

# Homer, the slut

**VOX**

THE  TIMES

*The Guardian*

*Rolling Stone*

**Q**

**MELODY-MAKER**

 **THE INDEPENDENT**

**RECORD COLLECTOR**

**NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS**

*First Special Subscribers' Issue*

The front cover is by Pia, using one of John Hume's marvellous 1991 photographs.

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**Thank You  
For Subscribing To  
Homer, the slut**

**Now gimme more of your money....**

**A gentle reminder that for those brave adventurers who first subscribed to Homer, the slut before Issue Three that your renewals are due before May. Next year will surely see a new album which should provide the basis for the second subscribers' special.**

## OPEN THE DOOR, HOMER

Ed

As the year draws to a close, I look back (DON'T LOOK BACK) on *Homer, the slut* as being the dominant thing in it for me. (Closely followed in world events by the collapse of the Soviet Union.)

Last January *Homer, the slut* issue two was launched with a print run of 100, some 3 times larger than issue one. It quickly became 150 but there was still none left for Bob's anything-but-satisfactory residence at Hammersmith in February. In the queue - at this time last year - I did make several acquaintances that unbeknownst to me at the time were to have a bearing on Homer's future. Including one Stuart Batsford, immortalized as "highly knowledgeable" in the current VOX (I take it they mean by West Brom fans' standards).

In the following months I made contact with *Rolling Tomes* - the specialist Dylan distributors in the U.S. - and began swapping cuttings with Mark Carter. Enquiries and contributions came in pretty steadily.

May saw issue 3 - a bumper one to coincide with Bobs big 5-0. For the first time there wasn't much written contribution from myself, (an excellent ploy for boosting interest!), there were loads of cuttings due to the Box Set and the Tour; but there were nearly as many again that weren't used. It sold like the proverbial sultry confectionery. More were sold at the Convention in Leicester and replies came from Buzby's fly-leaf campaign over the following weeks. *Homer, the slut* got its first public promotional announcement at the Southampton Film Festival in the first week of June, but not much seemed to come from that. Letters increased. It sold out in the States very quickly. *Rolling Tomes* became sole subscriber point for the States.

September came all too fast and it was on the last day of the month that issue four went out. Another bumper issue, if not quite as bulky as issue three. This issue saw the first column from JRS and the first instalment of Mark Carter's cartoon history. The issue was selling as fast as I could print them. Sold out in the States. First lot sent to Virgin sold out in 3 days and *Homer, the slut* became the fastest selling magazine in the Megastore, unfortunately I hadn't foreseen this and couldn't meet the demand. A couple of other shops also were interested but at the moment my print run can't deal with them.

One wonders what would happen if I ever advertised the bugger, or had picked someone popular to write about!

All of which leaves *Homer, the slut* straining at the leash to attempt a more business-like, large circulation approach but I hold on to that leash wondering if this is the wisest course, worrying that it will lose the feel of "the friendly fanzine" and realising I couldn't personally answer all the letters. Well, when I come to write the review of 1992 we'll see which road I decided upon.

*A Big Bouquet Of Roses* to the following for their help in general - more specific roses are handed out in issue 5 - firstly to THOSE WHO CANNOT BE NAMED but, thankfully, always know who they are, for supplying the raw data. There are some intimidatingly generous people out there, I'm pleased to say! For general help and encouragement throughout the year to Lambchops, Joe M, Hazel H, Buzby, Mark C, Ian W, All my family, JRS and everyone who wrote contributions and/or letters plus all those who helped with production and distribution. (Hi, Laurie & Mick!) Special thanks should go to Pia, of course, but over the year she's become "full time" on *Homer*, and therefore will cease to be thanked for what is now her accepted role in things.

I was going to write a brief review of Bob's year but, since Mark Carter has already done this for *Freewheelin'*, I thought I would use his and it would remind me to thank *Freewheelin'* for the various contributions its members have made. If you want to know my opinions simply substitute "not quite as transcendent as normal" where Mark writes "terrible" and "the greatest experience of your life" where Mark writes "getting better"!

## IN THE FINAL BATTLE HE WON THE WAR

Mark Carter

As another year prepares to bid us farewell, it's always tempting to look back. Next month I shall have to concoct my Top 10 of 1991, but my first reaction is that, in many ways, the year was somewhat wasted – full of promise and "should have been" and "wouldn't it be great if" and very little in the way of positive results. The box set was indisputably superb, of course, but Dylan did nothing to celebrate his 50th year – or to even acknowledge it. Unless, that is, you consider this year's crop of shows to be something of a celebration. Of course, we could all say how typically "Dylanesque" and anti-showbiz it was of Dylan to totally ignore this milestone and continue to chip away at the old myth and legend with a series of downright or partially awful shows this year. And so it is, and, in some ways, I'm pleased to see it. But another part of me plays a tape from 1987 or '88 or '89 or even last year and cringes at just how slap-dash the shows are just now. I mean, you can harp on about "reinterpreting the songs onstage" or "improvising like a jazz player" all you like, but 80% of this year's shows just could not have been very good. Not by Dylan's standards, not by anybody's.

A couple of months ago, in *Freewheelin'*, Chris Cooper defended this year's Hammersmith stint by calling the shows "average", not terrible – average. I would consider this to be a personal insult to Dylan – if those kind of shows are what we consider to be average nowadays, then our expectations must have drastically tumbled over the past couple of years. If I walked into a pub and heard a band sounding like that, I wouldn't consider them average. Hell, I'd probably walk out. And I wouldn't have paid 20 quid to see them.

Sad to say, I consider most of this year's shows to be atrocious at worst and sub-standard at best. January/February probably contain some of Dylan's worst shows ever, and even Europe, where he at last pulled himself back to some semblance of normality, sound tired and messy – a few nice performances, but not a complete gig's worth amongst them. True, I didn't attend any shows this year, but then, I didn't attend any of the 1990 Paris shows, or Barcelona in '84 for any of the 1980 Fox Warfield shows or any of the '75 revues either, yet you can tell by the audio/video evidence that something special was going down. Surely we've all listened to enough tapes of good shows to know bad ones when we hear them.

So it's a year of "what ifs". What if Dylan had ditched the band? What if he had paid attention to his performing art again? What if he spent less time touring and created a new album? What if he increased, rather than decreased, his audience after this year's Grammys? What if he stopped wearing those hideous checked jackets?

I don't believe we are in the middle of a "golden" period at the moment. 1963–66 was a "golden" period, so was 1974–78, so was late 1980 or (give or take) 1984 and so was, more or less, mid 1988 to mid 1990. 1991 had some golden Dylan-related moments (the box set, the *Series Of Dreams* video), but nothing that came directly from Dylan – they were all things either created by other people or by other Dylans in other lifetimes.

And then, just in the nick of time, something happens. I receive the *Seville* video and see Dylan back on top (or very close to it) of his performing powers. This is how good he can still be, this is what he is still capable of. *Watchtower* is throwaway, but still the best version I've heard in some 18 months. Then *Boots Of Spanish Leather* starts out badly and you think "here we go again – another wasted opportunity, another "what if", and then he seems to find whatever he lost probably after the 1990 Hammersmith shows, certainly after the 1990 *Beacon* shows. *Borderline* and *Answer Me* are gorgeous, gorgeous performances. The stuff dreams are made of. Dylan enjoying the words and the performance. Knowing that he's good, and that he can still cut it, and that he could go on getting better and better because it's in him now – the spirit or the inspiration or whatever it is that drives him on at all of his best gigs. Knowing that this is not a burned-out relic, but a middle-aged artist who has regained or recaptured, however fleetingly, the invisible force that can sometimes still take him to where he wants to go.

The spell is broken with *Shake, Rattle and Roll* but it was the kind of performance, like *Letterman* in '84, that you immediately rewind to see if it was as wonderful as you thought it was, only to find that, no – it's better. Shivers down the spine, tears in the eyes. I love Bob Dylan, and this is how I want him to be. When he's this good, it makes it all worthwhile. Everything. First reports of the U.S. shows immediately after *Seville* suggest that we may have some seriously fantastic shows on our hands. A recommitment to his artistry and to himself. I so, so want it to be true, even though I realise that he's so mercurial that next year's shows could be terrible again. But you can hope.



**BOB DYLAN** *at Fifty* ∞ It was one of the odder moments in the history of televised rock & roll. ∞ Bob Dylan had been invited to play at the 1991 Grammy Awards ceremony, on the occasion of receiving the National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences Lifetime Achievement Award. In theory, these tributes are bestowed to acknowledge [BY MIKAL GILMORE]

a performer's invaluable contribution to the history of popular music. In this case, though, it was a ludicrously belated recognition: Though he had affected both folk and popular music more than any other figure had in American culture, Dylan hadn't been honored — by NARAS, nor most of the established music industry for that matter — during the period of his greatest innovations, a quarter century ago. Indeed, in 1965 — the year that Dylan released "Like a Rolling Stone" and single-handedly changed rock & roll — the Grammy for Record of the Year was awarded to "A Taste of Honey," by Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass. Dylan himself would not receive a Grammy until 1979, for "Gotta Serve Somebody."

Maybe Dylan was thinking about this when he took the stage that night. Or maybe he had other matters on his mind. In any event, on this occasion, Bob Dylan proceeded to behave precisely like Bob Dylan. Accompanied by a motley rock & roll outfit, he delivered a snarled, throttled version of his most embittered antiwar song, "Masters of War," at the peak of America's most adamantly prowar season. It was a transfixingly weird performance: Dylan sang the song in a flat, rushed voice — as if he realized that no matter how passionately or frequently he sang these words, it would never be enough to thwart the world's appetite for war — while the band behind him blazed like hellfire. For days afterward, critics would debate whether the performance had been brilliant or embarrassing (why bother to protest a war, some asked, when the song's lyrics couldn't even be deciphered?), but this much was plain: Dylan's appearance was the only moment of genuine rock & roll abandon at the Grammy Awards in years.

Moments later, a deliriously amused Jack Nicholson presented Dylan with his Lifetime Achievement Award. Dressed in a lopsided dark suit, Dylan stood by, fumbling with his gray curl-brim fedora and occasionally applauding himself. When Nicholson passed the plaque to him, Dylan looked confused. "Well, uh, all right," he said, fumbling some more with his hat. "Yeah. Well, my daddy, he didn't leave me too much. You know, he was a very simple man. But what he told me was this: He did say, 'Son . . .'" And then Dylan paused, rubbing his mouth while silently reading what was on the plaque, and then he shook his head. "He said so many things, you know?" he said, and the audience tittered. "He said, 'Son, it's possible to become so defiled in this world that your own mother and father will abandon you. And if this happens, God will always believe in your own ability to mend your ways.'"

After that, nobody was laughing much. Dylan gave a final tip of his hat, spun on his heels and was gone. One more time, Bob Dylan had met America, and nobody really knew what to make of him.

IF THERE IS ANY CENTRAL MESSAGE IN BOB DYLAN'S early music, perhaps it is that it isn't easy for a bright, scrupulous person to live in a society that honors the inversion of its own best values, a society that increasingly turns away from the notions of community and democracy toward the twisted politics of death and abundance. To live through such a time with conscience and intelligence intact, Dylan says in his music, one has to

hold a brave and unsparing mirror up to the face of cultural corruption.

These days, of course, the politics of corruption and death are doing just fine and are fairly immune to any single pop star's acts of sedition. But back in the fevered momentum of the Sixties, when he first asserted himself, Dylan had a colossal impact on the changing face of American culture. With both his early folk writing and his mid-Sixties switch to electric music, Dylan gave voice to the rising anger of a bold new generation. In the process, he recast rock & roll as an art form that was capable of mocking society's values and politics and even, in the end, helping to redeem that society. Next to Elvis Presley, Dylan was the clearest shot at an individual cultural hero that rock & roll ever produced — and though he certainly pursued the occasion of his own moment in history, he would also pay a considerable cost for his ambition.

In July 1966, just a year after he had upended rock's musical and literary possibilities with "Like a Rolling Stone," and immediately following a tumultuous concert tour of the U.K. with his backing group the Hawks (later renamed the Band), Dylan was riding his motorcycle one morning near his home in Woodstock, New York, when the back wheel locked and he was hurled over the handlebar. He was taken to Middletown Hospital with a concussion and broken vertebrae of the neck. An impending concert tour of America was canceled, as were all future

recording sessions. He retreated to his home, with his wife and children, and spent months holed up with his friends from the Band in their nearby basement studio. According to some sources, Dylan was not as seriously hurt as was widely believed and had decided to use the time off to immerse himself in his new family life and to reevaluate his musical, political and spiritual tempers. According to others, Dylan used the sabbatical to recover from the intense psychological turbulence and rumored drug and alcohol bents of his short but seismic season as the king of rock & roll.

Eighteen months after the accident — at the peak of rock & roll's psychedelic era — Dylan returned to the pop world with *John Wesley Harding*, an acoustic-guitar and country-rhythm-section album. Along with *The Basement Tapes* (the sessions that Dylan had recorded privately with the Band in 1967), *John Wesley Harding* set out to find what could be salvaged of the American spirit — what values of family and history might endure or help to heal during a time of intense generational and political rancor. It was as though Dylan were trying to work against the era's context of rebellion and refusal — a context that he, as much as anyone, had helped make prevalent. Or perhaps he had simply lost his affection for a cultural momentum that, in his rush toward fame and invention, had almost cost him his life and his sanity.

But Dylan had changed rock & roll too much to undo or stop its drift, or to be released from the promises of his earlier visions. To many fans it seemed that he had lost a certain vital sense of com-

mitment. As a result, nearly all his subsequent releases would be evaluated for what they lacked — that is, for how they failed to live up to the standards of his explosive mid-Sixties work. Though Dylan would go on to make much lovely and resourceful music, he would never again produce work that would change or redefine American music and culture. Instead, he would make music that staked out the dimensions of his own change — music that, often as not, spoke to how the artist tried to outdistance the claims of his own past. Dylan's surpassing moment had come, and then, more quickly than any admirers ever expected, it had passed. For the last twenty-five years, Dylan has had to cope with that knowledge — and he has also had to cope with the knowledge that an increasingly capricious pop world has never really forgiven him for losing the momentum of his frenzied, world-breaking vision.

IT IS NOW 1991, AND BOB DYLAN — WHO TURNS fifty years old on May 24th — is still an active figure in rock & roll. In fact, recently he has been

busier than any time since the mid-Sixties, releasing collections of new recordings on a near-annual basis, writing and singing with the first major group he has ever joined (the Traveling Wilburys) and touring almost constantly on his own. It's as if Dylan were committed once again to the restless troubadour life that he effectively renounced following his motorcycle accident, as if he had more invested in the music's sustaining power than ever before.

Yet despite this renaissance, and despite the enduring influence of his Sixties work, the modern pop world has lost much of its fascination with Dylan. In the last decade, artists like Bruce Springsteen, Prince, Michael Jackson, Madonna, U2, Public Enemy, Metallica, Ice Cube and Guns n' Roses have produced vital work that has transformed what popular music is about and what it might accomplish, and some of that work has affected the culture at large, fueling ongoing social and political debate. Dylan hasn't made music to equal that effect for many years, nor has he really tried to. At best, he has tried occasionally to render work that taps into pop's commercial and technological vogues (such as *Empire Burlesque* and *Oh Mercy*), or he has mounted tours designed to interact with the massive audiences that his backing bands attract (such as his ventures with the Grateful Dead and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers). More typically, though, he has produced records that many observers regard as haphazard and uncommitted (like *Knocked Out Loaded*, *Down in the Groove* and last year's *Under the Red Sky*), and he has also been given to playing live shows that take some of his best material and flatten it beyond recognition or rescue.

At least that's one way of looking at it. It is also true that there remains much that is, illuminating and beautiful — and also profoundly unsettling — in Dylan's recent work. His best modern songs — including "Man in the Long Black Coat," "Brownsville Girl," "Under the Red Sky," "Dark Eyes," "Every Grain of Sand," "Death Is Not the End" and "Blind Willie McTell" — aren't that

"HAPPINESS IS  
NOT ON MY LIST  
OF PRIORITIES.  
ANYBODY CAN BE  
HAPPY."

much of a departure from earlier touchstones like "I Shall Be Released" and "Like a Rolling Stone." That is, they are the testament of a man who isn't aiming to change the world so much as trying to find a way to abide all the heartbreak and disillusion that result from living in a morally centerless time. In the end, that stance may be no less courageous than the fiery iconoclasm that Dylan once proudly brandished.

IT IS TEMPTING, OF COURSE, TO READ DYLAN'S modern songs as a key to his recent life and current sensibility — but then, that has long been the case. That's because, following his accident, Dylan became an intensely private man. He did not divulge much about the details of his life or the changing nature of his beliefs, and so when he made records like *Nashville Skyline*, *Self Portrait* and *New Morning* — which, in part, extolled marriage and family as redemptive forces in life — many fans assumed that these works also signified the truths of Dylan's own personal life. Later, in the mid-Seventies, when Dylan's marriage began to come apart and he made *Blood on the Tracks* and *Desire* — with their accounts of romantic loss and disenchantment — his songs seemed to be confessions of his suffering, and the pain appeared to suit his artistic talents better than domestic bliss had. Well, maybe . . . but also maybe not. The truth is, there is still virtually nothing publicly known about Bob Dylan's marriage to Sara Lowndes — how it came together, how it survived for a time and why it ultimately failed.

Since that period, there is even less that is known about Dylan beyond a few simple facts: that he has never remarried (and has apparently never found a love to take the place of his wife, except perhaps his love of God) and that he reportedly maintains a close relationship with his children. Past that, Dylan's personal life pretty much remains hidden; in fact, his is one of the best guarded private lives that any celebrity has ever managed to achieve. Dylan's friends do not disclose much — except, that is, when they leak his unreleased recordings — and Dylan himself likes discussing these matters even less than he likes discussing the meanings of his songs.

Which only causes one to wonder: Are Dylan's songs truly the key to Dylan? Does his life pour into his work at all? And is he a happy man? Or have his history and vision forever robbed him of the chance for peace and happiness?

There are, of course, no definitive answers to questions like these — and maybe they aren't even the right questions. Then again, with Dylan, it isn't always easy to know just what are the right questions to ask. A few years ago, during the recording sessions for *Knocked Out Loaded*, I conducted some interviews with Dylan for *ROLLING STONE* and once or twice tried broaching some of these topics. One night, at about two in the morning, Dylan was leaning across a pinball machine in an L.A. recording studio, talking about 1965, when he had toured England and made the film *Don't Look Back*.

Though it was a peak period in both his popularity and his creativity, it was also a time of intense pressure and unhappiness. "That was before I got married and had kids of my own," he said. "Having children, that's the great equalizer, you know? Because you don't care so much about yourself anymore. I know that's been true in my case. I'm not sure I'd always been that good to people before that time, or that good to myself."

I asked him, Did he think he was a happier man these days than twenty years earlier?

"Oh, man, I've never even thought about that," Dylan said, laughing. "Happiness is *not* on my list of priorities. I just deal with day-to-day things. If I'm happy, I'm happy — and if I'm not, I don't know the difference."

He fell silent for a few moments and stared at his hands. "You know," he said, "these are yuppie words, *happiness* and *unhappiness*. It's not happiness or unhappiness, it's either blessed or unblessed. As the Bible says, 'Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.'"

Now, that must be a happy man. Knowing that you are the person you were put on this earth to be — that's much more important than just being happy.

"Anyway, happiness is just a balloon — it's just temporary stuff. Anybody can be happy, and if you're not happy, they got a lot of drugs that can make you happy. But trust me: Life is *not* a bowl of cherries."

I asked him if, in that case, he felt he was a blessed man.

"Oh, yeah," he said, nodding his head and smiling broadly. "Yeah, I do. But not because I'm a big rock & roll star." And then he laughed and excused himself to go back to his recording session.

That was about as far as we got with that line of questioning. A couple of nights later, during another postmidnight visit, Dylan wanted to play the tape of "Brownsville Girl," which he had written with playwright Sam Shepard and had just finished recording. It was a long, storylike song, and it opened with the singer intoning a half-talked, half-sung remembrance about the time he saw the film *The Gunfighter*, about a fast-gun outlaw trying to forsake his glorious, on-the-run life when another fast-gun kid comes along and shoots him in the back. The man singing the song sits in a dark theater, watching the gunslinger's death over and over. As he watches it, he is thinking about how the dying cowboy briefly found a better meaning of life to aspire to — a life of family and love and peace — but in the end he couldn't escape his past. And then the singer begins thinking about all the love he has held in his own life, and all the hope he has lost, and all that he gave up for his own life on the run — and by the time the song is over, the singer can't tell if he's the man he's watching in the movie or if he's simply stuck in his own memory. Finally, as "Brownsville Girl" came crashing to its end, I realized what should have been obvious all along: This was a song about Dylan and about the life he has led and can never leave behind.

I didn't really know what to say, so I said nothing. Dylan lit a cigarette and took a seat on a near-

"IF I'M HERE AT  
EIGHTY, I'LL BE  
DOING THE SAME  
THING I'M DOING  
NOW."

by sofa and started talking. "If I'm here at eighty," he said after a bit, "I'll be doing the same thing I'm doing now. This is all I want to do — it's all I can do. . . . I think I've always aimed my songs at people who I imagined — maybe falsely so — had the same experiences that I've had, who have kind of been through what I'd been through. But I guess a lot of people just haven't."

He watched his cigarette burn for a moment and then offered a smile. "See," he said, "I've always been just about being an individual, with an individual point of view. If I've been about anything, it's probably that, and to let some people know that it's possible to do the impossible."

"And that's really all," Dylan added. "If I've ever had anything to tell anybody, it's that you can do the impossible. *Anything* is possible. And that's it. No more."

On that night, as on so many nights before and since, I realized that it has indeed been something special to be alive during the time that Bob Dylan has been one of our foremost American artists. Dylan managed to speak to and for the best visions and keenest ideals of an entire emerging generation, and he also spoke to our sense of scary and liberating isolation: the sense that we were now living on our own, with "no direction home," that we would have to devise our own rules and our own integrity to make it through all the change. In the process, Dylan not only boldly defined the moment, he also invented rock & roll's future: He staked out a voice and style that countless other budding visionaries, including Bruce Springsteen, Patti Smith, Elvis Costello and Sinéad O'Connor, would later emulate and seek to make their own. And because he did this so affectingly, it became easy to take him and his work personally, to believe that he was still tied to our hopes for pronouncements that might yet deliver us: As Springsteen once noted, in some remarks directed toward Dylan on the occasion of Dylan's induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame: "When I was fifteen and I heard 'Like a Rolling Stone,' I heard a guy like I've never heard before or since. A guy that had the guts to take on the whole world and made me feel like I had 'em, too. . . . To steal a line from one of your songs, whether you like it or not, 'You was the brother that I never had.'"

It's an understandable sentiment; to some of us, the epiphanies of youth count as deeply as the bonds of family. But as Dylan himself once told an interviewer: "People come up to me on the street all the time, acting like I'm some long-lost brother — like they *know* me. Well, I'm not their brother, and I think I can prove that."

It may be the only thing that he has left to prove — that he is not, after all, his brother's keeper — though in a sense it hardly matters. The truth is, despite his lapses, Dylan is still attempting to sort out the confusion of the day in the most honest and committed way that he knows. That is probably about as much as you can ask of somebody who has already done a tremendous amount to deepen our consciousness and our time. In the end, Bob Dylan remains a vital American artist — and one that we should be proud to claim as our own.

Happy birthday, Bob — and thanks for all the gifts. ■

By Martin Keller

# Happy Birthday Bob Dylan

## Best-Known Dylan Songs

Blowin' in the Wind  
 Like a Rolling Stone  
 Girl From the North Country  
 If Not for You  
 Don't Think Twice It's Alright  
 Forever Young  
 The Times They Are A-Changin'  
 It Ain't Me, Babe  
 I Shall Be Released  
 It's All Over Now Baby Blue  
 Rainy Day Women #12 & 35  
 Just Like a Woman  
 Knockin' on Heaven's Door  
 Lay Lady Lay  
 Quinn the Eskimo (The Mighty Quinn)  
 I Threw It All Away  
 I'll Keep It With Mine  
 Mr. Tambourine Man  
 Tears of Rage  
 All Along the Watchtower

## 50 YEARS OF BOB DYLAN

Robert Allen Zimmerman is born May 24, 1941, to Abram and Beatrice Zimmerman in Duluth, Minnesota, the first of two sons. The family moves to Hibbing in 1946. The teenager works for his dad's appliance store and is an above average student. But he's getting a bigger education outside school: James Dean movies, the songs of Hank Williams, and rock 'n' roll singers such as Little Richard and Chuck Berry influence his artistic development.

