: "Everybody's going up the castle stairs".
- (21) As (20) above, Patrick Webster quoting from Jean Stein's initial publication: *Edie, The Life And Times Of Andy Warhol's Superstar*.
- (22) *The Telegraph* 38, page 64.
- (23) *Edie - An American biography* by Jean Stein, Chapter 27.
- (24) As (23) above - Chapter 35.
- (25) *Across The Great Divide* by Barney Hoskyns, Part 2, Chapter 1.
- (26) As (23) above, Chapter 25.
- (27) As (23) above.
- (28) As (23) above, Chapter 38.
- (29) As (23) above, Chapter 44.
- (30) *No Direction Home: The Life And Music Of Bob Dylan* by Robert Shelton Prelude Chapter.
- (31) *Bob Dylan's dalliance with Mafia chic* - article by Lester Bangs published in Creem, April 1976; gloriously re-printed in *The Dylan Companion* edited by Elizabeth Thomson.
- (32) *Backstage Passes* by Al Kooper, Chapter 10.
- (33) As (30) above - Chapter 10.
- (34) As (33) above.
- (35) As (33) above.
- (36) As (15) above, Chapter 4.
- (37) As (4) above.
- (38) As (4) above.
- (39) *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran, paperback edition, page 94.
- (40) Editorial to *Selected Poems and Letters of Emily Dickinson* by Robert N. Linscott.
- (41) Introduction to *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse* by Ted Hughes.





The above is reprinted from a colour original by John Hume of Dylan performing at La Coruña on 9/7/1993. It is only one of many available from John. For a full list of colour 10 by 8s write to: John Hume, 14 Liscoole Park, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, N. Ireland, BT36 6EL.



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