In 1959 after playing piano in a band that backs Bobby Vee for a gig in Fargo, the young musician works briefly around Center City and Denver, Colorado, before coming home to enroll at the University of Minnesota. Although he's been listening to rhythm and blues and pioneer rock 'n' roll, the scene he discovers in Dinkytown abounds with the poetry of the beats and the various strains of "folk" music, from cowboy tunes and Appalachian ballads to "Negro" spirituals and the influential songs of Woody Guthrie. He absorbs them all only to put his own stamp on each one in the years ahead.

The name change to Dylan transpires shortly after dropping out of both school and the Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity. He runs with the bohemian crowd that hangs out at places like McGosh's Bookstore, and sometimes plays at the local coffeehouse, The Ten O'Clock Scholar (a Burger King rests on the spot today).

### The Times They Are A-Changin'

December 1960-1962

Dylan heads to New York City, ostensibly to find Woody Guthrie, who is dying in a New Jersey hospital of Huntington's chorea. He embraces and is embraced by a small circle of Greenwich Village friends, folkies, beatniks, and hipsters, who share a voracious appetite for the blues. Brando and Dean, civil rights, and vision quests.

John Hammond, who had signed leg-

**A**FTER 50 YEARS AND MORE THAN 35 RECORDS, DOZENS OF UNAUTHORIZED biographies, numerous tours, and loads of speculation, Bob Dylan continues to confound skeptics and lifelong fans. He has been called a prophet, the voice of a generation, even the conscience of the world, and then written off, only to be penciled in again as a contender, as artist reborn. Perhaps because of these reincarnations it may be wrong to give him a fixed birth date. For as he implied in "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)," he's been busy being born. The alternative, he wrote, is to be busy dying.

In one of those births 30 years ago, he left Minnesota and arrived in New York like one of Jack Kerouac's dharma bums in search of Woody Guthrie—and himself. What he found helped shape a nation and its popular culture.

Dylan has never stopped searching. He's explored spiritual matters in a dark age that often seems cut off from its spiritual sources and from the fraternal common sense inherent in this country's great laws and doctrines. A poetic champion of the oppressed, Dylan produces work that, at its finest, seethes with a proverbial longing for freedom and decency.

God and mystery have always played supporting roles in his life and times, and his songs are rife with such visionary testimonials. Few albums more clearly state the case than those from the last decade. However, even as far back as 1967 in *John Wesley Harding*, Dylan's reach and songwriting reflected a wonderful mystical sensibility.

Friday, May 24, may be the perfect day to celebrate those sensibilities as well as his birth, by kicking back with a few old friends, while listening to the songs that at least for a while helped change a nation.

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endary artists such as Billie Holiday, signs Dylan to CBS Records late in 1961. Released on March 19, 1962, *Bob Dylan* was the first of more than 35 albums he has recorded, including the recently released three-record set, *The Bootleg Series (Rare & Unreleased 1961-1991)*.

*Recommended Albums from the Period:*  
*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan,*  
*The Times They Are A-Changin'*

### Like a Rolling Stone 1962-1966

Dylan's brilliant creative output and the troubled times in which he is writing are so intertwined that often he is unfairly pegged as the voice of a generation. He is touted and pigeonholed as prophet, poet, seer, shaman, and demigod.

Dylan's mythological stature is momentarily eclipsed when he performs with a rock 'n' roll band at the Newport Folk Festival in 1964, a much ballyhooed event that in retrospect seems absurdly overblown. While the dawn of "electric Dylan" is scorned by folk purists, the stage is set for some of the most compelling music he will record. The songs are alternately surreal, apocalyptic, symbolic, and sometimes very funny, but they are unmistakably original, and Dylan's star rises on both sides of the Atlantic.

*Recommended Albums:*  
*Bringing It All Back Home, Highway 61 Revisited, Blonde on Blonde*

### Knockin' on Heaven's Door 1967-1975

A near-fatal motorcycle accident near his home in Woodstock, New York, on July 29, 1966, sends Dylan into a reclusive period. The ensuing years are a meditative time during which he moves away from the brutal clamor of the sixties and the tyranny of leading the frantic life of a pop star.

Focusing on raising his family and reading philosophical and spiritual works, he downshifts his songwriting from rock to country. He pens the film score for the Sam Peckinpah movie *Pat Garret & Billy the Kid* and takes a cameo role in the film as the aptly named "Alias" in late '72, early '73. Aside from the 1969 Isle of Wight concert ("Woodstock East") in England, the now-legendary artist generally stays off the road and out of the public eye until

a landmark "comeback" tour with The Band in 1974.

*Recommended Albums:*  
*John Wesley Harding, Nashville Skyline, Self Portrait, New Morning, Before the Flood*

### Rolling Thunder 1976-1978

The mid-to-late-seventies are both vexing and vibrant for Dylan. He moves back to New York City and starts hanging out again, recording with everyone from Bette Midler to longtime friend and poet Allen Ginsberg.

In America's bicentennial year, he assembles a large traveling medicine show, a feast of musicians, singers, poets, and friends (among them playwright Sam Shepard and singer Joan Baez), that criss-crosses the continent. He names the group "The Rolling Thunder Review," and in performance he wears whiteface and a cowboy hat. There's thunder rolling through his personal life, too. In the late seventies, his 12-year marriage to Sara Lowndes is breaking up and the albums *Desire* and *Blood on the Tracks* eloquently, if painfully, chronicle the upheaval.

*Recommended Albums:*  
*Blood on the Tracks, Desire, The Basement Tapes (recorded with The Band in '67, bootlegged extensively and officially released in 1975)*

### Born Again 1978-1983

After years of singing about justice and freedom, pain and release, all forms of love including betrayed and abandoned love, and the lonely, mysterious place of man in nature and the wider universe, Dylan experiences a conversion to Christianity in 1978. He tours during this period but refuses to perform any songs written prior to his spiritual transformation.

Although sometimes framed by fundamentalist trappings, the "gospel records" of the early eighties, *Slow Train Coming, Saved, Shot of Love, and Infidels*, prove the born-again songwriter was more immersed in the Jesus defined by 18th century metaphysical poet William Blake—that is, the universal perfect man of brotherhood and forgiveness—than in the watered-down version of the savior embraced by televangelists such as Jim and Tammy Bakker. (In recent years, Dylan has been studying and practicing Judaism).



Once touted as a prophet and poet.

Throughout these tantalizing testaments to his newfound faith, Dylan continues to deliver the visionary poeticism inherent in his older work (such as *The Basement Tapes* in 1967 and *John Wesley Harding* in 1968) using the spiritual themes and mystical allusions common to both Old and New Testaments.

*Recommended Albums:*  
*Slow Train Coming, Shot of Love, Infidels*

### Forever Young 1983-1991

Dylan continues to record and rigorously tour. In 1988 he records the first of two *Traveling Wilburys* albums with George Harrison, Tom Petty, Jeff Lynne, and Roy Orbison. Dylan can still be counted as one of America's great artists, in the company of Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, the beat poets and Jack Kerouac, Chuck Berry and Hank Williams, Mahalia Jackson, Billie Holiday, James Dean, and many others whose work transcended the time in which it was born. At one time or another, the blue-eyed native son has sung in a voice that spoke to both the head and the heart, and to the mysteries of all ages. In that regard, the work of Bob Dylan endures and remains, as he sang in 1974, "Forever Young."

*Recommended Albums:*  
*Oh Mercy, Biography, Under the Red Sky, The Bootleg Series (Rare and Unreleased 1961-1991)* ■

# DYLAN AT 50



If he'd followed the script, Dylan wouldn't be here at all. In fact, he wouldn't have seen out the Sixties. He would have checked out after 'Blonde On Blonde', at the

height of his powers, his legend intact. Dylan being Dylan, however, he's hung in there - grimly, some would say - and on Friday, May 24, he will be 50. To celebrate the great man's half-century, we asked a cross-section of people to select their favourite song from Dylan's vast repertoire and tell us what it and he mean to them.

**JOHN BAULDIE** (editor of the Dylan fanzine, 'The Telegraph')

**'Mr Tambourine Man'**  
In May 1964, when 'Mr Tambourine Man' was composed, Dylan's writing was being newly shaped and inspired by sounds which were jangle-jangling somewhere in his own future. In one sense, 'Mr Tambourine Man' is about that, the best of Dylan's times and about the eagerness of the artist to pursue the elusive yet seemingly limitless possibilities of words and music, both written and, if necessary, beyond the world. I also like the tune.

**JIM BEATTIE** (Spire X)

**'Please Crowd Out Your Window'**  
While everyone else sang about love, Dylan sang about life.

**MIKI BERENYI**

(Lush)  
**'Bob Dylan's 115th Dream'**  
What does Bob Dylan mean to me? Not as much as Bob Marlin!

**BILLY BRAGG**

**'Mr Tambourine Man'**

It was so much better than all the rubbish poetry that I was being taught in school. I didn't know at the time that it was about illegal substances - but then again almost all the great songs of the time were either about substances or inspired by them. It was just that there was something about the imagery that appealed to the budding songwriter in me - 'Take me disappearing through the smoke rings of my mind', and so on. Anyway, I was saved by Bob Dylan, because all my classmates at school were listening to 'Tartarus', 'Tubular Bells' or 'Tales From Topographic Oceans'. They thought you had to do for liking Dylan, but I knew I was right - although do remember thinking, 'What a stupid thing to do getting up on stage with just an acoustic guitar...

**PETE WYLIE**

**'One Of Us Must Know (Sooner Or Later)'**  
If I'm writing words, no matter how good I think I'm getting, Dylan's the one person who intimidates me. He's got such a wealth of great stuff. 'Positively 4th Street' was the first one I thought of, and then 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' - because one of the things people miss about Bob Dylan is that he had a sense of humour. He wasn't just spitting out intense nastiness or anger - he was laughing half the time. 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' is a funny song, and so is 'Stuck Inside Of Mobile With The Memphis Blues Again'. I also love 'Like A Rolling Stone', which is the first Dylan song I was ever aware of, and it's just this stream of great words. 'You're A Big Girl Now' is another one - but it's not just the song I love, it's the big, painful howl he does, which says more than any of the words or the music. But in the end I had to choose something off

'Blonde On Blonde', because that's my favourite Dylan record. It touches so many areas - there's humour on it, like 'Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat', and great lyrical things like 'Visions Of Johanna'. But if I have to choose one, I'll choose 'One Of Us Must Know (Sooner Or Later)' - partly because I've just read that Robert Shelton book, 'No Direction Home'. He kind of dismisses 'One Of Us Must Know' because it isn't an intense lyrical dissection of the political scene, or whatever - but it's just a great song about a relationship breaking up. It's really well thought out, but it never feels as if he sat down and analysed it - it feels as if it just came out of him. The music's great too, and that's another thing - because Dylan has such a reputation as a words writer, people forget that he wrote great tunes as well. 'One Of Us Must Know' is a great melody, and it's very powerful and really moving.

Then, around 1982, I suddenly thought, 'There's an option I could take!'

I got into the idea of lyrics and songwriting through the 'Times They Are A-Changing' album, which had all the great political songs on it like 'The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll' and 'The Times They Are A-Changing' itself. The real turning point was when I swapped 'The Jackson 5's Greatest Hits' for 'Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits', the one with the red book on the cover. When I was the Saturday boy at Guy Norris' record shop in Barking, I used to sneak into the listening booths during the lunch hour and listen to that album - and that was how I first heard Dylan's version of 'Mr Tambourine Man'. I became a Dylan bore from then up until 'Blood On The Tracks', but after that he kind of drifted off.

**MARTIN CARR** (The Boo Radleys)

**'It Ain't Me, Babe'**  
There's loads of Dylan stuff I really like, but of the moment I'm listening to the version of this on the 'Now Ain't The Time For Your Tears' live 1965 bootleg LP. I collect his stuff up to '66, basically - up to then, I think he was wonderful, totally brilliant. But he lost a lot of his power in the motorbike accident. Before that, he just lashed out at everyone and everything. After the crash, he seemed to mellow out. He was a genius because he had these extreme feelings that he managed to channel in the right direction, at the right time, and this comes out in some of the nastiest undercurrents in pop. I don't listen to his post-accident records at all, though. It would've been better if he'd died then.

**NICK CAVE**

**'Idiot Wind'**  
No comment.

**EDWYN COLLINS**

**'Tomorrow Is A Long Time'**  
This is from his 'Greatest Hits' album, and it's my favourite Dylan love song. I love it for its poignancy. Out of his protest songs, I really like 'The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll'. That covers the two strands of Dylan's music.

I've got most of his LPs, but I don't think he's made a great album since 'Blood On The Tracks'. I haven't got any of his Eighties stuff. Dylan was great, though, because he changed the lyrical concerns of rock by using things from folk, which was more pertinent than pop of the time. He obviously influenced The Beatles in the early-to-mid Sixties. After that I met Dylan - who'd been influenced by the French symbolists, like Rimbaud - in '65. John Lennon's lyrics changed from boy-meets-girl to more surreal stuff. The title track from my LP, 'Hope And Despair' was a notable homage to Dylan. The character in that song is almost a parody of a wandering minstrel with an electric lute. Well, that's got the plug for me in!

**ELVIS COSTELLO**

**'No Time To Think'**

**BOBBY GILLESPIE** (Primal Scream)

**'Like A Rolling Stone'** (Five at the Royal Albert Hall, 1964)  
'Immaculate rock'n'roll. I'm a Dylan fan because of his amphetamine habits in 1966.

**MILES HUNT** (The Wonder Stuff)

**'It's Alright (It's Only Bleeding)'**  
My old man brought me and my brother up on a diet of Dylan - much to the annoyance of my mother. I go for the albums, really, like 'Desire' and 'Blood On The Tracks'. But if I had to pick one track, it would be this.

**SHANE MacGOWAN**

**'Chimes Of Freedom'**  
Like all Bob Dylan songs, 'Chimes Of Freedom' is open to interpretation. He's stoned out of his brain early in the morning and in his mind the bells of prison are turning into chimes of freedom, crashing and smashing for the hung up and the screwed up, the

only way he could write.

**JOHNNY MARR**

**'Ballad Of A Thin Man'**  
Beautiful gloom.

**BOB NEUWIRTH** (songwriter, former Dylan tour manager)

My favourite Dylan song? It has to be whatever he writes next because I'm always surprised.

**LIAM O'MAONLAÍ** (Hothouse Flowers)

**'Forever Young'**  
I first heard 'Forever Young' when I saw a video of 'The Last Waltz', and I just thought it had a great sentiment and was a very complete sort of song. The main reason I like Bob Dylan's style of singing is because it sometimes reminds me of the Sean Nas singing of the west of Ireland.

**STEVEN SEVERIN** (Siouxie And The Banshees)

**'This Wheel's On Fire'**  
We covered 'This Wheel's On Fire' solely on the strength of the Julie Driscoll version. We only found out it was written by Dylan when we received the sheet music. Bob Dylan has never meant anything to me, thankfully. In fact, I am eternally grateful that I didn't have an older brother or sister forcing me the stuff. There again, his stint at Live Aid did raise a smile.

**MICHELLE SHOCKED**

**'The Boxer'** (Paul Simon song, from 'Self Portrait')

**BOB STANLEY** (Saint Etienne)

**'Please Crowd Out Your Window'**  
I really like Bob Dylan - up to a point. I actually believe that he died in that



'What I like about Dylan is the fact that they guy's not scared. He has no fear, his courage gives us all courage. He's also an incredible role model for scumbags like me...'  
- DAN STUART, Green On Red

'66 motorbike crash and that the bloke who's been making records under that name ever since has been an impostor. It's true! He looks nothing like pre-'66 Dylan, and all his records since then have been crap, so he must be an impostor. 'Please Crowd Out Your Window' is my favourite Dylan track. It was a single-only release that came out after 'Positively 4th Street' and it's brilliant because there's so much bile and venom in it. No one else could be as venomous as Dylan. That's why I like him.

**DAN STUART** (Green On Red)

**'Every Grain Of Sand'**  
There's too many favourites to mention, but just now I'm listening to 'Every Grain Of Sand'. It's a big metaphysical thing, the whole idea that someone's watching over us. What I like about Dylan is the fact that the guy's not scared. He has no fear. His courage gives us all courage. Usually it sounds pretentious to talk of someone in those terms, but with Dylan it's not pretentious at all. It's like Marlon Brando in films. Marlon Brando and Bob Dylan - you're talking about the same reality.

He's a f\*\*\*ing bank robber. He's an international cultural terrorist. I like the way he refuses to accept any kind of image that his audience has of him. I think Dylan has the healthiest mindset of any artist who has that body of work. It's just incredible how he's constantly able to reinterpret himself and not get up every day and put a bullet through his head. He's also an incredible role model for scumbags like me. It's also great that he can put out nursery rhymes like 'Wiggle Wiggle' at this stage of his career. He doesn't have to bother with this 'Blowin' In The Wind' shit, he's already done that.

'If Dogs Run Free', that song has got to be the stupidest, most hilarious thing - that woman scot singing in the background. It's totally horrid, it's just wonderful.

I saw him five months ago in Austin and I couldn't recognise his face. At one point I thought he was doing a George Michael cover. He was breaking in a guitar player who thought he had the gig. This guy was 40 yards away from Dylan on the other side of the stage and every now and again Dylan would nod him to play a solo. This little tour was just did, when we had a bad night I would comfort myself with the thought that Dylan was 10 times worse than we could ever be.

**JIM REID** (The Jesus And Mary Chain)

**'Subterranean Homesick Blues'**  
The choice may be obvious but this record has probably changed more people's attitude towards pop music than any other I can think of. Pop music need not be throwaway, this record will outlast all of us.

**STEVE RIPPON** (Lush)

**'Rainy Day Women'**  
He was the first person to make rock'n'roll fans think

**KARL WALLINGER**

**'Percy's Song'**  
It's the story of Dylan writing a letter to a judge who's just sentenced his friend to 99 years for crashing a car and killing the passenger. He goes to see the judge to try and sway him, but it doesn't work. It's basically a 'common man trying to make the establishment see sense' kind of thing. But it's set up in the best way I've ever heard any song set up. The way Dylan sings, 'Bad news came to me where I sleep' - you immediately realise the guy must be in a hostel. You know so much about the character from just a few words. Dylan's a master of that. It's so melancholic. It's a lovely song. It's like a book within a song. It's a REAL song. I think the first Dylan song I ever heard was 'Positively 4th Street'. I remember thinking it sounded like he was drunk, which was completely different to any other kind of singer I'd heard. Because here was

somebody who was just letting it all hang out and it wasn't a performance. If it was, he's like a massive sponge - he absorbed Woody Guthrie, he absorbed the blues, he absorbed early rock'n'roll, he absorbed The Beatles and went electric and didn't give a shit about what people thought. He was into being a pop star, which is interesting, and he was good at it too. He didn't just want to wear a funny sweater and hang out in folk dives his whole life. I like the fact that he wanted to go the whole way. I think Dylan's scary. He was a prodigy. I've got tapes of him when he did radio broadcasts as Little Bobby Dylan and he sounded like an 80-year-old blues man when he was just 19. Having mastered the blues before he was 20 and then to go on to be a pop star after looking across the Atlantic at The Beatles, it's incredible. I think he's still got the spirit brat in him. But then it must be very hard being Bob Dylan.

# It ain't you, babe

Bob Dylan, 50 this month, wooed the women in his life with love songs too eloquent to resist. But who were they?

ELSPETH THOMPSON scours the lyrics for clues

**I**F AN ALBUM COVER HAS EVER CAPTURED AN AGE, THE SLEEVE OF *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* seemed to say it all for the pre-hippy early Sixties. A 22-year-old Dylan and an even younger girl stride arm in arm down West Fourth Street in the snow, he deep in thought, hands deep in pockets, she with her head glued devotedly to his shoulder, flashing a groovy smile. At the time few people knew that this was no model but Dylan's first girlfriend, Suze Rotolo, for whom he had already written two of his most famous love songs, *Tomorrow is a Long Time* and *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right*.

Like any songwriter, Dylan has always had his muses, and Susan

Rotolo was the first of many. But, being Dylan, the women in his life have always been the subject of intense curiosity and speculation. Apparently, his effect on women was notorious, even before he became famous. "He made out like a bandit because he was a lost waif," remembers a friend from his wild two terms at Minneapolis University. "He had this little cherub face and the most beautiful voice... and a pair of brown corduroy pants that he wore so often they had a rip in the crotch."

When he hit the New York Village scene in 1960, the same success prevailed, but it was not long before he had struck up an intense relationship with the bookish, socially aware Rotolo, who he admits played a big part in



EDIE SEDGWICK, 1965, BEFORE SHE 'BROKE JUST LIKE A LITTLE GIRL'

swaying him towards the protest songs that made him famous. "Suze was into this equality-freedom thing long before I was. I checked out the songs with her," he confessed much later. Ironically, it was precisely these songs – *Blowin' in the Wind*, *Masters of War* and *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall* – that would provide the bait for Joan Baez and lead Dylan into his most famous public affair. The undisputed "Queen of Folk" for four years, Baez's sole use of old material was beginning to jeopardise her appeal, and as fast as Dylan wrote his new songs, she stole them. She invited him to stay at her house in California "to write together", and started introducing him as an act at her own concerts – "dragging my little vagabond out on to the stage was a grand experiment". It was a difficult time for Suze Rotolo, and when Baez introduced *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right* as "a song about a love affair that's lasted 'oo long", she ran out of the Newport Folk Festival in tears.

The Dylan/Baez liaison continued – probably more glowing in the public imagination than in reality – until Dylan's British tour of 1965, when his increasing

irritation with Baez is evident in Don Pennebaker's film, *Don't Look Back*. At one point, Joan announces that she is going to bed because she's "fagged out"; this is greeted with jeers and laughter from Dylan and his friend Bob Neuwirth: "Sister, you fagged out long ago."

Dylan had invited her on the tour, and Baez hung on in the hope that he would return her favour in introducing her at his gigs. It became obvious to all that this was not going to happen, but Joan did not relinquish her hold until she came round to his hotel room one morning only to have the door opened by Sara Lowndes, the future Mrs Dylan.

**B**AEZ'S PUBLIC HARPING about the affair ever since has at times made her look ridiculous. Although they did not play together for another 10 years, she continued to address Dylan in song – with an album of his lyrics in 1969 and the ghastly *To Bobby* in 1971, in which she beseeched him to come back to the protest scene. She also believed that he wrote songs to her. "I'm not pompous enough to say that anything was written because of me," she said in an interview with Robert Shelton in 1966, "but it sure is hard to think otherwise when I hear some of the lyrics." Dylan has always been non-committal about the affair and denies having written songs to her. "She brought me up," he told Shelton. "I rode on her, but I don't think I owe her anything."

"I see Bobby with a slightly damaged diamond in his head," Baez said after the split, and her finest song, *Diamonds and Rust*, is an examination of their affair, 10 years on, inspired by Dylan's telephone invitation, out of the blue,



JOAN BAEZ, QUEEN OF FOLK, WITH HER 'ORIGINAL VAGABOND', 1963



HE GAVE HER HIS HEART BUT SHE WANTED HIS SOUL. DYLAN WITH HIS FIRST LOVE, SUZE ROTOLO, ON THE SHOOT FOR THE 'FREEWHEELIN'' COVER

to join him in the Rolling Thunder Revue tour of 1974. Dylan's wife and children were part of the entourage, and there is a wonderful story about Baez's first meeting with Sara, when they sat and talked for hours about the days when the "Original Vagabond" was two-timing them. Joan remarked that she had never found Bob to be much good at giving presents, but that he had once given her a beautiful blue nightgown. "Hang on," exclaimed Sara, "I'd always wondered where that went."

Joan Baez was by no means the only person shocked by Dylan's marriage in November 1965, at the peak of a period of wild, almost suicidal living and experimentation with every drug in the book. Edie Sedgwick, the gamine star of Warhol's movies, had started hanging around with Dylan and had apparently been given plenty of encouragement. According to Nico, the Velvet Underground chanteuse for whom Dylan wrote *I'll Keep it with Mine* in 1964, the playful *Leopardskin Pillbox Hat* is about Sedgwick, and some say she was the inspiration for the most

famous love song of them all—*Just Like a Woman*.

Everyone was taken by surprise by the marriage; indeed, it was not reported in the press until months afterwards. And before a year was up, after a hectic world tour in which the chaotic new electric sound of *Blonde on Blonde* was presented to fiercely hostile audiences, and after the much-fabled brush with death on his motorcycle, Dylan just as abruptly vanished from the scene. He went into virtual domestic hiding with Sara, and spent most of the next five years having babies and writing love songs.

So who was Sara—the "Scorpio sphinx", the "mystical wife", the "saintlike face and ghostlike soul" of these songs? Who inspired *Sad-eyed Lady of the Lowlands*, one of the longest love songs in rock, taking up a whole side of *Blonde on Blonde*? Dylan quite literally worshipped Sara, referring to her as "one of the two people I know who I could call holy", and much of the religious imagery in his pre-conversion songs is focused on her. Both physically and mentally, Sara was his "saviour".



SARA, OH SARA. FROM BUNNYGIRL TO 'SWEET VIRGIN ANGEL' AND 'MYSTICAL WIFE', AT HOME IN WOODSTOCK, 1968

Dylan's madonna was, in terms of her past, anything but. The ex-wife of Playboy impresario Victor Lowndes, Sara had worked as a bunny girl and was a good friend of Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman, and his wife. Yet those who knew her then describe her as wise beyond her 22 years and knowledgeable about magic and folklore. "She just rolled with nature," remembered the music journalist Lynn Musgrave in Shelton's biography. "I got the impression of her being strong. That line, *My love, she speaks like silence*—that's Sara."

But soon the excitement about Dylan's new life began to pall. Others beside Joan Baez grew impatient at his withdrawal from reality. In 1968, year of the Prague spring, Vietnam, Civil Rights and student insurrections, Dylan's total creative output was two love songs—*I Threw it all Away* and *Lay, Lady, Lay*. People started to resent the woman who seemed to be sapping his creative powers.

As cliché would have it, the poetic muse only returned to Dylan when his real-life muse seemed in danger of leaving. A very bad patch in his marriage in the early Seventies is generally believed to be behind the achingly beautiful *Blood on the Tracks*, an album still regarded as his best. When DJ Mary Travers told Dylan in an interview how much she had enjoyed it, the reply came: "How could anyone possibly enjoy hearing that type of pain?"

A period of creative chaos ensued, with the Rolling Thunder Revue tour, another well-received album, *Desire*, and the films—*The Last Waltz* and *Renaldo and Clara*, in which Baez and Sara seem to alternate in roles as goddesses or whores. Dylan was running wild again at this point, remembers Ron Wood, who was part of the tour before joining the Stones. "He was seeing all kinds of witchy women, seers and mystics..." And Joan Baez paints the scene that ensued when Sara turned up one evening unannounced, "looking like a madwoman... Bob was ignoring her and he had picked up some curly-headed mopsy who perched on the piano during his rehearsals." It was not long until the divorce and the public fight for alimony and custody of the children.



SALLY KIRKLAND TRIES ON THE LEOPARDSKIN PILLBOX HAT

SINCE SARA THERE HAVE BEEN NO MUSES ON THE GRAND SCALE. Sure, there have been women—Sally Kirkland, an American actress who said in *Hello!* magazine last year that he has written songs for her; a dubious dancer called Gypsy Fire, who claims to have "danced naked for Dylan"; affairs with backing singers in the early Eighties; a gospel singer called Clydie King, and the Born-Again Mary Alice Artes, who seems to have played a critical part in his public conversion to Christianity.

God, rather than women, has provided the talk about Dylan in the Eighties. And God has largely taken the place of women as the inspiration behind his music. He still writes love songs, but it is hard to tell whether he is singing about the present or the past; about one woman or an idealised lost love.

What has also gone since Dylan's conversion is his intensely personal relationship with his audience. In the past, in love songs such as *It Ain't Me, Babe*, he sometimes appeared to be talking as much to the audience as to a lover. These days, he is a silent, remote figure on stage. Fifty years old this month the enigma remains intact, deep in Raybanned shadow. **AL** Unless otherwise stated, quotes are taken from *Dylan: Behind the Shades* by Clinton Heylin (Viking, £16.99) May 2

Forever young?

Sorry, no. Bob Dylan—suddenly 50 years old—has declined into a loopy, very occasionally inspired parody of his once-great self. JOE QUEENAN explains what happened and asks Dylan about his future.

"Yeah, well, um...well, you know, things could change at any time," Dylan says. Don't count on it.

# The Free-fallin' Bob Dylan

EXCLUSIVE POLYSYLLABIC

AS A COOL OCTOBER EVENING FALLS ON EISENHOWER Hall at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, about an hour's drive north of New York City, the women inside selling calico piglets, cow-shaped oven mitts and pussycat chess sets are looking a bit glum. Of all unlikely things, West Point's Eisenhower Hall has been the site of a crafts fair this day, and it seems to have been a success. The women, though, no doubt hoped they would make lots of extra sales to the crowd gathering for the performance at the Hall that night—Hal Linden with the Rockettes. For synergistic marketing, you couldn't do much better than to combine calico-piglets with Hal Linden belting out the Liza songbook. Unfortunately, Linden and the Rockettes have canceled, and the audience that has shown up for the replacement act is not buying.

True, there are hundreds of couples in their forties, and that's a pretty good age group if you're selling cow-shaped oven mitts, but these 40-year-olds look like college-professor types. Maybe they would go for *antique* cow-shaped oven mitts? There are a few teenagers in freshly laundered tie-dyed T-shirts. As potential customers, the worst are the people who look the way the farmers in these parts did around 1850—the men with their beards and shapeless hats, the women, a lot fewer of them, with their hair very simple and no makeup and big clunky shoes. Finally, hundreds of cadets have arrived, all dressed in gray. This strange brew of locals requires an explanation. It is simply this: of all unlikely things, the performer this night at Eisenhower Hall at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point is Bob Dylan.

ILLUSTRATION BY MILTON GLASER



DYLAN INTERVIEW

If any institution could be described as a place where none is the number, where black is the color, where the masters of war stick guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children, that institution is West Point. The appearance there of the man who wrote "The Times They Are A-Changin'," "Blowin' in the Wind," "With God on Our Side" and other songs intended to make the Pentagon tremble seems a little incongruous. However, when it is suggested to Barbara Sarff, assistant director for the theater, that Dylan's booking may have culturally anomalous overtones, she replies, "Eisenhower Hall is a performing-

arts center that sponsors a *wide* range of cultural events in the Hudson Valley region."

And why should a mere publicist at Eisenhower Hall find it curious and ironic that Bob Dylan is playing West Point when Dylan himself, a man who was once widely believed to be divine, does not? Some months later, when I ask him about the West Point show in an interview, Dylan says, "Uh, the West Point show... was that before New York?" Reminded that it was indeed before he performed at the Beacon Theater in New York, Dylan responds, "Ohhhh... okay. That was probably flown in—that show was, uh, just booked in that... because it was in that area." He ignores a hint that the implications of this appearance are interesting: "It was a decent show. It—no, it was a great show, wasn't it? There was a large pit there, and they didn't allow people to go across it." To the question of whether he felt strange playing to a sea of gray-uniformed cadets, Dylan says only, "Well, every show is different, you know? There wasn't anything unusual about it, except my recollection is that there might have been some problems that particular evening

because of the stage setup. My recollection of the show is more in that area instead of the crowd or the facility where the show was happening. They seemed to be an enthusiastic crowd." Pressed further on whether he saw any incongruity in singing protest songs to this particular audience, Dylan says, "Do you remember when this show was?"

(Getting an interview with Bob Dylan is only slightly less difficult than persuading Pol Pot to free up some time on his calendar. Requests are submitted in writing and relayed to Dylan by his press agent, Elliot Mintz, who

then transmits the message that the request either has been turned down or has "fallen into the category of a nonrejected request." Once a request becomes a nonrejected request, Mintz alerts the potential interviewer to "windows of opportunity" during which Dylan may be in the right mood to chat. In this case, the first window of opportunity was expected to open around February 20, six weeks after the original request, but Mintz said Dylan was too overcome by receiving a Lifetime Achievement Grammy award to agree to an interview and instead had retreated first to Mexico, then to "a tropical island with no telephones." Mintz eventually said that a brief conversation on Thursday, March 28, was not inconceivable. But he could not promise that Dylan would call this reporter, nor could he specify what time of day Dylan would call, if in fact he did call. The most Mintz could do was to say that if Dylan did not call on Thursday, he would never call. Mintz seems to have taken PR lessons from Samuel Beckett. At an unappointed hour on the appointed day, Mintz called to say that he was on his way over to Dylan's house to see if Dylan was "up for it." Said Mintz, "If this comes down, it will take place at around 9:30 p.m. If he's not up for it, I'll call to say that he's not." At 10:20, Mintz called to say Dylan was ready to talk.)

If we had no other evidence than this haziness about West Point that Dylan has become completely oblivious to his legend and to the world as a whole, we might speculate that these responses were a Dylanesque joke at a reporter's expense, that he was toying with his interviewer as he had done so often and so famously in the sixties. Unfortunately, we have lots of other evidence. The first exhibit might be Dylan's appearance at the Grammy Awards last spring. If any of the tens of millions of people watching had not already realized that Bob Dylan, poet, wit, heartrending vocalist, hipster, scourge, had turned into Bob Dylan, somewhat pathetic kook—well, now they knew.

### Getting an interview with Bob Dylan is only slightly easier than persuading Pol Pot to free up some time



**BOBBY:** clockwise from top left, Dylan and Joan Baez actually looking happy, 1965; Byronic Bob; "How many years can some people exist before they're allowed to be free?"; perfect folkie cool; Innocence, giddiness, promise, 1963

### For He's a Jingle-Jangle Good Fellow!

A SPY 50TH-BIRTHDAY  
CELEBRATION

Given the course of Bob Dylan's career over the last two decades, the slogan whose attitude he once epitomized—"Don't trust anyone over 30"—may have been wiser than anyone knew. Still, 50 is a pretty important milestone and should be celebrated accordingly. STEVE TURNER asked some of Dylan's friends and admirers for their thoughts on a suitable gift.



BONO

"A copy of *Finnegans Wake*."

MARIANNE FAITHFULL

"A brand-new leopard-skin pillbox hat."



JOHN LEE HOOKER

"I'd give him my Cadillac."



GEORGE HARRISON

"A 1015 Wurlitzer CD jukebox."

WILLIAM BURROUGHS

"A shaman's drum."



ARLO GUTHRIE

"A sense of humor."

Wearing one of those distinctive hats of his that make him look like a refugee from *Hee Haw*, Dylan first played an incomprehensible, Gatling-gun version of "Masters of War." Then Dylan bemused his patient listeners with this acceptance speech: "Well, uh, all right... Yeah... Well, my daddy, he didn't leave me too much; you know, he was a very simple man, and he didn't leave me a lot. But what he told me was this: he said, 'Son,' he said, um..." A long pause. "He said so many things, you know. But he did say, he said, 'It's possible to become so defiled in this world that your own mother and father will abandon you. And if that happens, God will always believe in your ability to mend your own ways.' Thank you." Tantalizing; inscrutable; nuts.

Not to Dylan, though. When he is asked about the Grammy performance, he sounds downright jolly, taking the whole thing in stride. "That song may be retired," he says. He goes on: "The flu greeted me that morning in a big way. All my drainpipes were stopped up. Those kinds of things just happen to me, the night of... the night I'm going to be on a big TV show, and the inside of my head was feeling like the Grand Canyon or something. It was not a good night for me. But the song would have come off probably better if my head had been able to get more or less into it." Why did he play "Masters of War" that evening? "We just did that one... You know, war going on and all that."

Dylan's nonchalance has its charm. One can almost admire him for taking this approach to an occasion of such monumental insincerity and commercialism as the Grammys. With a lot of effort, one might even divine some profoundly apt sentiment in his speech. Maybe in a convoluted way one can explain the value of breaking one of his classics into shards—if you want note-perfect renditions of oldies, that's what the Beach Boys are for. *Maybe* one could look at it this way. But nothing can excuse the hat.

BOB DYLAN TURNED 50 ON MAY 24, 1991 ("WELL, TO ME IT'S JUST ANOTHER BIRTHDAY," he says), and it seems clear that the second 25 years of his life have been less kind to him than the first. He is still capable of writing stunning songs—like the one for his current video, "Series of Dreams"—and it might be too much to ask of anyone to stay brilliant and pure while those around him, ourselves included, sink into dullness and compromise; but his degeneration has been painful to witness.

In 1966, Dylan suddenly withdrew from the public and spent eight quiet years mostly in Woodstock, New York—not so far from West Point, as a matter of fact. He claimed to have injured himself badly in a motorcycle accident, but many believe that the accident was trivial and that Dylan was really using it as an excuse to escape the mounting pressures and obligations of superstardom. By the time of his retreat to the country at age 25, Dylan had recorded two very good albums (*Another Side of Bob Dylan*, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*), two magnificent albums (*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, *Bringing It All Back Home*) and two albums that neither he nor anyone else would ever surpass (*Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*). He had become the object of more international fascination than any individual since Byron. He had proved himself to be the wittiest and most moving composer and performer of folk songs to have come out of the folk movement, and the writer of the most important protest songs in the days of the civil-rights movement. He had made a second career, as it were, in rock 'n' roll and had become arguably the most important figure in rock history—more important than Elvis because he wrote his own songs, full of musical imagination; more important than the Beatles because of his sway over John Lennon, his lyrics ("I Am the Walrus" sounds like Dylan on his day off) and his bluesiness; more important than the Rolling Stones because, well, he was more important than the Rolling Stones. He had dominated the ultrahip Warhol-Chelsea Hotel scene and had taken more drugs earlier than Lou Reed; he was a very sharp dresser.

And Dylan's influence was pervasive. A partial list of the things Dylan is primarily or exclusively responsible for would have to include protest music, hostile press conferences, Jimi Hendrix's hair, cheap sunglasses, pretentious liner notes, singer-songwriters with horrible voices, two-record sets, turning the Beatles on to marijuana, and sincere, pasty-faced folksingers who make every subway on the planet a living hell.

Given the apex of political, musical and stylistic coolness that Dylan had reached in 1966, it should come as no surprise that the subsequent acts of his life have been less satisfying. For a quarter of a century, he has suffered from the fact that had he hit his head a bit harder one July afternoon in the Catskills, he would be regarded as the rock James Dean, the tortured genius who lived fast, died young and left an exquisite corpse. The Jim Morrison cult would have looked like some minor sect compared with the posthumous religion of Dylan. As music critic Stephen Fried says, Dylan's early demise

would have suited some people just fine: "Critics want rock stars to make three great albums and then die." Which a surprising number have been more than willing to do.

But Dylan did not die. Instead, he lived on to make one album, *Blood on the Tracks*, that may just be the equal of *Blonde on Blonde*, three others that are worth buying (*John Wesley Harding*, *Desire*, *Slow Train Coming*) and three others that are worth thinking about buying (*Shot of Love*, *Infidels*, *Oh Mercy*).

**Asked why he makes so many records, Dylan says, "They're just records that are fulfilling my contract, which they give to me"**

Dylan lived to become a born-again Christian in the 1970s. (He was raised Jewish, and his real name is Robert Zimmerman. Despite his conversion, he appeared on the Chabad telethon in 1989 performing "Hava Nagila" as part of a trio called Chopped Liver.) Dylan lived to bloat his raw, crackling sound grotesquely with full-tilt, hydrocephalic, late-period-Elvis production values—the uptown horns, the Jimmy Smith organ swells, the oohing-and-aahing girl backup singers who make Dylan sound as if he were being held hostage in an abandoned warehouse by Gladys Knight and the Pips. And, perhaps worst of all, Dylan lived to appear in the never-released 1986 film *Hearts of Fire*, in which he plays an aging rock star who raises chickens.

With *Infidels* in 1983 and *Ob Merly* in 1989, each of which has a handful of fine songs, Dylan raised hopes that he could return to something like his old form. After *Infidels*, these hopes were greeted with *Empire Burlesque*, a record of which Neil Diamond would be proud; after *Ob Merly*, these hopes were greeted with *Under the Red Sky*. *Under the Red Sky* includes the song "Wiggle Wiggle." Its lyrics run, "Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, like a bowl of soup/Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle like a rolling hoop." (Actually, these are not the most embarrassing lyrics Dylan has ever written. Those lyrics are from his 1979 song "Gotta Serve Somebody": "You may call me Terry, you may call me Timmy/You may call me Bobby, you may call me Zimmy.") Peter, Paul and Mary made 22-year-old Bob Dylan a songwriting star with their massively successful recording of "Blowin' in the Wind" in 1963. Says Peter Yarrow, "One can surmise that [Dylan] does these things from the heart and doesn't scope out the sagacity of everything he does. That's what keeps him clean." He adds, "What we're seeing is works in progress that didn't work."

"There aren't many steady-on albums," says Joan Baez, who also helped make Dylan famous almost three decades ago. Indeed, Dylan may finally have achieved the mediocrity and near oblivion he has seemed, perversely, to seek for so long. His work with the Traveling Wilburys is fun but silly. (Noel Stookey, the "Paul" of Peter, Paul and Mary, says of the Wilburys, "It's a little like going bowling.") *Biograph*, released in 1985, is a 53-song compilation that is impressive only because it reminds you of Dylan's past. The three-CD *Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3*, issued by Columbia last spring, contains a lot of alternate tracks and unreleased songs that were probably left off Dylan albums because they were the ninth-best cuts he'd recorded that week. Never a great commercial success, Dylan has had sales of about 300,000 copies with his recent albums (M.C. Hammer's latest has sold 15-million). As a result of sixties nostalgia, college students do feel they should own one Dylan record, so he has become to campuses of the early 1990s what John Coltrane was to campuses of the early 1970s.

Dylan will continue to put out record after record; he will continue to tour and tour and tour. Only now, any hope for a sustained return of Dylan's wit, intelligence and passion may finally—finally—have died. If his audiences still had that hope, he would disappoint them, but he does not even do that.

THE REASONS FOR DYLAN'S ARRIVAL AT THIS PASS ARE A SUBJECT OF ENDLESS FASCINATION to his admirers. Some point to Dylan's split from his wife, Sara Lowndes, with whom he had four children, in 1977. (Among other problems, Mrs. Dylan was shocked to find that her rock-star husband had strayed into the arms of other women while he was on the road.) Others wonder whether Dylan's fondness for intoxicants has begun to tell on him.

Mick Taylor, the ex-Rolling Stones lead guitarist whose playing helped make Dylan's 1983 album *Infidels* such a success, clearly idolizes Dylan. Nevertheless, he is puzzled as to why Dylan would leave a profoundly beautiful song like "Blind Willie McTell" off *Infidels* while including several so-so tracks. Does anyone working with Dylan ever try to intervene when the songwriter makes such decisions? "There are certain people who can sit down and say things to Bob Dylan," Taylor says. "He just doesn't have to listen to them." If the results are so often so painful, though, you wonder why Dylan releases about an album a year. Taylor speculates that this decision has little to do with Dylan's boundless creative energy. "It's to fulfill contracts, I guess," says Taylor. "When he made *Infidels*, you could see that he was really inspired, and that he's a really great singer when he's relaxed. But when I talked to him recently, he said, 'You know me, Mick; I can only write songs when my back is to the wall.'"

Dylan volunteers the same answer when asked why he makes records. "Usually my records are turned in on some kind of a contractual deadline," he says. "If they didn't want me with the company, they wouldn't continue to give me a contract. They're just records that are fulfilling my contract, which they give to me." He laughs merrily. Asked if there are some records he cares about more than others, Dylan replies, "Well, yeah, there are some that stay with you longer than others. . . . To me, though, there's something about all

of them that I get something out of. They're just not all filler." Does that mean there *is* some filler on his records? "Some filler?" says Dylan. "Oh, yeah—depending on what your standards of filler might be. There's filler, and then there's songs that aren't performed as good as they could be for all kinds of reasons. There's some songs buried on my records that are good songs that just aren't performed well, and then there's some songs that are performed well that aren't necessarily very good songs."



JUDY COLLINS  
"A pair of sneakers."

KEITH RICHARDS  
"I'm having something special made up for him, so if you want to know what it is, you'll have to ask him after he's got it."



PETE SEEGER  
"A little peace and quiet and an invisible cloak that would enable him to go wherever he wanted without being hassled."

**"It's very difficult to sing along with me," Dylan says, "because it's never clear to me where my own voice is going"**



Dylan's work habits certainly don't encourage consistency. "He doesn't like to explain things," says Taylor. "He comes into the studio and starts playing the piano, and you just have to make sure the engineer has the tape running." Responding to the complaints of fussy budgets who have taken



ZIMMY: clockwise from above, when Dylan was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988, the end-of-ceremonies jam included a rendition of "Like a Rolling Stone" (Bruce and Mick remembered the lyrics—did Dylan?); the lead singer of Chopped Liver on the Chabad telethon; a coy Dylan poses with the Wilburys



him to task for his carefree, let's-make-an-album-and-get-out-of-here-by-midnight approach to recording, Dylan has periodically enlisted respected producers to help him make well-engineered bad records to stand in contrast to his early, badly engineered great records. Fortunately, these producers have usually failed to change Dylan's ways, thus saving him from making the kind of

gorgeous, fake records that Paul Simon — with his ingenious brand of tribal Muzak — has perfected.

"People say that [I make a lot of records]," Dylan says. "Well, Willie Nelson puts out maybe ten times as many records as me. Merle Haggard puts out a record all the time. You know, it's all part of a racket."

It may be a racket, but no one can accuse Dylan of micromanaging his career. Consider his new video, a quintessential Dylan project in



that it features a terrific song, "Series of Dreams," that Dylan inexplicably left off *Ob Merly*. When Dylan is asked how much input he supplied to the project, he replies, "Not much. They had me come downtown to a meat-packing place and photographed me walking around." Told that the video intersperses classic 1960s Dylan footage with ominous pictures of Jack Kerouac's grave, he exclaims, "What?! Why'd they put something like that in there?" Then he thinks about it. "Maybe it had something to do with the song. But it's not me that made that video. Nobody's even shown it to me. This was something that was done with very little participation on my part."

Both Dylan's relentlessness and his perversity are evident in his concerts. He has been performing almost nonstop for 17 years — on the Never-Ending Tour, as he called it in 1988. Will he tour forever? "Oh, yeah. When you start out, that's what you want to do, you want to be able to work in this arena no matter what, in good times or bad times." Like Chuck Berry, like Ray Charles, Dylan crosses the country, and the world, performing over and over in the same halls, year after year. And like those artists, he has been doing what amounts to an oldies show: more than half of his West Point concert, for instance, consisted of songs written before 1966. But at least Dylan has made it the world's strangest, sloppiest oldies show. Usually the tour bands simply scaffold his songs with indiscriminate session-man rock. The British punk-folkie Billy Bragg admires Dylan for the way he performs live: "He's not letting them wallow in nostalgia. He plays 'Wiggle Wiggle' with the same conviction that he plays 'The Times They Are A-Changin'.' He's deconstructing his songs right in front of your very eyes. He's trying to demythologize himself."

He's succeeding. At his concert late last year at New York's Beacon Theater, the audience repeatedly tried to sing along with hits such as "Like a Rolling Stone." Dylan was *having none of that*. By speeding up the songs or spitting out the lyrics in mangled Dylanese, he made it impossible for anyone to sing along with him. "They can't do that, and they never could," he says, with more assertiveness than at any other point in the interview. "That was never my thing; *nobody* could ever sing along with me. Well, maybe a couple people down in front in the first row, but outside of that it's very difficult to sing along with me because it's never clear to me where my own voice is going." He goes on, laughing, "Well, you know, 20,000 people singing 'Darkness on the Edge of Town,' you know, like... one night Bruce [Springsteen] had everybody singing that with him, and it sounded pretty good, and it's something people think about, but it's never really occurred to me to make people do that."

Maybe anarchy is better than a roomful of thickened, balding dads accompanying the Four Tops on their 65,000th identical rendition of "It's the Same Old Song," but it's still an oldies show. Dylan, however, says it isn't his fault if the majority of the songs he performs are more than 20 years old. A decade ago he tried to do new songs. The response was terrible. "People didn't like those tunes," he says. "They rejected all that stuff when my show would be all off the new album. People would shout, 'We want to hear the old songs.' You know... at a certain point, it doesn't really matter anymore."

JOHNNY CASH  
"Peace of mind."



SUZANNE VEGA  
"A painting by Francis Bacon."

LITTLE RICHARD  
"Longevity both as a person and as an artist. I would also buy more paper for him to write more great poetry."



ALLEN GINSBERG  
"I'd suggest that the major media commission lengthy essays that examine Dylan's works as a minstrel, sympathetically accounting the progression of his phases of interest, empathetically tracing his technical, ethical, religious and political moves in a reasonable way, absent of smart-aleck cynicism, motivated by an admiration for his obvious intelligence, abundance, maintenance of dignified privacy and ability to manifest humane changes of spirit and thought—that he be accorded the same dignities as Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, Bunting, Pound and other twentieth-century poetic peers."



MICK JAGGER  
"After seeing him on the Grammy Awards, I'd get him a new hat and a good song." ☺

WELL, EXACTLY. ON A CHILLY OCTOBER NIGHT IN WEST POINT, DYLAN CHARGES HIS way through number after number. He plays "Gates of Eden" and "Blowin' in the Wind," and the rows of cadets look on in delight, oblivious to the meaning or probably even the identity of the songs in their mutated forms. One oldie ends this way:

And I hope that you die  
 And your death'll come soon  
 I will follow your casket  
 In the pale afternoon  
 And I'll watch while you're lowered  
 Down to your deathbed  
 And I'll stand o'er your grave  
 'Til I'm sure that you're dead.

The words are unintelligible, but the folkies are happy. The Audi owners are enjoying themselves. The Garth Hudson impersonators are glad they came. The kids in the tied-dyed sixties-retro T-shirts seem pleasantly surprised by how loud the band is playing. The cadets applaud. Even without the Rockettes, "Masters of War" goes over pretty well. ▶

## I Spy a rat, Dylan's agent says of magazine interview

WASHINGTON POST

When Bob Dylan turned 50 recently, many folks meditated on what it all meant. But only *Spy*, the funny and often acerbic New York magazine, ran an interview, which didn't sit well with Dylan's media consultant, Elliot Mintz.

Mintz thought the interview request was for a cover story in the *New York Times Magazine* at a time that also saw the release of Dylan's *Bootleg* set and the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. Mintz agreed to set something up with writer Joe Queenan.

The interview was actually a 15-minute phone conversation, but it was enough for Queenan, a writer for both *Spy* and *Forbes* who says, "I basically slam people most of the time."

The story had indeed been assigned by the *Times*, and what Queenan says he turned in was a tough 7,000-word analysis — "flip, direct, sarcastic, not the *Times* voice" — suggesting that Dylan's work after his 1975 album *Desire*

left much to be desired and that, with a few notable exceptions, he had remained stuck in his early '70s sound and made some bad choices, particularly in movies and religions.

The *Times* magazine said no, although the Arts and Leisure section offered to buy the interview portion of the piece, fresh Dylan quotes being a precious commodity.

This time Queenan said no and sold the story to *Spy*, which toned it down a bit and ran it in July without any suggestion that its origins and access to Dylan lay elsewhere.

Mintz, who says he was informed about the shift after the fact, called it "a gross misrepresentation. Bob would never have agreed to an

interview with *Spy*."

Queenan, who says he lost money waiting for Dylan and Mintz to make up their minds, says: "I wish I had never started that piece."

As for the call, "I ended it. I couldn't stand it anymore. It was like talking to Arlo Guthrie — he just didn't sound like Bob Dylan. He just didn't care."



Dylan

# Bob Dylan: Not Quite A Complete Unknown

By Richard Harrington  
Washington Post Staff Writer

*Do not create anything, it will be misinterpreted. It will not change it will follow you the rest of your life . . .*

—from "Advice to Geraldine on Her Miscellaneous Birthday," by Bob Dylan, 1964

Dylan was in his twenties when he wrote this poem. Ah, but he was so much younger then. He's older than that now. He's 50 today.

It's a milestone—perhaps a milestone, as well—that Dylan's chosen to acknowledge this day the way he does most things, and that is not at all. He's not even in the country, conveniently having scheduled a tour in South America. Not that this will stop the appreciations, the appraisals and the inevitable post-mortems from critics who tend to write about Dylan in the past tense—not as though he is dead, but as though he is no longer . . . relevant. While Dylan's songs have always resisted conclusive analysis, he himself has never had the same kind of luck with concluding analysts.

Ironically, one of the most astute appraisals of Dylan's career came not from a critic but from actor Jack Nicholson, presenting him with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Grammy Awards in February. Casting Dylan's life as one long creative adventure, and his character as one of unregenerate individualism, Nicholson called him "a paradox, the fairest word for him, I think. It means a statement seemingly self-contradictory but in reality possibly expressing the truth.

"He's been called everything from the voice of his generation to the conscience of the world. He rejects both titles and any others that try to categorize him or analyze him. He opened the doors of pop music wider than anybody else, yet returned time and again to the simplicity of basic chords and emotions to express himself. He's been and still is a disturber of the peace, his as well as ours. . . ."

Along the way, Dylan's been hailed, imitated and mythologized, as well as ridiculed and ignored, but there's no denying that during his '60s bloom Dylan was a wordscraper with the instincts of a populist musician and the skills of a poet, and that his performed literature dramatically changed popular music. Touring now more than ever, Dylan attracts both loyalists and neophytes, a two-tiered audience that responds to him—much to his chagrin—as though he were a potent symbol, not only of a particular time and generation, but of an enduring state of mind.

Dylan brought it on himself simply by being himself, invented and otherwise. He had many antecedents and has had just as many progeny, but with his folk-rooted albums in the early '60s and the astounding trio of "Bringing It All Back Home," "Highway 61 Revisited" and "Blonde on Blonde" released over a 14-month period in the mid-'60s, Dylan validated rock as an art form to be taken seriously. As critic Ellen Willis noted, Dylan imposed literacy on illiterate music, showed that the form could reflect adult concerns and address complex social issues and personal concerns with the same power and immediacy as novels, plays and films.

Dylan changed the rules. Dylan changed our expectations. Among individual artists, only Elvis Presley managed to stir up public emotions and redefine pop music at same time; Dylan took it a step further, proving that it was possible to be both popular and serious. When Bruce Springsteen inducted Dylan into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame a few years back, he called him "revolutionary."

"The way Elvis freed your body," he said, "Bob freed your mind and showed us that just because the music was innately physical did not mean that it was anti-intellectual. He had the vision and the talent to make a pop song that contained the whole world. He invented a new way a pop singer could sound, broke through the limitations of what a recording artist could achieve and changed the face of rock-and-roll forever."

Needless to say, Dylan squirmed in his seat during this speech, as uncomfortable as he was during Nicholson's Grammy encomiums. In any case these were short versions of the billions of words expended on his work over the past 30 years. Of course millions of words have also been expended on Dylan's life, and all too much of his career has been a battle to keep separate his self and the art that springs from it.

Somewhat Dylan has managed to keep his personal life well hidden—his friends are very protective and the media are usually reduced to sightings. This is a rare achievement for an innately private person in what is an intensely public medium. Again, from "Advice to Geraldine":

"When told 'look at yourself . . . never look. When asked 'give your real name . . . never give it."

Dylan's relationship with the public is clearly through his songs, and there one finds the mother lode. His inner life (and ours to a great extent) is reflected in his lyrics: because, consciously or unconsciously, Dylan shares everything that happens to him and within him. His contempt for a critic became "Ballad of a Thin Man." His divorce became "Blood on the Tracks"; his religious conversion became "Slow Train Coming." Dylan's a shamus of the soul, always investigating and laying bare his personal struggles, which may explain why he's never been inclined to play the "meaning" game. Asked by Playboy what his songs were about, Dylan was brutally dismissive: "some of my songs are about four minutes, some are about five minutes and some, believe it or not, are about 11 or 12."

Dylan has never been able to explain his work in words that come anywhere close to the precision of the songs—neither have his critics, of course, no matter how long-winded—but the fact that so many have tried, and so passionately, suggests just how remarkable Dylan's work has been. He's always used the personal to say something universal—private obsessions publicly autopsied. Apart from the songs that sparked the ongoing social consciousness wing of rock-and-roll, no one has better or more honestly explored the ever-changing landscape of the mind or the minefields of the heart. Because Dylan's best songs work on so many levels—elasticity of meaning abounds—people can usually take as much or as little as they need from them.

"The point is not understanding what I write but feeling it," Dylan said in 1965. After all, the key line in "Like a Rolling Stone," perhaps his best-known song, is sung with a passion unusual even for Dylan: "How does it feel?"

Ultimately, all the attention, and its attendant expectation, must not have felt good because it didn't take long for Dylan to actively discourage his starry-eyed admirers, particularly those who depended on him for moral leadership.

"It Ain't Me Babe" and "Lay Down Your Weary Tune" were both written in 1964, protest songs of another ilk and declarations of independence not only from relationships but responsibilities. A decade later, on the "Planet Waves" album's "Wedding Song," he echoed himself: "It's never been my duty to remake the world at large/nor is it my intention to sound a battle charge."

Nor was it his intention to be a battlefield, but that was the consequence of Dylan's fusing folk music with the rock-and-roll attitude he cherished in his youth. He'd always loved the power but lamented rock's lack of lyrical depth and literacy. Then he found a way to bring them together: "that's what made me different," he once said,



Dylan at this year's Grammys.

"allowed me to cut through all the mess and be heard."

What was heard? Once his own songs came tumbling, it was what one writer called "performed literature." Dylan's "Lyrics: 1962-1985" yields great rewards, but it's almost impossible to read Dylan in cold type without hearing his voice, the emotional subtlety and the tension between words, the *sui generis* phrasing, the capacity for drawing out his lines like a saxophonist spinning out gossamer lines. . . .

By his early twenties, Dylan had already honed his writing skills, learning from Woody Guthrie and Big Joe Williams, who showed a song could be a poem, and such French symbolists as Rimbaud and Baudelaire. In 1965, critic John Clellon Holmes called Dylan "an American Brecht, whose poems are meant to be sung. . . . There is the same cold humor, the same ironic warmth, the same violent and splintered invigoration, the same urgent, idiomatic involvement in the way things actually are."

Dylan also picked up on these writers' images—the hobo, the renegade poet, the radical intellectual—and their intellectual itineraries: None was tied down to any one place or set of circumstances, and neither would Dylan be. After the folk redemption came the rock revolution and a succession of styles and images.

At first fans were fascinated by the risks Dylan took, but they would only go so far with him. After he'd reflected and then inspired the anger and frustration of his generation with "Free-wheelin' Bob Dylan," "The Times They Are a Changin'" and "Another Side of Bob Dylan," Dylan went electric at Newport and, abandoning the explicit political commentary that had endeared him to folk purists, was castigated by former fans who suddenly decided he was modern enough in substance, and refused him the corollary in style. Then, after Dylan's motorcycle accident in 1966, his new-

found rock constituency felt abandoned when he unveiled the spare and understated "John Wesley Harding" and the country-ish "Nashville Skyline" at the time "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" heralded the age of rock psychedelia.

The post-'60s albums have been wildly uneven—from 1975's brilliant, visceral "Blood on the Tracks" and 1989's return to form, "Oh Mercy," to others that seemed to lack direction, passion or purpose (though occasionally containing songs that ranked with Dylan's finest). In 1979, Dylan entered another controversial period as a born-again Christian, for a while refusing to perform his old classics in concert, another arena where he was sometimes brilliant, sometimes uncaring and unconvincing. It was as if testing loyalists was a crusade, not just a game. The fans usually took it personally, feeling betrayed, or disappointed, as if it wasn't kosher for Dylan to change.

Having inspired a parade of reluctant New Dylans, the prototype has continued to serve himself up occasionally as a new Dylan (though his fans probably hope that the New Dylan turns out to be the Old Dylan), reflecting what John Landau called "an unrelenting capacity to grow." Dylan was no more fixed than the meaning of any of his songs.

Concertgoers can attest to Dylan's penchant for rewriting (what he's called "creative renovations"), recombination and redelivery, enabling him to find new meaning in old songs and thus reflect new moods, times, preoccupations. He's learned to live with the legacy that everything else will always be compared to. Even Springsteen noted the burden at the Hall of Fame dinner: "To this day where great rock music is being made, there is the shadow of Bob Dylan over and over and over and Bob's own modern work has gone unjustly underappreciated for having to stand in that shadow."

Early on, Dylan chose to shift his attention from saving the world—by changing it—to saving himself—by changing himself. Which may explain why change has been the constant in his life, and investigation of truth his mission.

"I'll tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it/and reflect from the mountains so all souls can see it," Dylan sang in "A Hard Rain A-Gonna Fall" and that's never changed.

Asked about what drove him and Dylan, Eric Clapton confessed a few years ago that "I just apply myself to what I know is commercial and I think Bob just sticks to what he knows is true. . . . I try to bend with the wind, whereas he will always try to stay straight. . . . [His songs reflect] the spirit of the universal, of private pain, of the self, personal recognition—a private awakening."

Being true to himself has cost Dylan—fans and understanding alike. That may have been on his mind at the Grammys when he made what seemed at the time a brief, enigmatic acceptance speech. "It's possible to be so defined in this world that your own mother and father will abandon you," Dylan said. "And if this happens, God will always believe in your ability to mend your ways."

In 1971's "When I Paint My Masterpiece," Dylan sang about running on a hilltop, "following a pack of wild geese/someday everything is gonna be smooth like a rhapsody." That will be the day that he paints himself at peace. Meanwhile, happy birthday.

Charles Shaar Murray on the afterlife of famous rockers

## Dead Groovy

John Lennon (d. 1980) was 1990's Dead Rock Star Of The Year – the winner by a short head and a money-losing Liverpool charity tribute concert over Jimi Hendrix (d. 1970), his closest competitor – and Jim Morrison (d. 1971) has already nailed down this year's title with a considerably larger margin over his runner-up, Bob Marley (d. 1981). Janis Joplin (also d. 1971), a figure of comparable eminence at the time, didn't even rate the courtesy of a Greatest Hits album when her zero-in-the-date anniversary rolled around: partly because her particular brand of white-blues histrionics has aged extraordinarily badly, and partly because Joplin was a woman and, for some reason, authentic Croaked Legends have to be male.

It is a truism of our time that there's nothing sexier than a dead rock star. Croaked Legends are a marketing department's dream: they are infinitely predictable and unlikely to compromise a winning streak in the applectart-upsetting manner of a Bowie or a Prince, unlikely to complain (except through the medium of a live lawyer) and equally unlikely to provide inconvenient surprises, except in the case of Elvis Presely (d. 1977), still apparently appearing in supermarkets or alive and well on the moon. However, if your favourite rock star is sufficiently inconsiderate to be still alive, then Undead is the next best bet.

The main advantage that an Undead rocker has over a genuine stiff is that the Undead can tour (and that anyone who can tour can therefore cut a Live album). Case in point: The Who. Their membership includes an actual dead person (Keith Moon, d. 1978), and they have been formally dissolved several times. In other words, they are a dead band except that they can tour when the occasion demands it (ie, when the bank account of any of the three surviving members dips below a certain balance), and they don't make disappointing new albums.



The Rolling Stones are almost Undead, except that they spoiled things by releasing not only a 'souvenir live album of the reunion tour', but a topical single attacking the dishonesties and stupidities which created the Gulf War. The aforementioned Bowie, having cocked up his last two or three metamorphoses, managed to recoup some of his investment by launching a recent Undead tour before diving back into his Tin Machine for another exercise in audience alienation.

Which brings us to Bob Dylan, who turns 50 this year. 1991 also marks the 30th anniversary of the release of his first album, which combination of events delivers enough zeros to satisfy even the most demanding anniversary addict. To celebrate, Columbia Records have issued a 3-CD boxed set of out-takes and marginalia impossibly entitled *The Bootleg Series Vols 1-3 (Rare and Unreleased) 1961-1991*, and a new biography has also appeared: Clinton Heyman's *Dylan: Behind The Shades* (Viking, hbk £16.99).

Both projects make much of the continuing evolution of the subject, but nevertheless, 'Dylan Classique' stubbornly remains the mid-60s

edition: the period between the British tour captured in Pennebaker's *Don't Look Now* and the cover-photo session for *Blonde On Blonde*. The *Bootleg Series* box carries a particularly striking 'Dylan Classique' cover shot, as does *Behind The Shades*. While Heylin's book fails to live up to its title, it does at least provide the most tightly focused close-up of said shades currently available. Heylin is very good on the what and when of Dylan's doings at any particular stage of the proceedings, and he is a tireless and painstaking seeker after the sources of Dylan's assorted inspirations; but the why of the former Robert Zimmerman's seemingly capricious shifts and fancies remains as irritatingly enigmatic as ever.

The CD set lives up to its title by proving, fairly conclusively, not only that the stuff Dylan was rejecting in the 60s was considerably more powerful than what he is issuing now, but that some of the material that he rejected recently – most spectacularly the astonishing 'Blind Willie McTell' – is also better than his current official project.

Significantly, Heyman's book quotes virtually none of Dylan's lyrics; a clear sign that the book remains unsanc-

tioned by the great man and his representatives. It is one of Dylan's rules that permission to quote from his lyrics will not be forthcoming if the context is unflattering: I myself fell foul of this stricture in a book of my own. Dylan's proxies may have been overcautious in the present case: while Heyman is no sycophant, his admiration for his subject is beyond doubt.

Dylan Classique remains unassailable: the curly-haired dandyish young cynic who appears on these covers is the man who did not so much bring poetry and politics to rock and roll as demonstrate that the potential for both was already there. He is 'hot, sexy and dead', as a *Rolling Stone* cover described Jim Morrison in 1981. Beside him stands the Dylan of the present day: a cantankerous old curmudgeon capable of staggering obtuseness (on gender, politics and religion) and severely dodgy records, some of which his devotees claim are works of authentic

This is Dylan the born-again Christian, Dylan the ayatollah of anti-feminism, and Dylan whose interpretation of Zionism is undoubtedly closer to the vision of Ariel Sharon than that of Amos Oz.

You can accuse this mean-spirited old crank of many things: Undeadness is not one of them. His shows are too inconsistent, his attitudes too inconvenient, his politics too changeable for him to be anything other than alive, if not necessarily well.

And one more thing: Dylan, like James Brown (who also has a major box-set due out around this time) has more than made his point. Like Brown, he can make crappy records, deliver crappy shows, and express crappy attitudes for the rest of his life if he so desires (and he probably does): his achievement is unassailable. Dylan Classique is dead and pure: Dylan himself is alive and kicking. Long may he evade the ranks of the Undead, and any marketing gurus who would drive a stake into his miserable old heart. ●

■ The legacy of his work elevates him far above the hype and mythology.

By DENNIS ELLAM  
Feature Writer

Another city, another stage. Tomorrow night, on the evening of his 50th birthday, Bob Dylan will step out in front of a packed hall in Buenos Aires and play a concert which, by the capricious nature of the man and his live shows, could range from rank awfulness to diamond-bright brilliance.

In these past three years the *Never Ending Tour*, as Dylan now dubs his lifestyle, has criss-crossed the entire American continent several times, swept through Australia, roamed across Europe and the UK twice, and rolls on.

A new album — his 34th, officially, although illicit bootleg recordings would fill a library wall — is likely this autumn.

Not bad going, Bob. In 1966, they predicted you would be burnt out by the age of 30.

"Singing and writing and performing — it's been a long, hard road but that's the journey he chose for himself," his friend and biographer Robert Shelton, the former *New York Times* critic who gave the 20-year-old Dylan his first write-up, once told me.

"If you're Bob Dylan, what else are you going to do in your middle-age? Sit by your fireside with your slippers on?"

The first 50 years are a well-documented tale. Beatnik-capped country boy arrives in big city with a song-writing talent sharp as barbed wire and voice to match; falls in with the folkies, goes electric and falls back out with them.

He leads the 60s Beat Revolution, narrowly avoids self-destruction in a motorcycle accident, dis-



Not all of his works are perfect... He's only as good as Shakespeare.

Prof Christopher Ricks  
Cambridge University

# Dylan gathers no moss as he rolls up to 50

appears and reappears, is born-again as an artist, then as a Christian, latterly as a Jew.

Money means nothing to him, he says, but a sizeable part of Minnesota is now his estate, he owns a ranch in California, apartment in New York, yacht in the Caribbean.

Fanciful myth is interwoven with fact, some of it by Dylan's own engineering. As youthful Robert Zimmerman, for instance, he never did run away repeatedly from home in Hibbing, Minnesota, as he used to claim — he was the dutiful middle-class son of a shopkeeping family, whose Mom and Dad watched early concerts proudly from the wings.

The public persona has become more bizarre with the years. "He shuffles around the mean streets of his beloved Greenwich Village like a down-and-tramp," we are assured. On stage he demands lighting so subdued he's often performing in deep shadow, maybe wearing dark glasses and a cap and a sweatshirt hood pulled over that.

He is criticised for saying too much to an audience: in his religious zealot period, (early 80s), he would regularly sermonise for five minutes between songs.

And he's condemned for saying too little: in a dozen UK concerts last year and this, he is estimated to have spoken no more than 20 words in total, including "Thank You" and "Good Night".

Wherever he plays, photographers are banned and interviews with him are rare.

But it is Dylan's work, not his whims, which have established him as a colossus.

His trilogy of "folk-rock" albums; *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde On Blonde* — produced during 12 months of intense creativity in 1965-66 which aroused worldwide adulation.

The surrealism of *Desolation Row* elevated him, as a manipulator of words, alongside TS Eliot.

Meanwhile, *Subterranean Homesick Blues* dared strike the first hammerblow against the all-American dream. But it is trite to view him as a product of the period. "The 60s suddenly seem a little further away, as Dylan reaches 50," *The Observer* smirked recently, blithely ignoring 25 years of prodigious output since then.

"There's no such item as the definitive Dylan album," said John Bauldie, author of the liner notes on the recently-released *Bootleg* series of previously unissued recordings. "There is the excellent and the not so good and the dross, and what we forget looking back is that there was a certain amount of rubbish on those 'classic' Sixties albums."

One of the English language's foremost commentators, Professor Christopher Ricks of Cambridge University, has regularly praised Dylan: "Not all of his works are perfect," he says. "He's only as good as Shakespeare."

From the raw days of *Freewheelin'*, Dylan's skill has been to craft and hone the unlikeliest words into astounding phrases, to build labyrinths and lay minefields for a motley cast of characters. No one else has written this way and put it to music. Other big names of mass-recording — Gershwin, Novello, Sondheim — are rhyesters and tunesmiths by comparison.

*The Never Ending Tour*, the promise of albums and compositions to come, suggest middle age is too soon to write off Dylan.

# DYLAN TURNS 50!

By LEE JESKE

**I**N THE author's note to Clinton Heylin's new biography, "Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades," we're told that Heylin "is a co-founder of Wanted Man, the British information office dedicated to studying Dylan's life and work ... He spends much of his time traveling the world watching Dylan in performance."

Ever since he rolled into New York as some half-baked Midwestern Woody Guthrie 30 years ago, Bob Dylan has been unsuccessfully dodging the Clinton Heylins of the world, those who pick through his words and the details of his life (there was once even a guy devoted to picking through his garbage) looking for some truth or direction.

The answer, my friends?

What's the question?

Bob Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman in Duluth, Minn., 50 years ago Friday, but for most of those years he's been reinventing himself.

One fact: Bob Dylan is the most important and influential single figure of the Rock Era. His songs — "Blowin' in the Wind," "Like a Rolling Stone," "Subterranean Homesick Blues," "The Times They Are A-Changin'," "Mr. Tambourine Man," "Maggie's Farm," "It's All Over Now Baby Blue," "Just Like a Woman" and on and on and on — defined the '60s and laid the foundation for the popular music of the '70s, '80s and '90s.

Poetic, enigmatic, indignant, witty, romantic and profound, great songs poured out of him at a startling rate, yet from the get-go he distanced himself from them. If there's a theme to his every interview it's this: The songs speak for themselves and my private life is my own business.

What else is there to talk about? What else, indeed — so let's pick through his garbage.

Calling Dylan a mystery is an understatement. Probably the subject of more books than any other living American (save a president or two), his biographers can't even agree on how many kids he has (Heylin's index under ex-wife Sara Dylan lists an entry for "mystery pregnancy of").



## DYLAN NOW

*Happy birthday, old-timer.*

Friends and band members talk about his uncommunicativeness, his ability to sit for hours, even days, without talking. Joan Baez, a bitter ex-lover, goes to him with some complaint about a 1984 tour and finds him too busy picking his nose to address her problems.

In her divorce papers, Sara accuses him of physical and psychological abuse and there has been constant talk of drug or alcohol problems (some even question whether that famous 1966 motorcycle accident really happened). Lately he looks like hell: a ravaged, crumbling, unhealthy version of the chipmunk-cheeked ragamuffin staring out from that first album.

Born a Jew, he went through a widely publicized conversion to Christianity in the '70s, yet he recently appeared on a Chassidic telethon singing "Havah Negilah." He works by himself, yet he's a charter member of the Traveling Wilburys, with whom he's recorded some of his best recent songs. (But when it's time to promote the albums, the other three Wilburys — George Harrison, Tom Petty and Jeff Lynne — sit forlornly on MTV without him.)

He hasn't made a great album in 15 years, yet he cranks them out — one crummy, poorly selling album after the other — year after year after year. During most of the '80s, he seemed particularly adrift: performing as an epaulet on the shoulders of more popular rock bands — Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers and the Grateful Dead — and acting in a movie, "Hearts of Fire," so bad it was never released.

Yet for the past three years, backed by a raucous little rock band, he's been touring constantly, and he seems to have accepted his decline with grace — quietly moving his New York shows from Madison Square Garden to Radio City to the Beacon Theater (he'll be at Jones Beach July 11).

His repertoire, not surprisingly drawn primarily from his 1961-76 heyday, is often so drastically altered and so perversely sung that most of the time you (and frequently his band) can't tell what he's performing. (Only the keenest of ear knew that his hard-rock rampage on this year's Grammy Awards was his old "Masters of War.")

He hates dwelling in the past, yet twice in the past few years he's dipped deeply into that past for dozens of previously unreleased songs that only reinforce the staleness of his recent work (most of the early songs on the new three-CD "The Bootleg Series" are better than anything on his last dozen albums).

For a public figure, Bob Dylan has done a masterful job of keeping himself shrouded in mystery. Some say it's an artful dodge, some say it's just the true expression of a paranoid, lonely man — a man with few real friends, a man constantly wrestling with the fact that somewhere along the line he lost the ability to spin words into gold.

But he has so profoundly touched a generation, so profoundly left his mark on American music and culture, that those who care wait quietly and patiently for the muse to return, while those who really care — like members of that Dylan information service — sift hopefully through his every wheeze.

"Oh my name it is nothin'," wrote the 22-year-old Bob Dylan in "With God on Our Side," "my age it means less."

*Happy birthday, old-timer.*

## Under Review

CULTURE  
WATCH**The Times They Are A-Changin'**

The Time-Wearied Troubadour Turns 50

by COLBERT S. CARTWRIGHT

■ Popular song-poet Bob Dylan, hailed in the '60s as prophetic spokesperson for his generation, is remarkably well and alive as he turns 50 years old May 24, 1991. Music critic Ralph Gleason early termed Dylan "a genius, a singing conscience and moral referee as well as a preacher." Although Dylan has radically shifted

perspectives many times since he burst upon Greenwich Village 30 years ago, Gleason's assessment still stands. This past February, Dylan was the recipient of the distinguished Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

Dylan is now generating an everflowing stream of serious studies of his song-poems, the latest and one of the best being the first of a two-volume work by Paul Williams titled *Performing Artist: The Music of Bob Dylan*, published in 1990. Last fall he issued his 36th record album, titled *Under the Red Sky*, and he continues a heavy schedule of concerts around the world. Marking his 50th birthday, Columbia Records has released *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3: Rare and Unreleased 1961-1991*, a three-hour retrospective set containing 58 songs.

My interest in Bob Dylan was kindled in 1965 by reading an article titled "Bob Dylan as Theologian." Upon purchasing Dylan's albums, I was less struck by his theological acumen than his flashing imagery; his hauntingly expressive, rough, and raspy voice; and his earnest, but sometimes humorous, search for life's meaning.

Dylan's quest for meaning has consistently centered upon the nature of temporal reality. In song poetry he has sought to confront what it means, in theologian Mircea Eliade's phrase, to "fall into time." Recognizing his own mortality, he searches to understand how he relates to a time-bound world, which, too, is mortal—moving toward its end. How does one solve the mystery expressed in "Oh Sister" (1975) that time is an ocean but it ends at the shore? As a seer, a visionary—but eschewing the role

.....  
*However much Dylan  
sought to transcend time  
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and unjust world.*  
.....

of prophetic leader—Dylan has carved out his partial answers in fragmentary images of song. Clearly in his philosophical journey through time, Dylan has done, like his folk singing hero Woody Guthrie, "some hard travelin' too."

OF PARTICULAR concern to this time-trapped artist is the issue of injustice and how it is redressed. Dylan goes beyond individual instances where justice has gone awry to decry a world in which injustice is the rule rather than the exception.

In an early song, "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" (1964), Dylan graphically relates the true story of Hattie Carroll's senseless murder. This maid of the kitchen is "slain by a cane" at a socially elite party in Maryland. But as Dylan unfolds the story, he cautions the listener at the close of each verse to withhold one's tears. Something more tragic is yet to be revealed.

The closing verse ironically announces that the judge "handed out strongly, for penalty and repentance/William Zanzinger

with a six-month sentence." Dylan concludes: "Oh, but you who philosophize disgrace and criticize all fears/Bury the rag deep in your face/For now's the time for your tears." The greatest tragedy lies in the complete corruption of a society that produces this kind of specific injustice.

In these early years, Dylan expresses a prophetic optimism that promises redemption in time. He believes "The Times They Are A-Changin'" (1963) in which "the order is rapidly fadin'" and "the loser now will be later to win." Dylan, in the Hebrew prophetic tradition, does not minimize the element of God's judgment, which entails a cataclysmic upheaval of society in the process.

Dylan sings darkly that "a hard rain's a-gonna fall" (1963) and to look toward "the meanest flood that anybody's seen." But enemies of justice shall in time be conquered. He looks to the day "When the Ship Comes In," (1964) when the "foes will rise":

*And they'll raise their hands,  
Sayin' we'll meet all your demands,  
But we'll shout from the bow your days are  
numbered.  
And like Pharaoh's tribe,  
They'll be drowned in the tide,  
And like Goliath, they'll be conquered.*

Dylan expected the time to be redeemed through the prophetic assurance that life can change and injustices be redressed. Battles for justice must be fought and can be won.

ALTHOUGH DOGGED by pessimism from his earliest days, Dylan did not begin to lose hope about the meaning of history until around the time of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Through that event he recognized something of Lee Harvey Oswald within himself—that perverseness of evil that pervades all of life. In "My Back Pages" (1964) he renounced the prophet's mantle, declaring that "I'd become my enemy/In the instant that I preach."

Dylan turned radically inward, seeking to transcend time within his own psyche. Through French symbolist derangements he sought to follow "Mr. Tambourine Man" (1964), who took him "disappearin' through the smoke rings of my mind/Down the foggy ruins of time...." This interior venture produced some of Dylan's most imaginative and poetic songs.

At the same time Dylan's psychedelic view of the world produced a time warp in which all of life was seen as corrupt and beyond redemption. The world's doom is expressed in this imagery from "Desolation Row" (1965): "The Titanic sails at dawn/And everybody's shouting/'Which Side Are You On?'" As if it mattered.

Yet Dylan found it did matter to him. However much he sought to transcend time by escape into an inward landscape of the mind, he still cared about a fallen and unjust world. He continued to decry corrupt senators and commissioners and judges and preachers and businessmen. These temporal concerns were important to him. Dylan expresses this tension in "Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again" (1966), where he simultaneously laments a degenerate society and complains, "An' I have no sense of time." Time is of the essence of this world. Dylan finds there is no escape.

Fed up with a surrealistic approach to life, Dylan started his followers by producing in 1968 an earnest and austere Nashville-flavored album titled *John Wesley Harding* (1968). This followed a motorcycle accident in which he broke some neck vertebrae and spent months, as he put it, "looking up at the ceiling." With a fresh prophetic earnestness, Dylan engaged once more the issues of justice.

At the close of *John Wesley Harding*, Dylan took a fresh tack toward time and its potential for meaning in history. Striking his rock followers dumbfounded, he assumed the manner of a country gentleman who enjoyed the simple pleasures of nature. On *New Morning*, he explored time as an

ever-flowing river or as cyclical—reveling in the changing seasons.

But despite the joys of nature, Dylan concluded in "Time Passes Slowly" (1970):

*Time passes slowly up here  
in the daylight,  
We stare straight ahead and  
try so hard to stay right,  
Like the red rose of summer  
that blooms in the day,  
Time passes slow and fades  
away.*

By 1971 the cyclical time of nature had circled quickly back to justice. In a lament titled "George Jackson" Dylan professed his love for this black man who had been shot through the head by prison guards. Where was the justice in all this? The cyclical time of nature had no answer.

A variation on time as cyclical is the effort to find meaning in the recurrent myths which seek to replenish old symbols with fresh meaning. Dylan explored these possibilities on an album called *Desire* (1975). Particularly in a song titled "Isis" (done in collaboration with Jacques Levy), Dylan explored how this ancient Egyptian myth could renew the wounds of married life. Recounting a long adventurous tale of a year's journey, the persona returns "not quite" different, confessing to his mystical lover that "what drives me to you is what drives me insane." Dylan, father of five children, was divorced from his wife Sara in 1977.

DYLAN'S MOST astounding shift in world perspective came in 1979 with the announcement that this Jewish native of Minnesota (born Robert Zimmerman but self-dubbed Bob Dylan before leaving for New York) had become a born-again Christian. Three evangelical albums quickly followed—*Slow Train Coming* (1979), *Saved* (1980), and *Shot of Love* (1981)—all with a clearly New Testament apocalyptic cast. In personal terms Dylan related a mystical experience: "Jesus put his hand on me. It was a physical thing. I felt it. I felt it all over me. I felt my whole body tremble. The glory of the Lord knocked me down and picked me up."

In a broader perspective, Dylan was still seeking to come to terms with humanity's "fall into time." He saw a pre-millenarian apocalyptic reading of the Book of Revelation as a means to bring together his need for justice to be vindicated within history.

Dylan's new-found apocalypticism was congenial to his long-held pessimism toward improving society. The problem, Dylan now concluded, was cosmic. In an uncharacteristic outburst of testimony during a Santa Monica performance, he declared: "Satan is called the God of this world.... That's right—he's called the God of this world, and prince of the power of the air."

But for Dylan the good news was that Jesus Christ through cross and resurrection had demonstrated his victorious power over Satan. And soon Christ would return to set up his righteous kingdom. In the final end, righteousness would be vindicated.

In "I and I" (1983) he marveled that it "took a stranger to teach me, to look into justice's beautiful face/And to see an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." At the same Santa Monica concert Dylan explained: "All these sad stories that are floating around. We're not worried about any of that—we don't care about the atom bomb, any of that, 'cause we know this world is going to be destroyed and Christ will set up his kingdom in Jerusalem for a thousand years, where the lion will lie down with the lamb."

DYLAN'S SEARCH for meaning in time throughout his 30 active years as a songwriter, which has resulted in an apocalypticism to which he still firmly holds, seems actually to have brought him little comfort. He still resides on Desolation Row—more despairing and cynical than ever. With growing disillusionment he terms himself the old "Jokerman" (1983) who sees "freedom just around the corner for you/But with the truth so far off, what good will it do?" On his album *Oh Mercy* (1989), Dylan declares that we live in a political world in which everything is broken.

Ultimately divine retribution affords little encouragement for the triumph of justice in present-day living. In "Dark Eyes" (1985), a hauntingly doleful song, Dylan looks out upon a world of suffering and sings:

*They tell me to be discreet  
For all intended purposes  
They tell me revenge is sweet  
And from where they stand, I'm sure it is.*

*But I feel nothing for their game  
Where beauty goes unrecognized.  
All I feel is heat and flame and  
All I see are dark eyes.*

Dylan's ultimate hope for justice lies, as he sings in "Ring Them Bells" (1989), in being among "the chosen few/Who will judge the many when the game is through." But meaningful redemption in this life seems to have escaped him.

Dylan has not been able to shake his concern for justice taking place here and now in this world. This is expressed in his participation in relief efforts such as Live Aid and Farm Aid (which he helped initiate) and L'Chaim to Life. In regard to participating in a charity benefit, Dylan has said, "Obviously, on some level it does help, but as for any sweeping movement to destroy hunger and poverty, I don't see that happening." In a world seen as degenerating into its original chaos, present injustices seem to empty time of any vital meaning.

As Dylan joins the "fiftysomethings," he continues to search for life's meanings in terms of time and justice. He does so no longer as a blue-eyed visionary leader of an optimistic generation but as a sad-eyed prophet who is less sure of the answers than when he began composing his protest anthems 30 years ago.

At 50, Dylan is a sadder, and in his uncertainties, possibly a wiser man than when he began his visionary quest for meaning. But clearly he still struggles and puzzles over humanity's riddle of having fallen into time. ■

COLBERT S. CARTWRIGHT is a retired pastor and author of *The Bible in the Lyrics of Bob Dylan*. He lives in Fort Worth, Texas.





Graham McCann argues that Bob Dylan at 50 is one of the great American under-achievers

## A lost hero killing time

**B**OB DYLAN is 50 years old today. Fifty: half a century, more than half a lifetime — long enough to make his relatively small group of admirers feel their age, and long enough to make a rather larger group of people, indifferent to the great man's charms, feel their youth.

Dylan is, as the cliché has it, a living legend. He is the most interesting and respected representative of that period currently being marketed under the name The Sixties, although the more it is invoked the less distinct it becomes in memory and in representation. Bob Dylan suffers from a similar loss of focus on the part of the audience; he was either a cynical clown or the Second Coming, but few seem sure which.

His career, to anyone but the most engaged of fans, looks oddly imbalanced. Although the years after 1966 are regarded by some of his critics as a time of uninterrupted creative decline, this period represents five-sixths of his working life. It is difficult to reconcile the gloriously inventive, witty, audacious recordings of those early years — such as *Highway 61 Revisited* — with the mostly weak, uninspired and sometimes frankly bad work of the past two decades. It is hard to reconstruct the extraordinary impact his early music had when it was first released, partially because there have been so few examples since of pop songs that burst on the scene as news. It is also a thankless task to attempt to measure his influence at this remove, his time being both too far away and not far enough.

Those to whom he means so much today are, to a significant extent, the same people to whom he meant so much back then, all those years ago. Unlike Jagger, he has never been specially interested in courting a new generation with a new set of values. Unlike Lennon, he has rarely allowed anyone a glimpse of his private vulnerabilities, and the prickliness of his personality is, to say the least, an acquired taste.

He does not appear to seek any kind of new fans, nor on the evidence of his recent material, is he particularly likely to attract many. Indeed, even some of his most passionate supporters have felt frustrated by his insularity, bemoaning his cavalier attitude during recent concerts when performing the classic songs, and criticising the cloying cosiness of his relationship with his Travelling Wilburys colleagues. His public has grown smaller, the conversation more intimate, the vocabulary more arcane.

Long hung over from a monstrous fame and lack of privacy, and stuck in a life where everything is permitted him except fallibility, some part of him must have wanted more than anything, to flop around and make a mess. Like other highly distinguished American under-achievers, such as Orson Welles and Marlon Brando, Dylan has somehow managed to brush aside the criticisms which were meant to shame him, while occasionally issuing the kind of bitter response that suggests the barbs went rather deeper than he would ever care to admit. There are times — and they seem to grow more frequent — when he seems to be flaunting his contempt for his medium and his audience, and expressing no small amount of self-contempt as well.

Surely the problem has something to do with the fact of his fame, the largely unintended consequences of his early success. He has never really come to terms with his unsought-after position as a hero of a distinctively modern sort, a cultural hero, burdened with the considerable, if ill-defined, hopes of his own generation. It was not a role he actively sought, it was, indeed, a role he fought. Somehow, however, it settled upon him. In the sixties, young people identified with him as they (including Dylan himself) had previously identified with James Dean. In the movies, it was said that while Brando changed the way one acted, Dean changed the way one lived. In popular music, according to Bruce Springsteen, "The way Elvis freed your body, Dylan freed your mind."

Dean died young, and became one of the most seductive myths in youth culture. Dylan, according to some reports, very nearly died in 1966, when he was involved in a serious motorcycle accident.

"A traditional gesture of the prophet," announced a newspaper article of the time "is the

retreat and the re-emergence . . . with a new message." Dylan recovered and re-emerged, but with no new message. He had survived, but the song remained the same. Now he lives on, with a left-over life to kill in a culture that offers no home, no rest, only the cold comfort of empty celebrity. The faithful remain, hoping he has it in him to go all the way down the well again, come out from behind the masks and show once again the passion and power of a time gone by. The suspicion grows that such faith is in vain.

Today, at 50, Bob Dylan seems to be striving to hide in plain sight a purloined letter somehow mixed in with all the special delivery parcels of stardom. At the Live Aid show he was a shambling self-parody of his younger self, contributing nothing of real weight to an event that once would have been dominated by his presence. He will, no doubt, continue to occupy a special place in many people's past (there is a Dylan song playing in a memory near you) but to a younger generation he seems a profoundly antiquated figure. "Every hero," wrote Emerson, "becomes a bore at last." What is poignant about this day is not the warmth some people still feel for Dylan, but rather the cool indifference of everyone else. How, we might ask him, does it feel?

*Graham McCann lectures in social and political theory at Cambridge. His book *Rebel Males* is published next month.*



# A poet for posterity?

**B**RUCE Springsteen says he's a genius. Jack Nicholson calls him "America's great voice of freedom". Van Morrison says he's "our greatest living poet".

George Harrison goes even further, saying: "Five hundred years from now, looking back in history, he will still be the man. He takes the cake."

Cambridge don Christopher Ricks, ex-professor of English at Christ's College, is yet more effusive. "A great amuser, a great entertainer who belongs with the artists who've looked for the widest popular constituency, like Dickens and Shakespeare."

The subject of these extraordinary eulogies, rock legend, poet and eternal rebel against any form of so-called authority, Bob Dylan, is 50 tomorrow — and his massive influence remains undimmed.

Which probably explains why 300 obsessive souls trekked to the somewhat mundane surroundings of Leicester's Park International Hotel to pay homage to their hero at the "Forever Young — Bob Zimmerman's Birthday Masquerade".

It was like stepping onto the set of a weird science-fiction movie as Dylan devotees set to with gusto to enjoy what was billed as a "one-day Bob Dylan Birthday Tea Party".

## Assembled

In the hotel foyer a series of characters in bizarre fancy-dress, including an Egyptian goddess, a clown and a blind man with a stick and ear-muffs, intermingled to discuss the esoteric delights of matters Dylanesque.

Among the assembled throng was New Zealand food scientist Dr Rob Lake, soberly dressed in sports jacket and slacks, who revealed that he forked out hundreds of pounds just to be present.

"Back home it's very difficult to get hold of Dylan material, such as singles, books and other literature. He's only ever played three concerts there so I really did want to attend this."

Dr Lake, a fan for over 20 years, explains: "Back in the Sixties, when I first heard the album *Bringing it all Back Home*, I was totally amazed that

JON GRIFFIN joins in the 50th birthday celebrations of legendary rock rebel Bob Dylan, whose devotees reckon his words will last like those of The Bard . . .

anybody could write stuff like that.

"Dylan has a gift for turning a phrase which will hit the nail on the head. He has had enormous influence on thousands of people's lives."

As he waxed lyrical, an auction of Dylan memorabilia was underway, with rare books fetching up to £100 — including one Dr Lake contributed himself. The prize exhibit was a platinum disc of the fabled *Blood on the Tracks* album.

The auctioneer, a long-haired East Ender wearing a black stetson hat, described the disc to bidders as "the best record ever made by anybody ever in the history of records since Greensleeves — including that one". It was sold for a startling £1,950.

As a massive birthday cake bearing 50 candles was cut to loud cheers from the audience, guests prepared for the fancy-dress judging — but this was no ordinary fancy-dress contest.

Partygoers had been invited to attire themselves after the fashion of a Dylan song character — and such obscure luminaries from Bob's vast repertoire as Blind Willie McTell, the Jokerman and William Zantinger stalked colourfully around the hall.

To all but devoted Dylan fans, the joke would have been lost. But these people wouldn't have been here if they did not enjoy the obscure mythology that is part of the attraction of being a Dylan follower.

Solihull computer programmer Phil Townsend, together with fellow Dylan zealot Derek Barker, was one of the organisers of the Forever Young party — and is also the co-author of *Isis*, one of three newsletters published across the globe.

"I think that there are all sorts of

reasons why Dylan fans come to this sort of event but one of the big things is that his songs are still as pertinent today as they were in the Sixties.

"I really do believe that any work of art needs to stand the test of time and for Dylan's work, we are talking about a relatively short space of time.

"The potential is there for Dylan's work to be remembered in that way, in the same way as, say, Shakespeare."

If all this might seem somewhat overblown to new generations of pop fans reared on Jason Donovan, New Kids on the Block or even critically acclaimed performers like Springsteen, it is useful to consider the scale of Dylan's legacy.

He has been performing, increasingly actively, since 1961. He is the author of between 500 and 1,000 songs, if not more. He has released more than 30 albums, the most recent a vast set of previously unreleased bootleg material encompassing 30 years of recording.

Songs such as *Masters of War* and *Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall* were considered catalysts in America's eventual withdrawal from Vietnam.

Cynics would say he has now outlived his usefulness, that Vietnam was two decades ago. But television images from two recent historical events would counter such thoughts.

## Defiant

As the relatives of the Birmingham Six awaited the release of the jailed men outside London's Court of Appeal, they were joined by supporters in a defiant rendition of *I Shall be Released*.

Just weeks previously Gulf War protesters had gathered outside American embassies across the world to sing perhaps Dylan's most enduring anthem, *Blowing in the Wind*.

Timeless reminders or maudlin nostalgia? As Dylan himself has said: "The stuff that I grew up on never grows old. They don't have to make any more new records, there's enough old ones."

Only time will tell if Dylan's songs will remain forever young. But 300 recent visitors to Leicester's Park International Hotel — and a few hundred thousand elsewhere across the world — have no doubts at all.

## Feature Review

# Dylan's Bootleg Series

## An Artist In A Constant State of Creative Evolvment

by Danny McCue

### Bob Dylan

The Bootleg Series,

Volumes 1-3

Columbia 47382

Producer/compiler: Jeff Rosen

Engineers: Various

Total disc times: 77:08, 77:20, 76:41 (no SPARS code listed)

Merit: \*\*\*\*\*

Sound: \*\*\*\*\*

In the 22 years since the infamous bootleg, *Great White Wonder*, first surfaced in California, the music of Bob Dylan has been the subject of a most intense and clandestine scrutiny. Drawn from sources as diverse as a 1961 recording made in a Minneapolis hotel room to outtakes from every Dylan album from *The Times They Are A-Changin'* to *Highway 61 Revisited* to a portion of *The Basement Tapes*, it was the recording that ushered in rock's bootleg era. Today something on the order of 400 tapes -- including studio outtakes, concert recordings, rare radio and television appearances, rehearsals, and in one case an autograph signing outside New York's Beacon Theater (where a lone bootlegger was taping a soundcheck through the stage door until Jimmy himself emerged on his way out to somewhere else) -- serve as the basis of a voluminous underground catalog.



Dylan fanatics don't simply collect rarities, they collect *everything*.

This has, understandably, been a major thorn in the side of both the artist and his label, Columbia Records, who over the years have found that stopping the flow is about as easy as plugging a White House leak. Part of their problem, of course, lies in the sheer volume of quality recordings that have remained in the vaults over the years. Another part of it stems from the bootleggers getting the jump on the legitimate competition. Release the official *Basement Tapes* and collectors of illicit material simply dig

deeper and unearth some more. And part of it surely grows out of bonehead corporate decisions: When a motion picture producer requested permission to use "Like A Rolling Stone" in his soundtrack a few years ago, someone at CBS reportedly sent over the original mastertape -- not the best way to keep pristine source material out of inquiring hands.

Though it doesn't resolve all of these issues, the release of the extraordinary *The Bootleg Series, Volumes 1-3 (Rare and Unreleased 1961-1991)* does something far more important and also far more fun by providing an almost definitive portrait of an artist in a constant state of creative motion and evolvment.

When Bob Dylan came to New York in early 1961 he was a sharp folk guitar player with a relaxed way with a ballad who was looking for an ailing Woody Guthrie. Not surprisingly, as the inclusion of "Hard Times in New York Town," "Rambling, Gambling Willie," and "Quit Your Low Down Ways," and other songs attest, he was heavily influenced by traditional folk and rural blues. What this collection is really about, however, is the explosive series of creative events that took him from obscurity to notoriety at an age where most musicians and writers are still feeling out their master plan.

Particularly on *Volume One*, which

covers the shortest timespan (1961-'63) but contains the bulk of the collection's songs, what we're witness to is an artist who makes himself heard and felt through sheer force of personality. By early 1962 he's already bringing the full brunt of his wicked sense of humor to bear on topical material, such as the jaunty and brilliantly deadpan "Talkin' Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues." A year later he couldn't be further from the gentle pamphleteering of many of his contemporaries than he is during a performance at Carnegie Hall. Two of the songs are included here: the hilarious and defiant "Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues" and an outraged "Who Killed Davey Moore?"

It's as if, artistically, the young composer, just then into his twenties, is running as fast as he can creatively. Six months prior to the Carnegie Hall show, Dylan as novice performer was playing the traditional "No More Auction Block" at the Gaslight Cafe in New York's Greenwich Village. The first disc closes

with a confident-sounding Dylan reading a five-page tribute to Woody Guthrie (then still very much alive) called "Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie" on-stage at New York's other toney uptown theater, Town Hall.

In telling the story of Dylan's 30-year career, producer Jeff Rosen resists the temptation to get bogged down in the wealth of available material. *Ten of Swords*, for instance, the massive 10-volume bootleg set that covers much of the same ground as the first half of this collection, provides far too much for the listener to absorb, even after repeating playing.

Also among the 58-track collection's attributes is Rosen's deliberate decision to use alternate and rehearsal versions of familiar songs that reveal them as works in progress. The slower acoustic version of "Subterranean Homesick Blues" included here is typical. On this run-through the pieces haven't quite fallen into place and for the first time on any Columbia release the

listener gets a sense of how the mercurial Mr. Dylan works his material out in the studio. Likewise, on the very short version of "Like A Rolling Stone" that follows on the same disc, the studious listener can hear lyrics that Dylan obviously felt were in need of fine-tuning later.

Whereas *Biograph* was intended for everyone, *The Bootleg Series* appears designed exclusively for the Dylanophile; the fan, who, like a true baseball follower, loves to second guess managerial decisions. Yes, the New York session version of "Tangled Up In Blues" was wisely omitted in favor of the take that made it onto *Blood On the Tracks* (the former not quite having the swing of the latter), but why, one must wonder, didn't Dylan use the slower, bluesier version of "If Not For You" (featuring George Harrison on guitar) on *New Morning*?

Opening with the long "lost" original version of the despairing "If You See Her, Say Hello," from *Blood On the Tracks*, the third volume runs through Dylan's religious period and concludes with "Series of Dreams," an outtake from 1989's *Oh Mercy*. It's a strange period, in which Dylan goes from singing the praises of baseball player Catfish Hunter, in "Catfish," an outtake from *Desire*, to praising the Lord. At the same time, he also seems in search of something that he can't quite attain. And there is an ever-changing cast along the way that includes Little Steven and Roy Bittan, both formerly of the E Street Band, Mick Taylor, Robbie Shakespear, Mark Knopfler, T-Bone Burnett, and Mick Ronson. Surprisingly, given Dylan's propensity to hit the road during this period, this disc contains only one live track, "Seven Days," from his tour with The Rolling Thunder Revue in 1975.

*The Bootleg Series*, with insightful and exhaustively detailed booklet notes by Dylan authority John Bauldie, goes a long way towards reclaiming the most sought after Dylan collectibles from the outlaws. For a long time people have been wondering when the next great Bob Dylan album was going to come. The fact is folks, he's been working on it all along. #



# THE HARD REIGN OF BOB DYLAN

Artistic genius or embarrassing has-been?  
David Sexton traces the career of Bob Dylan, 50 years old today, from guru of the Sixties to Traveling Wilbury

"ACTUALLY I'm amazed that I've been around this long, never thought I would be." So Bob Dylan said in 1985. And actually we're amazed as well. Today Bob Dylan is 50. He's older than Mr Major. Handsomer too.

It's not easy for a rock star to age gracefully; not easy for a rock star to age at all. Pop culture places such importance on youth and rebellion against elders that when its heroes become elders themselves they must expect to be shoved aside in their turn. To some extent, Bob Dylan has been.

Many jobbing rock critics see him as a period giant but a contemporary embarrassment, someone who didn't have the grace to make the ultimate career move at the right time. Were Bob Dylan no longer with us, he'd have been revived by now, at least once. The Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix resurrections would have been nothing on the Dylan cult.

But there he is, his presence an obstruction to any new vogue, still making records, still on the road. In the last few years, not only has he recorded two original albums, *Oh Mercy* and *Under the Red Sky*, and two records with the spoof group The Traveling Wilburys, he has also played hundreds of dates on a "Never-Ending Tour", a show which just keeps on going round the world till it comes back again.

And if Dylan is no longer at the centre of fashion in rock music (anyway his chart success was never as great as you might have supposed), he has succeeded in creating a permanent constituency of his own. Dylan fans aren't like other rock audiences. They come in all shapes and ages; they may or may not listen to much other rock music; but they are united in recognition of his genius. An artistic genius — as opposed to a talent — changes the possibilities of the art he works in. This Dylan has done.

Increasingly, his position in popular music looks unlike that of anybody else. He has himself created the terms by which he must be judged. In practice, this means that he is almost impossible to judge yet. Dylan himself once admitted: "I know I've done some important things but in what context I don't know and also for who."

Most attempts to put his achievement in context have been awkward. The first serious study, by Michael Gray, chucked a lot of literary names around; Lewis Carroll, Bunyan, Browning. Professor Christopher Ricks famously likes to drop Shakespeare's name in his vicinity. Dylan's latest biographer, Clinton Heylin, also sprinkles literary analogies, as well as citing Fred Astaire, Orson Welles and Jimi Hendrix as equivalent geniuses in popular art forms.

Paul Williams, the author of a good new critical study, lines him up primarily with Picasso but also selects Shakespeare, Beethoven, Duke Ellington and James Joyce to keep him company. An improbable entourage — but such extravagant comparisons do at least prove that Dylan is widely felt both to be great and to be unlike his contemporaries or his immediate predecessors. (Some of his successors are like him, but that's a different matter.)

In the Sixties and Seventies the debate about Dylan's stature presented itself as: is he truly a poet? But the question was mis-cast. Dylan, as Paul Williams argues, is a performer before he's a writer. "Throughout Dylan's career we will find that although he has a reputation as a master of words, his mastery is more specifically of performed language — separated from his performance, his words can lose their power and even their meaning."

Though not always (or no longer) possessed of a great voice, Dylan is first of all a great singer. "An extraordinary quality of Dylan's singing," comments Williams, "is how much emotion, how much of what he's feeling at the moment he's performing, comes through in his breath and, if there's a distinction, in his attack on particular words, his diction..."

In a good performance he projects himself right into the song. In a great performance — the 1966 Royal Albert Hall concert, for example — his involvement is scarily intense.

In the Sixties Dylan's lyrics were often ingeniously interpreted in the search for messages and secret meanings. Plainly they were powerful, mysteriously so, and to some listeners an arcane explanation seemed the most likely. Now it's



Dylan today

easier to see them just as great songs: expressions of love, loss, vengefulness, happiness.

Over and over, his songs insist on harsh truths. You have only yourself to trust and what you do may have consequences to eternity. "If I'd thought about it I

never would have done it, I guess I would've let it slide, / If I'd lived my life by what others were thinkin', the heart inside me would've died. / I was just too stubborn to ever be governed by enforced insanity. / Someone had to reach for the risin' star, / I guess it was up to me," he sings proudly in *Up to Me*.

The evangelical period he passed through 10 years ago was no deviation from what he has always been saying, the challenge he has always offered: that there are truths outside time. His scorn for those who don't wake to this has been steady.

"When people don't get threatened and challenged... they don't get confronted, stay in the same old scene for ever, die and never get a break or chance to say goodbye. I have views contrary to all that. I think that this world is just a passing-through place and that the dead have eyes and that even the unborn can see and I don't care who knows it..."

Does any other singer speak like that? Does any other singer remind us so much that what we do we die for?

In *Don't Look Back*, the documentary of his 1966 tour, the 25-year-old Dylan can be seen telling an appalled Time reporter, who only wants to ask about folk music: "You're going to die, you're going to go off the earth, you're gonna be dead, it could be 20 years, it could be tomorrow, any time. So am I. We're just going to be gone, the world's just going to go on without us..."

It's surely this anchorage in "stuff that don't change" that has kept Dylan from being destroyed by celebrity and changing times. The Sixties mean more to others than to him, the decade's luminary.

In the remarkable interview that accompanies his retrospective set of records, *Biograph*, he has a wonderful speech about that: "As far as the Sixties go, it wasn't any big deal. Time marches on. I mean if I had a choice I would rather have lived at the time of King David, when he was the High King of Israel... or maybe at the time of Jesus and Mary Magdalene — that would have been interesting, huh, really test your nerve... or maybe later in the time of the Apostles when they were overturning the world... What happened in the Sixties? Wiretapping?"

Once he was in the right place at the right time. Now Dylan faces the knowledge that he will probably never surpass or equal his earlier achievements. He's not cowed by this, either. "Everybody works in the shadow of what they've previously done. But you have to overcome that."

Staying on the road is one way of not turning back. The concerts that have resulted have varied from sublime to dire, and

some find his commitment to continuous touring, when he can hardly need the income, inexplicable. But it's where he began, it's what he does: he's a travelling singer, always has been. So many of his songs are about leaving, travelling on.

And if some of what he does, some of what he writes, is not as good as what has gone before — though much of *Oh Mercy*, surely, is just as good — it is still significant to his admirers in a way nobody else's work ever will be. Dylan's songs enter and alter the minds of people who listen to them. They are comically dismayed when he produces a bad record, exhilarated when, as in *Oh Mercy*, he recaptures his form, and delighted when a great unknown recording comes to light.

A few weeks ago, with Dylan's authorisation, Columbia issued *The Bootleg Series: Vols 1-3*, a three-disc set of glorious, previously unreleased material from the span of his career; unused studio work as well as live recordings.

Especially in the last decade, many of the songs and versions he left off records have been better than the ones he put on them. The prospect of this work, and unheard recordings from his greatest periods, coming out over the next few years is thrilling: it's a retrospect with a future. Dylan's achievement will go on growing.

Picture: TONY GALE / PICTORIAL



Bob Dylan on a visit to London in 1967

LOW-DOWN

More than 20 things you'll need to know about...

# Bob Dylan



**1** The Sixties recede even further on Friday week when Robert Zimmerman turns 50. Expect a barrage of self-indulgent newspaper retrospectives.

**2** Zimmerman changed his name to Bob Dylan because of admiration for either (a) Dylan Thomas (above) or (b) Matt Dillon (of the TV series *Gunslinger*). He has also gone by these names: Tedham Porterhouse, Elmer Johnson, Big Joe's Buddy, Egg O'Schmullson, Robert Milkwood Thomas, Blind Boy Grant and Keef Laundry.



**3** Sara (below, in 1977 with her divorce lawyer), former wife of impresario Victor Lowmides, married Dylan in 1967, and is believed to be the Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands. They had four children, Jesse, Anna, Sam and Seth.

**4** Dylan, who once said 'Money changes the quality of the work that's being done - when I started I had nothing', now owns an apartment in New York, a ranch in California, an estate in Minnesota and a yacht in the Caribbean.



**5** Dylan claimed at one point that he had run away from home at 13 and that he was adopted. Neither assertion is true. Actually, he

went through high school in Minnesota and was the leader of the school's rock 'n' roll band.

**6** Adopted by the Sixties flower power generation, he never wrote a song about the Vietnam War. The nearest was 'Masters of War' in 1963 about arms dealers.

**7** Admirers in academe include Christopher Ricks, a Cambridge don, who said of Dylan: 'Not all his works are perfect. He's only as good as Shakespeare.' Michael Gray, who taught English literature at York University, compares Dylan to Blake. D. H. Lawrence, Donne and Browning in his book *The Art of Bob Dylan*.

**8** Lovers include singer Joan Baez (below), chanteuse Clydie King, actress Mary Alice Artes, Greenwich Village activist Suzie



Rotolo and Philadelphia deb Sally Kirkland, famous for appearing nude on Broadway. She called him 'the Howard Hughes of his day'.

**9** Asked by a biographer what the most important thing in his life was, Dylan replied: 'Well, I've got a monkey wrench collection and I'm very interested in that.'

**10** One night at a show in New York in 1989, while the band was still playing, he went down some steps into the audience, opened a fire door, stepped into the street, hailed a cab and went home.



**11** *Bringing It All Back Home*, which includes 'Lamborghini Man' (above) and 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', is credited with making stream-of-consciousness lyrics mainstream.

**12** In 1966 he all but disappeared. No one really knows why. Possible explanations: to recover from his injuries after a motorcycle crash; to beat a deepening drug dependency; to spend more time with his family.

**13** In 1970 he received a doctorate in music from Princeton University. Other colleges hold him in such high esteem that they offer Dylan Studies and he was enrolled as a Commander of Arts and Letters by French Minister of Culture Jack Lang in January last year.

**14** Asked to explicate the following line from 'The Long Black Coat' - 'People don't live or die/People just float', he explained: 'I needed something to rhyme with coat.'

**15** In 1960, Paul Levy, now *The Observer's* food and wine editor but then co-chairman of the First Annual University of Chicago Folk Festival, banned him from appearing because he was neither blind nor black'. Levy now concedes that this was a misjudgment.

**16** He produced the album that some critics believe to be his best, *Blood on the Tracks*, at the time of his divorce from Sara in 1977.

**17** In the late 1970s he shocked his fans by becoming a born-again

Christian. In his 1979 tour he sang only religious songs.

**18** By 1981 he was veering back to Judaism. Visiting Israel he had his son bar-mitzvahed.

**19** His son Jesse, a film-maker, directed the video of his dad's 'Everything Is Broken', a track from the *Oh Mercy* album.

**20** He has made three films, the last of which was *Hearts of Fire*. Co-star Rupert Everett said: 'I'd do *Coronation Street* to work with Bob.' His first movie, *Renaldo and Clara*, starring his wife Sara and directed by Dylan, was a critical flop. Blink and you'll miss his



appearance in the 1973 western *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (above, with Kris Kristofferson).

**BOB'S BITS**

- **DYLAN QUOTES** 'I'm always in love'... 'I think politics is the instrument of the devil'... 'When I'm singin' the stuff, sometimes I say: "Wow! Where'd these lyrics 'come' from?"
- **WORST DYLAN RHYME** 'Bobby thank you for my tea/ It's really so sweet of you/ To be so nice to me' (from latest album *Under the Red Sky*).
- **BEST DYLAN RHYME** 'Don't wear sandals?/ Can't afford scandals'
- **BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE SIXTIES ALBUMS** *Bob Dylan* (1962) Iraq folk; *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963) genius shows, includes 'Blowin' in the Wind'; *Times They Are a Changing'* (1964); *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965); *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965), possibly best rock album ever; *Blonde On Blonde* (1966), possibly the other best rock album ever; *The Basement Tapes* (1967, released 1975), back to basics; *Nashville Skyline* (1969), crooning country.



# Jim Greenhalf

Whitbread  
Feature Writer  
of the Year

STRAIGHT TALK

**A** FRIEND of mine once declared that Bob Dylan was the greatest artist of the Twentieth Century.

Whaaaaa! Greater than Stravinsky, T.S. Eliot, Duke Ellington, Chaplin, Sinatra, W.B. Yeats, Deborah Kerr, Picasso, A.A. Milne, Anna Akhmatova, Joyce, George Gershwin, Bartok, J.B. Priestley, Lotte Lenya, Samuel Beckett, Presley, Marc Chagall, Olivier, Humphrey Bogart, Pasternak, Gene Kelly, Ella Fitzgerald, John Huston, Chuck Berry?

Evidently my friend thought so. Well, Dylan's sold more records than Charlie Chaplin but he's not had a Number One in the UK singles chart — unlike Ken Dodd, whose Tears brimmed to the top of the hit parade in September 1965.

Dylan's poems, on the back of his third and fourth LPs, are worth reading. One, about a man threatening to jump from Brooklyn Bridge, is excellent. But as poetry none of them stand up to The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Easter 1916, the first seven words of Sailing to Byzantium, or the whole of the short An Irish Airman Foresees his Death.

His best work has the inspired touch of great poetry; but the power and glory of it is lost in cold print. Dylan's words need Dylan's voice and music.

The voice hasn't lasted as well as Sinatra's; but six of Dylan's 35 LPs reached the top of the UK albums chart. Francis Albert has done that only once. Dylan has never been able to dance like Gene Kelly or write short stories as good as Joyce's Dubliners — but Kelly couldn't write a song and Joyce, fine singer though he was, could have made a tight pie's end of Like a Rolling Stone.

As a painter Dylan probably ranks with Hitler.

The boy from the north country of America has been singing, playing, recording and performing for more than 30 years. Although still an excellent performer when on form, sadly the passing of the years has been accompanied by the withering of Dylan's once evocative voice.

*In his prime he could sing the blues every bit as good as Blind Willie McTell. His wonderful satires, fables, songs of sorrow, pity, love and pain were delivered with marvellous expressiveness.*

Dylan's effect was so powerful because he got things right in the recording studio, refusing to do a second take if the spirit of the song had been captured in the first. No over-dubbing for him. Even when he went electric and recorded with a band, Dylan liked to treat a studio session as though it was a concert.

The Beatles spent three or four months recording Sergeant Pepper. Dylan recorded 13 of the 14 songs on Blonde in Blonde in six or seven days. For his fifth LP, Bringing It All Back Home, he recorded Gates of Eden, It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding), and It's All Over Now Baby Blue in a single take, singing and playing straight through without playbacks.

His first nine LPs feel so good so good because Dylan was lucky to have at the mixing desk producers such as John Hammond, Tom Wilson and Bob Johnston. Absolute attention was given to the quality of the sound, particularly of Dylan's voice.

The scuffed and grungy way he sings on some of his LPs during the last ten years, the gabbled and somewhat self-indulgent soliloquies, above all the lack of humour, shows what a long, black way Dylan has fallen from the peaks of 1962 to 1968.

I used to think there would never be a time when I would be indifferent to a new Dylan LP; but I've not even heard Under the Red Dawn, Empire Burlesque or Down in the Groove (what a wretched, Los Angeles-type title for a Dylan LP). I gave the bullet to Shot of Love and Real Live.

But I did buy Oh Mercy which has three or four top class songs. And last Thursday I went out and bought the recently released tapes of 58 studio outtakes and concert performances. I marvelled at it was a Friend of Mine, Down the Line and Let Me Dle in My Footsteps. Dylan was just a kid, but his singing and playing were age-old, ageless. Once upon a time there was nothing Dylan couldn't do.

## Rainy day man still bringing it all back home



**HE DID IT HIS WAY:** Six of Dylan's LPs topped the UK albums chart while *Oh! Blue Eyes* achieved that only once

### 'Some wanted him to stay forever as the boy genius in the Huck Finn cap'

Until *Self Portrait*, his LPs had distinctive titles and covers which reflected the spirit of the songs inside. But look at the cheapo productions of his recent albums — as though he cares as little about their appearance as he does about his own.

But the main difference is that he doesn't write such great songs.

However, his masterpieces, and there are dozens of well over 500 songs that he has written and composed, never fail to take the breath away. I don't know if Dylan is the greatest artist of the Twentieth Century; but I have no doubt of the genius in:

Talkin' World War III Blues, Bob Dylan's 115th Dream, Boots of Spanish Leather, It Ain't Me Babe, North Country Blues, Only a Pawn in Their Game, Hollis Brown, Subterranean Homesick Blues, Like a Rolling Stone, Gates of Eden, It's Alright Ma, Desolation Row, Most Likely You'll Go Your Way and I'll Go Mine, Visions of Johanna, All Along the Watchtower, The Wicked Messenger, Idiot Wind, Tangled Up in Blue, and Hurricane.

Not to mention Positively 4th Street, Leopardskin Pillbox Hat, Rainy Day Women Numbers 12 &

35, Tomorrow is a Long Time, I'll Keep It with Mine, Every Grain of Sand, Long Black Coat and The Disease of Conceit.

Dylan has frequently shocked and surprised, or shocked and delighted by playing an old favourite in a completely different way.

"It used to go like that: now it goes like this," he announced at The Royal Albert Hall during the 1966 UK tour. Some didn't take kindly to Dylan reinterpreting his own work, wanting him to stay forever as the impish boy genius in the Huck Finn cap and a road map to the soul.

"I try to stay one step ahead of myself; that's my foolish mission," he said some 20 years after that Albert Hall concert. One step ahead of the fans, critics and especially his admirers — those who think Dylan agrees with them.

The UK singles chart in May, 1965 reflects the pace of the changes Dylan was going through from autumn 1962. Songs as different as The Times They are a-Changin', Subterranean Homesick Blues, Maggie's Farm, Like a Rolling Stone, and Positively 4th Street were simultaneously in the Top Twenty.

Dylan's last single to chart in the

UK was Is Your Love in Vain, from *Street Legal* in 1978. The following year he released *Slow Train Coming* and proved that, once again, he was down the line way ahead of the fans. *Slow Train*, Dylan as a Christian born again in the USA, came as a shock. A man capable of writing *Rainy Day Women* and *I Dreamed I Saw St Augustine* in the space of two years is capable of anything.

Times were changing. In the past Dylan had anticipated change and inspired it. But by the time of his confession that old time religion already had millions of Americans in its grip. Besides, Dylan had chosen to live in California, where the sun always shines and the fruitcakes are nutty and plentiful.

We shouldn't have been surprised at his need for religion. He started out 30 years ago singing black blues and gospel songs. The apocalyptic imagery of the Bible has always been part of the landscape of his cinematic imagination.

The four LPs which mark his conversion (*Slow Train*, *Saved*, *Shot of Love*, *Infidels*) all charted higher in the UK than in America; in fact all four notched up places in the Top Ten.

Perhaps Dylan's British fans have a keener appreciation of his work than their counterparts in the USA. Maybe that explains my friend's assessment.

*Happy 50th on the 24th. Thank you for the songs which kept me company through the rainy days and heartaches of my youth, which still accompany me.*

LFI



Acoustically Yours: miserable strummings from His Bobness.

## Cover me

**Predominantly despondent acoustic cover versions performed on Bob Dylan's Never-Ending Tour.**

Compiled by Homer, The Slut Bobzine

### 1 Barbara Allen

Tearfully tragic ballad concerning a fair maid (Barbara) and her ill-fated lover (Bill) who end up as worms' meat due to an unfortunate misunderstanding

### 2 Blue Ridge Mountain

Lying wounded on a mountain, surrounded by his pursuers, a none-too-pleased dying man looks back on his unfortunate life

### 3 When First Unto This Country

A petty thief fancies Nancy but before he can woo her, he's captured by the Sheriff's men, imprisoned, has his head shaved, is beaten up, and finally force-fed on baked beans

Andrew Muir  
24a Inglethorpe Street  
Fulham  
SW6 6NT

19, July 1991

Dear Sirs,

Thank you for the mention of my Dylan fanzine, *Homer, the slut*, in *Q 59*. Unfortunately I believe you have referred to my list of songs rehearsed rather than those actually performed on the Never Ending Tour. I'm only mentioning this in the hope of deflecting a glut of tape requests for "the concert with *When First Unto This Country* on it, oh and could you put *The Church With No Upstairs* on the other side, please." You should perhaps have also made clear that the irreverent comments on the songs were your own, anyone writing like this in *Homer, the slut* would be forced to watch Bob at Live Aid as a punishment.

Yours faithfully,

### 4 Buffalo Skinners

Woody Guthrie's unhappy tale of disgruntled hired hands whose wage packets are annoyingly cash-free - hence they take brutal revenge on their double-crossing boss

### 5 Dark As A Dungeon

Coalmine's complaint about how difficult it is to see underground due to inconvenient absence of light

### 6 The Two Soldiers

Anything-but-cheerful yarn of fraternally related soldiers fighting on opposite sides in the American Civil War. Ends badly

### 7 Rank Strangers

Desolate lament of one who goes home to find his youth, only to find it's gone for ever and he's alone in the mean old world etc

### 8 Lakes Of Pontchartrain

Fondly remembered encounter with warmly hospitable, dark-eyed Creole girl whom the itinerant singer subsequently abandons

### 9 Eileen Aroon

Gloomy Irish ballad about the transitory nature of human existence

### 10 Wagoner's Lad

Salutary warning to women that all men are false, not to be trusted, and only interested in one thing etc etc

### 11 Wild Mountain Thyme

Obviously evil-intentioned attempt to lure a lassie into plucking said herb, complete with shamefully false promises to build her a tower if she'll come for a "walk" in the heather etc etc

### 12 In The Pines

Moaning old blues song about a black girl who's stayed out all night "sleeping" in the woods

### 13 Man Of Constant Sorrow

Miserable manic depressive tells us he could kick the bucket at any time and gives careful instructions for his funeral arrangements. A real crowd-pleaser

### 14 Long A Growin'

Blubsome tale of a rosy-cheeked schoolboy who gets married while he's still in short pants, only to pop his clogs at a tragically early age

### 15 San Francisco Bay Blues

Confused, rejected singer ponders on his loved one's departure across the seas. Considers "taking a freight train" (whatever that means)



## SIGN OF THE TIMES

**BOB DYLAN**  
The Bootleg Series  
Volumes 1-3  
(Rare & Unreleased)  
1961-1991  
(Columbia)

Billed as the first in a series of rare Dylan recordings, and released in time for the Zim's 50th birthday on May 24, *The Bootleg Series* is a rock'n'roll monster: a 58-track hydra.

The opening salvo, while of little immediate interest to any but the most ardent folk freaks, is the most coherent body of work in the package. The first 25 tracks cover the Greenwich Village boom years, starting with the country-boy-in-the-great-big-city blues of 'Hard Times In New York City'. There are nine bona fide out-takes from *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, including the ethno-spoof 'Talkin' Hava Negeilah Blues', the shaggy dog musical monologue of 'Talkin' Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues' and a whole slew of Dylan's white Appalachian ballads. Of these, 'Rambling, Gambling Willie', a great card-sharp folk Western 'Walls Of Red Wing', about a correctional facility in the Zim's home town; and the bizarre blues boy parody of 'Quit Your Low Down Ways' all pass muster.

Of the live selections 'No More Auction Block', a prototype 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' (The Gaslight Café late 1962), and 'Who Killed Davey Moore', one of Dylan's ringside extravaganzas (Carnegie Hall, 1963), demand attention, as does a piano demo for the apocalyptic 'When The Ship Comes In', later echoed in 'When The Night Comes Falling From The Sky'. The original version of this is far superior to that found on *Empire Burlesque*. Most extraordinary of all, though, is the poem 'Last Thoughts On Woody Guthrie' (1963), where Dylan washes out a mesmerising flood tide of images, and reveals himself as a fabulous performer in the broadest sense.

Personally, I find the second substantial chunk of far greater interest. The appearance of the legendary 'Farewell, Angelina' will delight Dylan-ologists and the decade spanning '65 to '75 certainly provides even the less committed with little excuse to ignore our music's greatest son. The real finds here are a quartet of out-takes from *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited*, where the nascent electrified Dylan found himself a natural setting thanks to the superlative groundbreaking accompaniment of Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper. An early stab at 'If You Gotta Go, Go Now (Or Else You Got To Stay All Night)' - later covered to good effect by Manfred Mann among others - will have you out of your seat just in time for a dynamite 'Sitting On A Barbed Wire Fence' and the crazed, rocked ragged 'It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry', where the whole shooting match simply catches fire and yer actual psychedelia finds itself a handbook.

By contrast the demo flavoured and somewhat



Bob Dylan: how much more bootleg can you get? The answer is none

truncated versions of 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' and 'Like A Rolling Stone' could really have been left in the can.

The *Blonde On Blonde* out-take 'She's Your Lover Now', a tale of weird sexual intrigue with an arrangement that places it midway twixt 'One Of Us Most Know (Sooner Or Later)' and 'Visions Of Johanna' is equally welcome, though from this vantage point it wouldn't have been good enough to supplant anything on the finished masterpiece.

*The Basement Tapes* excerpts are nothing special, a theory proved by an acutely dodgy 'I Shall Be Released'. Similarly, the *New Morning* ditty 'If Not For You' arrives with a very inhibited George Harrison playing the most ploddingly prosaic guitar figure imaginable.

Inevitably, it is the four *Blood On The Tracks* songs that will haunt and provoke those who prefer their Dylan secular. 'Tangled Up In Blue', 'Idiot Wind' and 'If You See Her, Say Hello' are from the original New York sessions featuring

Eric Weissburg's Deliverance band. All find the master in far more reflective and forgiving mood than on available versions, but 'Call Letter Blues', maybe cut in Minneapolis with a different band, is a really vicious account of a marriage on the rocks.

The final chapter encompasses material from *Desire*, the born-again trilogy *Infidels* and the logical finale of 'Series Of Dreams' from *Oh Mercy*. Mention should be made of 'Every Grain Of Sand' which Dylan later gave to Nana Mouskouri(!), and the measured anger of 'Lord Protect My Child' and 'Foot Of Pride' where Dylan faces up to a late-flowering personal maturity, or change of emphasis with regard to relationships. The folk blues, 'Blind Willie McTell' brings the bard of Duluth back full circle, exploring the heartland music of his youth.

There is so much that is good here one can barely scratch the surface, marvelling at the man's breadth of expression. *The Bootleg Series* is a gargantuan labour of love.

(9) Max Bell





# BOB BELONGS

*At 50, Bob Dylan still commands an evangelical following. STEPHEN JARVIS joined the faithful as they celebrated his birthday in the unlikely environs of a Leicester hotel*

The Jewish kid from L.A. grabbed me in the hotel bar. 'He's a modern apostle,' he said. 'When I go to one of his concerts, it's like a church, a spiritual event, a new renaissance. No other artist will ever produce what's happening tonight.'

We were at a birthday party for another Jewish kid, born on May 24 1941 in Minnesota. Though the birthday boy himself wouldn't be blowing out the candles - we were in the Park International Hotel, Leicester - two hundred disciples had gathered to praise him. Many dressed as characters from his songs: a one-eyed undertaker; a man named Jezebel; a faithful slave, Pedro, with a fantastic collection of stamps; and



yours truly, as an angel complete with silver wings, sandals and no less than four faces. My four masks, stuck on all sides of my head, themselves reflected aspects of the man: the Statue of Liberty, as an ironic comment on his homeland; a clown, for he was always the joker; an old testament king for his love of Biblical language; and finally the head of Osiris, brother to the Egyptian Queen Isis – because the event had been organised by *Isis* magazine, a journal devoted entirely to the works of this single human being.

Who is he? One guest speaker summed him up: 'Elvis may have invented Rock 'n' Roll, and The Beatles may have popularised it – but he gave rock its conscience and its poetry.' The most bootlegged artist in rock history, the writer of lyrics dissected by professors of literature, the so-called voice of a generation – the legend's still alive, but he's now middle aged. Bob Dylan is 50.

A party of Dylan-freaks can be as surreal as Desolation Row. Here, an old live-bob concert programme can be auctioned for £200. (And ten times more can be paid in the furious bidding for a platinum disc.) Here, an American can be heard to say: 'My friends talk whiney like Dylan whenever they eat out in restaurants – How do ya feel about a haaaamburger, maaaaan.' And here, in a bazaar with twelve-inch statuettes and triple-album CD bootleg box-sets, you find people talking about a man as if he's a messiah. 'All of us have had our lives touched by this extraordinary figure,' said one. 'He means everything to me,' said another. 'Why do I love him?' asked a third, pausing. 'It's to do with symbols of confusion,' he answered. He was standing near a bootleg that featured a cover-shot of Picasso's 'Guernica'...

One woman, a committed Christian, told me that she became attracted to Dylan after his conversion to the faith. 'He expresses



## TO ME

what's in my heart,' she said, as Bob, on a video, bobbed his gipsy-like bandana-covered head. I asked her whether the other members of the congregation shared her musical tastes. 'No,' she said. 'They're more into Cliff Richard.'

To the true worshipper at the party, Dylan isn't simply a rock star – he is a major artistic figure of the 20th Century. I heard comparisons with the giants of Western culture – Michelangelo, Beethoven and especially Shakespeare. I felt this was just ludicrous, but I see how such comparisons can arise. Take a verse from *Subterranean Homesick Blues*:

*Ah get born, keep warm  
Short pants, romance, learn to dance  
Get dressed, get blessed  
Try to be a success  
Please her, please him, buy gifts  
Don't steal, don't lift  
Twenty years of schoolin'  
And they put you on the day shift  
Look out kid  
They keep it all hid*

'This is life in a few lines – and, dammit, it does indeed remind me of Shakespeare's *Seven Ages of Man*, albeit to a 'Too Much Monkey Business' beat. Or take Dylan's power to sketch characters, from *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*:

*Sweet Melinda,  
The peasants call her the Goddess of Gloom  
She speaks good English  
And she invites you up into her room...*

Or, more strangely, from *Tombstone Blues*:

*The geometry of innocent flesh on the bone  
Causes Galileo's math book to get thrown  
At Delilah, who sits worthlessly alone  
But the tears on her face are from laughter*

The truth about Dylan is that anyone nowadays who sings a song which says more than 'I love you, baby' owes the man a great debt – perhaps without realising it. As Bruce Springsteen once said: 'Without Bob, The Beatles wouldn't have made *Sgt. Pepper*, the Beach Boys wouldn't have made *Pet Sounds*, the Sex Pistols wouldn't have made *God Save the Queen*. U2 wouldn't have done *Pride in the Name of Love*... Springsteen's list goes on.

His voice is, of course, one of the worst you will hear – a thing of 'sand and glue' as David Bowie called it. One fan confessed to me 'I remember going to a record shop in '62 and in those days there were booths where you could listen to the discs before buying them. The trouble was, the booths weren't soundproofed, so other people could hear what you were playing. I remember putting on a Dylan album – and I was so embarrassed because other people would be able to hear that dreadful voice.'

A voice that has in fact deteriorated over the last decade, so that now even his most famous songs, performed live, have barely recognisable tunes. Paradoxically, Dylan's live distortions of his own material have made him still more fascinating to the fans – there exists a small group of so-called 'completists' who aim to collect a tape of every single live performance by the master. At the party, I saw boxes of hundreds of live bootlegs, individually catalogued by location and date of concert: Barcelona 28-6-84, Edmonton 12-8-90 and so on. I asked one bootlegger whether it was difficult to do all this recording. 'It's as easy as sticking a microphone up your jumper,' he said.

But after 30 years of songs and 50 years of life, where is Dylan going? There is broad agreement that the quality of his work declined in the '80s. Patrick Humphries, the noted rock writer, said to the gathered fans: 'Now that Lennon's dead, we know that The Beatles will never get back together again... And we can only hope that Dylan will get back together again.' There are already indications that the '90s' Dylan could get worse. The latest album, *Under the Red Sky* has little lyrical depth, with lines like:

*Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle in your boots and shoes  
Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle you got nothing to lose  
(Wiggle, wiggle)*

One Dylanologist, while ordering a drink, told me that this song 'represents the modern world stripped bare'. I'm not entirely convinced.

With the evening drawing on, I had already been tipped as a strong contender for the fancy dress prize. It looked like a straight tight between myself and Blind Willie McTell. (A costume composed of kilt, dark glasses and white cane.) The trouble was time: the holder of the International Bob Dylan Impersonator's title was doing a set of songs which overran: I knew the last train was due at ten and I had just a few minutes left. I had to go ... yet how could I leave?

With much nail-biting, and more clock-watching, the judgement eventually came – and I was truly annoyed to lose to another angel, the one who flew... too close to the ground. (Represented by a mud-splash on her dress.) I had stayed for nothing – and now I had to dash, with no time to change. The station guards stood open-mouthed as a full-grown man dressed like an angel came running through the ticket-barrier ... an ending to the evening that could take its place in any of Dylan's songs. ■

A GREAT SONGWRITER — NO DOUBT. BUT THE QUESTION REMAINS ...

# CAN DYLAN SING?

By TRACIE FELLERS, STAFF WRITER

BOB DYLAN has done at least one thing consistently over the past 30 years:

He has confounded his admirers and critics.

First, folk purists were dismayed and disappointed in the mid-'60s when Dylan switched from acoustic to electric guitar.

Then in 1979, the Jewish-born Dylan surprised fans with a conversion to Christianity and "Slow Train Coming," an album heavily influenced by gospel music. "Slow Train" sold a million copies; its lead song, "Gotta Serve Somebody," won Dylan a Grammy. But a tour following its release was poorly received.



Finally, though Dylan's talents as a songwriter and composer are still widely admired, some observers have questioned his commitment to his music in recent years.

Some cite lackluster performances, saying Dylan seems to have little interest in music that he once played and sang with passion and intensity.

A recent appearance on the Grammy Awards show, where Dylan sang a nearly unintelligible version of "Masters of War," has been defended by fans as a put-down of the whole scene.

Still, the shoddy vocals resurrected what is perhaps the most perplexing question about Dylan, the one that has nagged him throughout his career:

Can he sing?

We all know he mumbles, he rasps, he moans ... sometimes more than others. Has he lost his ability to carry a tune? Could he ever carry a tune?

There are probably as many opinions on that topic as there will be fans who turn out for Dylan's performance Thursday at the Salem Civic Center. But we wanted our insight in advance, so we posed the question to area artists and musicians.

Jere Hodgkin, Mill Mountain Theatre's executive director, first saw Dylan perform at New York's famed Fillmore East in the late '60s.

"He really wasn't any different from the way he is now," Hodgkin said with a chuckle. "I think what's happened is that Dylan hasn't changed, everything around him has changed.

"The problem today is we've got so much emphasis on people being performers in an MTV way. You have to be a camera performer, a live performer," Hodgkin said.

## BOB DYLAN

US, b. 1941, singer/songwriter

The "voice of a generation", Bob Dylan (above) gave rock music something to say. He injected the tenets of protest and folk music into the heart of rock'n'roll and early songs like *The Times They are A-Changin'* and *Masters of War* combined social commentary with brutal critiques of the ways of the world. They provided a rallying cry for a generation of idealistic and disaffected youth, and reflected the profound cultural and political changes that swept through Western societies during the Sixties.

But Dylan never approached performance as an attempt to win a public: "He approached it like a poet and a lyricist, which I think is brilliant.

"I think his musicality as a singer is very questionable," Hodgkin continued. "But that's fine. That's part of the package. He is an enigma. He is a recluse. . . .

"It doesn't matter to me that he doesn't have a vocal instrument. . . . He has bridged four different generations of music" in a way no other rock artist has, Hodgkin said.

Mike Seeger, a traditional folk musician, musicologist and half-brother of folksinger Pete Seeger, has a more personal perspective on Dylan. In the early '60s, he played with Dylan in Greenwich Village, then a focal point for folk music.

"I think it's best to focus on his role as a songwriter and a leader in the field of writing basically poetry put to music," said Seeger, who lives near Lexington. "He has become an interesting singer; I think he was from the beginning."

At the start of Dylan's career, "I think he was emulating some of the field singers that he heard in his early years listening to traditional music," Seeger said. And by doing that, Dylan "certainly got people's attention."

Over the years, Dylan, like many other musicians of the era, "began going toward a more mainstream and popular kind of music . . . so he became more of a mainstream type of singer," Seeger said.

"I think his songs have a high degree of literary content. They all have a great deal of merit, especially his popular music." And that music has influenced a number of musicians, including country and western artists Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings.

As for the voice, "you do hear people all over the place mocking his style of singing," Seeger said. "It's very distinctive. . . . Whether you like it or not, that's not the point if you get somebody's attention."

The effect of Dylan's nasal, stylized drawl and acute yet magnificently embroidered wordplay has been all-pervasive, influencing a range of musicians from John Lennon and Jimi Hendrix (qqv) to Bruce Springsteen and beyond. The recorded essence of his Sixties' portfolio — *Bringing it all Back Home* (May 1965), *Highway 61 Revisited* (October 1965) and *Blonde on Blonde* (August 1966) — remains an essential album triptych in rock history. Dylan's sound was harsh and authentic, but his message and melodies had such lucid and universal properties that they were successfully recorded by a myriad

of other artists from Peter Paul and Mary (*Blowin' in the Wind*) to the Jimi Hendrix Experience (*All Along the Watchtower*). His influence waned during the Seventies as he became a conspicuous member of rock's old guard, but he retained his place on the top table. He continued to enjoy a measure of commercial success, notably in 1988 thanks to his involvement with George Harrison (qv), the late Roy Orbison and others in the Traveling Wilburys. Whatever his latter-day circumstances, nothing can detract from his status as the most intellectually significant figure of the Sixties rock revolution **DWS**

Victoria Bond, music director of the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra, remembers Dylan as "a major voice" of the '60s — but not necessarily a singing voice. "He was somebody who basically spoke his songs, in almost a raplike way," she said.

"In classical music, we call it *sprechstimme*. That literally means speech song, speech voice, and it's actually used in contemporary opera. What it means is kind of speaking on pitch," Bond said.

Bond described Dylan's voice as "expressive" and "full of intensity." Dylan "had such a powerful poetic vision . . . almost like a prophet-like voice," she said.

"I think for a generation that was disillusioned — my generation was one that was disillusioned with material wealth — his voice was really a powerful one," Bond said. ". . . He wasn't impressed with power and wealth. I think that's a message we need to hear today."

Brian Sieveking, a Roanoke artist and Dylan fan, doesn't think Dylan's message has lost its strength. But he isn't as sure about Dylan's singing.

"If you go to see him now, it's kind of a hit-or-miss situation," Sieveking said. "I've seen him three times over the last five years, and one of them was a really good concert, and one of them was really terrible."

But Dylan is nothing if not multifaceted, he added. "If you listen to 'Lay Lady Lay' or some of that work, he sounds like Tony Bennett. If you listen to some of his stuff, like 'Biograph,' you'll see what he has an incredible vocal range."

If you pick up Dylan's latest release, "The Bootleg Series," a collection of 58 previously unreleased songs, listen to the song "Blind Willie McTell," Sieveking suggested. He considers it positive proof that Dylan can sing.

Still, Dylan's "greatest talent lies in his ability as a lyricist," Sieveking admitted. "He's not Frank Sinatra."

# Bob Dylan – positively 50

Landmark singer reaches a landmark age, yet stays forever freewheeling

By Christopher Ricks

**S**o Bob Dylan turned 50 on Friday. But then what hasn't he turned? Once upon a time he turned electric. He turned Christian, though not the other cheek. But he has never turned coat. Or tail.

Fifty is quite an age in the pop world. Though being on the road must mean going from pillar to post, it doesn't have to be a dog's life. Multiply seven times, for a dog's age? Twice for such as Dylan's, then.

"Light yourself a candle." Long ago, his rueful homesick line rhymed with his sardonic one about how the vandals took the handles. This time around, it is for us to do the lighting of 50 candles. Forever ageless.

Those of us who are old enough (in our 50s, say) to remember the sweet startlement of "Forever Young" will never forget what it was like to turn "Planet Waves" over and find that the first track on the second side was an utterly different version of the song we had just heard as the last track on the first side. Forever indeed. The reprise was a feat of modesty and pride. Modesty, in acknowledging that even Dylan himself couldn't sing one of his songs so that everything about it was realized in one performance. Pride, in insisting that a great Dylan song is endlessly fertile, floating free.

We have asked the impossible of him, but then – as he tenderly sings – "I believe in the impossible,

you know that I do." A lovely double-take, that, turning on what he means by *believe*, at once down to earth (I do believe there are such things as impossibilities, you know) and trusting in heaven (miracles happen, I can tell you).

We have asked him never to change and yet always to change. To meet our expectations and to astonish us. To be the voice of his generation and to close the generation gap; To be fiddler, statesman and buffoon. Old Testament prophet and gentle consoler. To make us wince and laugh and grieve and smolder. To be equally alive to the cave of his mouth and to the shell of our ears.

He is expected to keep faith with us, but we have felt under no obligation to keep faith with him. His best songs have been used as the enemy of his good songs (he is never ever to be other than at his best, understood?), and his good songs as the enemy of his best (this is no time for discrimination).

There he was recently, at the Grammy Awards, being given his Lifetime Achievement award, for all the world as if he were dead. And then he wouldn't lie down, but actually had the nerve to remind people, there of all places, that it is possible to defile yourself. The face of the man! And either the filming wasn't flattering, or the face of the man wasn't in great shape, what with wattles and jowls. "At fifty, everyone has the face he deserves" (George Orwell). And then a little while later, a couple of weeks ago, here he was for us at Northeastern, kempt and nimble and limber, being himself. Or some of his selves.

And everybody at Northeastern was at once grateful and impatient, craving her or his own priorities. Well, I know mine, and I do wish that in concert he would maintain the priorities of the albums themselves and give us, in *ascending*, not descending, order: decibels, arrangements, tunes, words, voice. But then again what would be the point of asking from a concert what we already have taped? No sense these days in going to a Dylan concert unless you know the risk, that you take your ears in your hands.

Dylan has an ear for a tune, whether it's his, newly minted, or someone else's, newly mounted. He has a voice that won't be ignored and that ignores nothing though it spurns a lot. Dylan when young did what only the great artists do: define anew the art he practiced. Marlon Brando made people understand something different by *acting*. He couldn't act? Fine, but he did something wonderful, and what else are you going to call it. Dylan can't sing? Call it what you will.

Not just the beauty but the force is always in the details, incarnate in his very way of putting it. So that any general praises of his art are sure to miss what matters most about it: that it is not general at all, but highly (and deeply) individual, particular.

The other day I received the latest issue of a serious (solemn, actually) poetry magazine from England. It was devoted to rhyme. Since Dylan is one of the great rhymesters of all time, I hoped that there might be something about him. There was – a grudging remark on "the accepted badness of rhyme in popular verse, popular music, etc.": "A climate in which, say, Bob Dylan is given even a moment's respect as a poet is a climate in which anything goes."

This is snobbery. The only reason for denying Dylan the title of poet would be a narrow one, that on the page a poem controls all its timing there and then. Dylan, a performing artist, is necessarily in the business of playing his timing against his rhyming. And his rhymes are no more "bad" than were Byron's outrageous ones. Byron would have applauded Dylan's rhyme of "ouch" with "psychiatric couch." Byron, who relished the comedy of rhyming on names, would have been tickled by the wistful way in which Dylan consciously fantasizes about the simple life:

*Build me a cabin in Utah,  
Marry me a wife, catch rainbow trout,  
Have a bunch of kids who call me "Pa."  
That must be what it's all about*

The great stroke there is the sidling comedy that doesn't exactly rhyme *Utah* with *Pa*, but *Utah* with *me "Pa."* You and me. There's the simple life for you. Me Tarzan, you Jane.

When Dylan offered "Advice for Geraldine on Her Miscellaneous Birthday," he spent the only capital letter in all his 120 lines on a frowning "Not":

*do Not create anything, it will be  
misinterpreted, it will not change.  
it will follow you the  
rest of your life.*

He was alive to a real fear, of being petrified forever in his past creations. Of having to fade into his own parade. Of being stuck inside of "Stuck Inside of Mobile." But he has had the courage to remake his own past and his own past songs. Added to which, he still gives us great new songs – oh, "Most of the Time" on "Oh Mercy" (1989), or the song that he unaccountably left off that album, but which is now (1991) to be heard on his official "Bootleg Series" (contradiction-in-terms, an "official" bootleg), "Series of Dreams." Hearing is believing.

When he was asked in 1969 by a London newspaper why he had come for the Isle of Wight concert, he said that it was so that he could see the home of Alfred Tennyson. Like the sea in Tennyson's great poem "Ulysses," Dylan moans round with many voices. And if you had to settle for the centrally obvious in praising Dylan, you would do well just to apply T. S. Eliot: "Tennyson is a great poet, for reasons that are perfectly clear. He has three qualities which are seldom found together except in the greatest poets: abundance, variety, and complete competence."



# Bob Dylan shows his many sides

By Jim Sullivan  
GLOBE STAFF

BOB DYLAN

At: Great Woods Center for the  
Performing Arts, with Laura Nyro, last  
night

**M**ANSFIELD - What about Bob? Long before the hit movie came along this summer people have been asking that question about the Bob that is Dylan, especially, of course, after his semi-comprehensible Grammy speech and performance of "Masters of War" earlier this year, but also throughout the past, oh, decade-and-a-half.

Contending answers:

■ A nostalgia act, content to play the hits that made him a superstar back in the early-to-mid-'60s.

■ A deconstructionalist-terrorist nostalgia act, willing to slash apart and re-assemble those songs, mutate or thwart their meaning.

■ An ongoing enigma.

■ A roadhog, a guy who always seems to be touring and is again now, promoting, it would nominally seem, "The Bootleg Series, Volumes 1-3, 1961-1991," an obscurities and alternate-takes collection that has some stellar moments.

■ A self-caricature, a substandard Dylan imitator.

What about Bob at Great Woods last night before 7,500 of the faithful?

All of the above descriptions surfaced during Dylan's 100-minute set, as the 50-year-old singer-songwriter fronted a young three-piece blues-rock band, guitarist John Johnson, bassist Tony Garnier and drummer Ian Wallace.

Primarily, Dylan seemed like a living legend who was unwilling to accept the adulatory status, certainly someone who has decided his current mission is to serve up familiar songs in unfamiliar contexts. The melody of "All Along the Watchtower" sounded nearly right, but the words were a thorough blur - Dylan doing Al Pacino as Mumbles in "Dick Tracy." The melody line and rhythm to "Shelter From the Storm?" Forget about it. The concert-closing "Ballad of a Thin Man" - interminable, dull, with Dylan totally bypassing the angry climax in the refrain. "Something is happening, but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?" Dylan rattled, meaning to get it over with quick substitute "Dylan" for "Jones" and you're tapping into

what was felt in these quarters at Great Woods.

It is, indeed, a peculiar sight to watch someone - Dylan or anyone - drain the drama from their songs, to treat the R & B/rock throwaway "Wiggle Wiggle" with the same degree of intensity as "Lay, Lady, Lay." That is, middling.

It was a disconcerting show, but not a wretched one. In a perverse way, you have to admire Dylan's decision to persevere as a musician - critics be damned - years after his best work has been written, as well as his concert concept of avoiding note-for-note replication. In concert, he has always toyed with arrangements - some for the better, some for the worse - and he continues to. A number of last night's versions had some merit, especially when the band sunk its collective teeth into a solid groove as it did during "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" and "You Gotta Serve Somebody," which Dylan slyly introduced as (R.E.M.'s) "Losing My Religion."

But, really, this year's Dylan appeals more to the cynic than the idealist. The acoustic mid-set section never took off, and he didn't even come up with a crowd-pleasing "Like a Rolling Stone" or "Blowin' in the Wind" at the end. He left us with the plodding version of "... Thin Man." A portrait of the artist as an old man, fronting a not half-bad bar band. And as much as fans and critics may have dumped on Dylan's semi-overblown 1978 album "Live at Budokan" - all those singers, all those horns - at least the emotional, cathartic goods were delivered. Not last night.

Veteran folksinger Laura Nyro, still possessing a gorgeous voice, opened with a 35-minute set. She has a gentle pull about her, but her voice-and-piano set rarely rose above the mid-tempo pace of a rippling brook, and nothing cut too deeply.



DYLAN'S European shows in January were a by now familiar mix of the lunatic and the inspired. Breaking in yet another new band who seemed as unfamiliar with each other as they were with his current repertoire, Dylan was apparently in worryingly indifferent form in Switzerland and Belgium on the opening dates of his brief European tour. Even the most committed Dylan admirers felt their loyalty was being tested to uncomfortable limits by the old buzzard's obvious drunkenness, his rambling lack of focus and his general incoherence. At the first of his performances at the SEC in Glasgow, there were indeed worrying signs that his manifest eccentricities had completely loosened his grip on his genius, but he still managed to confound sceptical opinion with a breathtaking acoustic section, the highlight of which was a stunning version of the venerable "Mr Tambourine Man" that sounded like nothing so much as The Velvet Underground laying waste to "Black Angel's Death Song". The London concerts that followed were by all accounts far more disciplined affairs - the band more confident, Dylan himself more composed, less wilfully erratic - but the fashionable consensus was that a once invincible talent was charred beyond recognition.

Indisputable evidence of the vast and

unparalleled scope of that remarkable talent was quickly available. In April, in anticipation of Dylan's 50th birthday in May, Columbia released "The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3 (Rare & Unreleased) 1961-1991". This was a truly astonishing 58-track collection, available as a three CD, three cassette or five album box set of legendary, but little-heard recording - including the original versions of a quartet of songs from "Blood On the Tracks" and a selection of outtakes from "Infidels", most notably the much-vaunted "Blind Willie McTell", which amazingly lived up to its underground reputation as one of Dylan's greatest-ever compositions. Why this material had never surfaced before is a mystery that only its author can explain. What is without doubt, though, is the straightforward fact that "The Bootleg Series" contains some of the most brilliant and enduring music ever produced. some of the most brilliant and enduring music ever produced. "The Bootleg Series" is missing from our list of Albums Of The Year. You would not, however, have to be blind into the supernatural to be able to predict that people will still be listening in awe and wonder to this collection long after "Screamadelica" is confined to the bargain bins.

# Too popular to be good

THERE'S a Charlie Brown cartoon by Schulz that is one of Constant Viewer's personal favourites, even though it doesn't have Snoopy or Woodstock in it, because it perfectly illustrates a certain attitude of mind. Charlie and his mates, faces bright with virtuous expectation, are walking up to a cinema showing a revival of Orson Welles's classic, *Citizen Kane*. Lucy is standing outside with a nasty look on her face and an enormous placard in her hand, legible at a couple of hundred yards. The placard reads: IT WAS HIS SLED!

Lucy's is a sadly common critical position, and not only in the movies. The minute any artist or work of art transcends mere greatness, like *Citizen Kane*, to become genuinely popular, part of the common consciousness, you can be sure his or its critical doom is sealed. Critics get annoyed that the cloistered preserves of the worthy connoisseur should be invaded by the scruff, so they withdraw from the cloisters and pronounce the grapes that grow there sour.

(Pedantic Reader: *Do grapes grow in cloisters?* Ourselves — Yes, pal, they do; for the metaphorical purposes of this column, anyway.)

Oy! Everybody wants to get in on the act... but, as we were about to say, this is why — for example — Luciano Pavarotti used to be a great tenor but is now sniffed at as a meretricious barnstormer; why Barber's Adagio for Strings used to be respected as a minor masterpiece but now — since being popularised by the films *The Elephant Man* and *Platoon* — is condemned as chocolate-box sentimentality; why in art a taste for the Pre-Raphaelites or the French Impressionists is considered a teensy bit vulgar. Too many people think they're nice, and great art is notoriously recognisable by its unpopularity.

Anyway, to bring us back to Lucy at the cinema — pausing only to dedicate today's column to everyone who thinks first of the Lone Ranger when they hear the William Tell overture — Channel 4's denunciatory arts slot *Without Walls: J'Accuse* (9.00pm) tonight finds itself outside that very cinema, with the same sort of placard in its hand, as film critic and screenwriting teacher Robert McKee takes a somewhat resentful-sounding whack at *Citizen Kane*.

It's over-rated, deeply flawed, hyped-up; Welles was a show-off, a heartless technician, a mere stylist. What really bothers McKee, though — and this is the giveaway — is its semi-official status as The Greatest Film Ever Made. *It's not, it's not, it's not; how can you think so?* he seems to roar, showing that lamentable sensitivity to other people's opinions that always bewilders those of us who take a more live-and-let-live attitude.

For example: some of you out there, for all Constant Viewer knows, may be so deaf as to disagree with us over the obvious fact that Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* is the greatest pop album ever made, but we promise not to get annoyed if you do. Our attitude would be more of sorrow than anger, with a little heartfelt pity thrown in. We promise not to make a TV programme about it; it would be an odd world if we all thought the same.

But leaving value judgments aside, there is one important and non-aesthetic fact about *Citizen Kane* and all works like it: over a long time it has given millions of people a tremendous amount of innocent pleasure, and will probably continue to do so for many years to come. *J'Accuse* — *Citizen Kane*, however, may not even get a repeat.



## BOB DYLAN

Born Robert Zimmerman in Minnesota to a Jewish family, he adopted Bob Dylan as his name on arrival at the University of Minnesota in late 1959. A year later he left for New York, where he met his hero Woody Guthrie and played harmonica at recording sessions.

Signed to CBS, his first eponymous album cost just \$402 to record, with sparse vocal, guitar and harmonica. Of two original songs, 'House Of The Rising Sun' was later picked up by the Animals—an early indication of Bob's wide influence. But it was the radical politics of songs like 'Blowin' In The Wind' (US Number Two for Peter, Paul & Mary in 1963), 'Masters Of War' and 'Talking World War III Blues'—from the largely self-penned *Freewheelin'* (1963)—that endeared him to the smart set.

1964 was a prolific and diverse year. *The Times They Are A-Changin'* was full of protest songs; *Another Side Of Bob Dylan* was a more personal affair. 1965's *Bringing It All Back Home* was different again: half acoustic, half rock, when played at the Newport Folk Festival it saw him

booted off.  
Highway



Lord Bob of Dylan: divine talent (sometimes) zimmers within...



## BOB DYLAN AND THE BAND

**Live At The Albert Hall, April 1 1966 (Bootleg)**

IN THE beginning they were The Hawks, a bunch of teenage hopefuls supporting rockabilly wildman Ronnie Hawkins, who promised them crap wages but "more pussy than Frank Sinatra". When Dylan came across them, they'd already ditched their leader and were a fluent bar-room band. So he put them on huge stages and made them co-conspirators in his contentious electric phase of '65-'66, playing to violent abuse from folkniks all over the world. This famous bootleg is a wonderful document of this tense, thrilling period, with Dylan sounding ornery and unfazed while The Band lash out 'Like A Rolling Stone', 'Leopardskin Pillbox Hat' and so forth with instinctive, ragged aplomb.

Lady Lay'. Though 1970's *Self Portrait* was a disappointing double, *New Morning* began the new decade in more promising style.

Dylan diversified, starting in and scoring *Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid*, from which emerged 'Knockin' On Heaven's Door'. The Band-backed *Planet Waves* (a 1974 US chart-topper) and the powerful concert double *Before The Flood* (first and best of four live albums so far) were issued on Asylum; back on CBS, Dylan forged his best '70s album, *Blood On The Tracks* (1975). *Desire* (1976) was followed by the *Rolling Thunder Revue* tour (with Dylan's ex-lover Joan Baez and ex-Byrd Roger McGuinn) and the rambling four-hour movie *Renaldo And Clara*. 1978's *Street Legal* closed the chapter; the following three albums, released in consecutive years from 1979—*Slow Train Coming*, *Saved and Shot Of Love*—reflected a conversion to radical Christianity.

Dylan's '80s were uninspired and uninspiring. As if unsure of his direction, he joined forces with Mark Knopfler (*Infidels*, in 1984), Eurythmics' Dave Stewart (*Knocked Out Loaded*, in 1986) and Was Not Was (*Under The Red Sky*, in 1990). 1988's *Down In The Groove* was an '80s *Self Portrait*. Acclaim was reserved, however, for the box sets *Biograph* (1985) and *The Bootleg Series Vols 1-3* (1991), which revealed more fascinating archive material from when the man really mattered. 1989's *Oh Mercy* was the best of the decade. Dylan entered the '90s with a stripped-down three-piece backing band, closer to pleasing the critics but still annoyingly idiosyncratic.

It's impossible to overstate Dylan's influence. His songs have been covered by everyone from Siouxsie to Rod Stewart, Hendrix to Bryan Ferry; his vocal style has imitated the world over, but the item causing most envy has been his evocative image-laden songwriting (see Springsteen, Costello and many others).

*Biograph* (CBS box set, 1985)

# HE WAS A FRIEND OF MINE ...



**BOB DYLAN'S 50<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY**

● "You gotta lotta nerve" . . . Lovers, sidekicks, pals and wannabes vent their spleen on the man we all call Bob.

"People would laugh and hoot at him and I'd just sit there embarrassed, almost crying. He always had the amplifiers too high. I guess he lived in his own world, 'cos apparently the audiences booing and laughing didn't bother him in the least."

**ECHO HELSTROM**, girlfriend from his adolescence



**It ain't me Abe**

"He was strong. I mean he could hold up his end of a refrigerator as well as kids twice his size, football players."

**ABE ZIMMERMAN**, Bob's dad

"I really loved him. I wanted to take care of him, have him sing. I mean brush his hair and brush his teeth and get him on stage on time."

**JOAN BAEZ**

"The two loudest things I've ever heard are a freight train going by, and Bob Dylan and The Band."

**MARLON BRANDO**

"Hell, he doesn't even talk to his old lady sometimes for weeks."

**KRIS KRISTOFFERSON**

"If he's thorny and difficult, it's because he wants to keep a distance. He can be an absolutely charming guy . . ."

**ROBERT SHELTON**, 'Dylanologist'



PICTURE: JOSEPH STEVENS

"Hide, Jack . . . it's a camera!"

"The transcendent Bob Dylan."

**JACK NICHOLSON**

"The magic moment when I heard that beautiful ragamuffin was to change my life. He was the social conscience of the 1960s."

**DONOVAN** famous 'Crap Dylan'

"He's a little fellow. That surprises you at first because from his singing you somehow imagine him as a tall man."

**JOHN LENNON**

"A voice like sand and glue."

**DAVID BOWIE**

"Sweetness wasn't part of his personality and neither was compassion. He was a bit of a terror."

**MIKKI ISAACSON**, old friend

"Sometimes I felt Bobby came closer to being psychotic than neurotic."

**JOAN BAEZ**, singer and ex-girlfriend



**OMI God—Allen Ginsberg**

"He was always a hard-working guy."

**ALLEN GINSBERG**

"He absolutely charmed the pants off me—well, not literally, but close. Actually, I tried to charm the pants off him—and everyone will be disappointed to know I was unsuccessful, but I got close. Oh, you know, a couple of first bases in the front seat of his Cadillac. He drives a hysterically long red Cadillac convertible and he can't drive worth a pea."

**BETTE MIDLER**

"We were trading verses off the top of our heads when Dylan came out with this absolute classic . . . then he said, 'Cancel that.' We couldn't believe it. He thought it was too close to what people expect of Bob Dylan."

**BONO**, U2



PICTURE: UPI

**Joan Baez and Bob, immaculately groomed**



**Sara Dylan with Division Two '60s icon Maccas**

"I was in such fear of him that I locked doors to protect myself from his violent outbursts and temper tantrums. He has struck me in the face, injuring my jaw."

**SARA DYLAN**, ex-wife

"All Dylan wants is a reaction from you."

**ARLO GUTHRIE**, folk singer

"It does not matter to him that people might not like what he is doing. Him still do it, and that is the most important thing."

**BOB MARLEY**

"There are men, and Bob is one of them, who get worried, for some reason, if their girlfriend or wife has strong outside interests, like a career."

**SUZE ROTOLO**, ex-girlfriend

"The thing about Bobby is that he always wanted to be a rock 'n' roll singer like Elvis Presley."

**DANA GILLESPIE**, singer

"He's a very nice man. A bit introverted, but still a very nice man."

**STEVIE WONDER**

"I've always found Bob Dylan's voice distinctly unpalatable. The flat, nasal, monotonous whine never seemed the best vehicle to put over his poetic prophecies."

**ANNIE NIGHTINGALE**, DJ

"If Bob Dylan is a poet, so is Cassius Clay."

**NORMAN MAILER**

"Fact: Bob Dylan knows the secrets of the entire universe—but he ain't telling."

**ROBERT CRUMB's Strange But True comic strip**

"All that talk about drugs . . . Bob never used drugs, that was just the press. He goes to bed at nine and gets up at six and reads until ten, while his mind is still fresh."

**MRS ZIMMERMAN**, faithful mum

"I hear things when I touch his hand."

**TAMARA RAND**, Dylan's 'psychic guide'

"Omigod . . ."

**ALLEN GINSBERG**

"I always thought he'd be stiff."

**BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**

"He might be into religion but he spends more time talking about sex than God."

**GYPSY FIRE**, actress and another ex-lover



PICTURE: KATIE SIMON

**Bang the birthday party**

"I hate the bastard . . . If I hadn't had to watch Dylan for this assignment I could have seen an interview with my idol, General Idi Amin. Bob Dylan is just an old fart running round in faded denims, modelling harmonica holders."

**LESTER BANGS**, rock journalist



## BOB DYLAN'S 50 INTERESTING THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT DYLAN

BOB DYLAN'S 50<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

*"Don't follow leaders/  
and watch the parking meters"*

**BOB DYLAN** walks alone. The history of rock has always been about groups; the boys in the band, the last gang in town, four men that shook the world. Bob Dylan did on his own what it took four Beatles, five Stones and any number of Fall members to achieve. Singlehandedly he changed the face of rock 'n' roll. And kept changing it.

He was apart. Apart from the folk music which he revolutionised, apart from the rock 'n' roll which he reinvented, apart from the Tin Pan Alley machine that glared at him with suspicion and which he in turn rendered obsolete. Just apart.

Dylan took the materials traditionally rejected by the builders of popular culture – folk forms, language beyond 'moon in June' platitudes, and vocals that could cut corrugated iron – and gave voice to previously unheard feelings (disgust, rage, paranoia, love and beauty), constructing a new kind of pop music. Let's call it rock.

He blew in from the mid-West in the early '60s with tall tales about his own past and an America few had ever glimpsed. He hijacked the hand-knitted folk revival then rampant and returned it to its raw roots. One afternoon he tossed off 'Blowin' In The Wind'; the protest lyric was born and with it the pop verse was forced forever to look beyond the simple themes of cars and girls.

If this alone had been his achievement, Dylan would be

remembered, but the frictional folkie went on to become the electric warrior, rustic recluse, angry self-analyst, crackpot Christian and latterly the most unpredictable live performer on the planet.

But then he's never been easy. Like Mark E Smith's grumpy grandad, it's almost as if he's set out to shock; at the height of the Vietnam war he performed in front of the largest stars and stripes he could find; at Live Aid he chilled the global warmth by raising the issue of American rural poverty.

But whatever his musical style, mental state or chosen religion of the moment, what has always been undeniable is his influence. It's not there in a slogan emblazoned on a bare chest or the cut of the latest fashion threads, but in the very weft and weave of successive waves of rock.

You hear it in every rock song that uses minor chords, in every non-crooning voice on the radio, in every performance that refuses to pander to rehearsed, 'greatest hits' expectation. Be fair, you hear it everywhere.

No Dylan, no rock 'n' roll. Happy birthday, you old bastard...

**D** One of the earliest known songs from the man later to be known as the E A Poe of Protest was a defiant, strident protest entitled 'Bonnie, Why'd You Cut My Hair?'. The 19-year-old Dylan didn't care who he upset when he sang to fellow student **Bonnie Beecher** in 1961: "Bonnie why'd you cut my hair/Now I can't go nowhere!"

**D** Dylan's first paid concert appearance took place on April 5, 1961, at the Loeb Music Centre, New York University. He received \$20 for the show.

**D** Ram Jam had a hit with 'Black Betty'; Dylan had been there 11 years before, in his notoriously unreadable, only novel *Tarantula* of 1966. Dylan incorporated the song's memorable chorus ("Whoa Black Betty, bam-a-lam") in the chapter headed 'Having A Weird Drink With The Long Tall Stranger'. In fact, the best things in *Tarantula* are the chapter headings – 'Pointless Like A Wilch', 'Mouthful Of Loving Choke' and 'I Found The Piano Player Vary Cross-eyed But Extremely Solid'.

**D** EXCLUSIVE!: Bob Dylan is not Bob Dylan's real name. He was born **Robert Allen Zimmerman** at 9.05am at St Mary's Hospital, Duluth, Minnesota on May 24, 1941.

**D** The 'Shaun Ryder Got It All Wrong Blues': Bob Dylan on **Donovan** in 1965 from the film *Don't Look Back*: "Donovan. Who's this Donovan? Let's put him right out on the sidewalk!" CBS representative: "I've got an award for the most promising artist of the year, and the best selling folk record, 'Freewheeling'." "Tell them to give it to Donovan". At the final night of the tour at the Royal Albert Hall, Dylan smirkingly rewrote his own 'Talkin' World War III Blues': "I went to the doctor the very next day to see what kind of things he had to say; He said it was a terrible dream, I looked in the closet, there was Donovan".

**D** It is **The Rolling Stones'** party to mark the conclusion of their 1972 American tour. A large man approaches our hero: "Hello, I'm Peter Grant, I manage Led Zeppelin". Dylan: "Hey man, I don't come to you with my problems".

**D** It is backstage at **The Band's** final concert, 'The Last Waltz', in 1978. **Neil Diamond** storms offstage past our hero who is about to go on: "You're going to have to go some to follow me, man. I was so great." "What do you want me to do, go onstage and fall asleep?"

**D** At the beginning of his career, Dylan was always filching melodies from other songs for his own: 'Rambling Gambling Willie' borrowed from **The Clancy Brothers**; 'Brennan On The Moor'; 'The Ballad Of Donald White' from the traditional 'Peter Amherley'; 'Bob Dylan's Dream' came from folk singer **Martin Carthy's** adaptation of 'Lord Franklin'; 'With God On Our Side' borrowed heavily from **Dominic Behan's** 'The Patriot Game' and 'Blowin' In The Wind' was borrowed from the old spiritual 'No More Auction Block'.



**Dylan retired to the countryside to work on that 'difficult' eighth album...**

**D** The opening act for **The Rolling Thunder Review's** show in Tampa in 1976 was a stand-up comedian – **Steve Martin**.

**D** In 1965, **NME** submitted one of their Lifelines questionnaires to Dylan: Favourite Composers? "Brown Bumpkin and Sidney Ciggy" Miscellaneous Likes? "Trucks with no wheels, French telephones, anything with a stewed prune in the middle." Personal ambition? "To be a waitress." Professional Ambition? "To be a stewardess." (Reproduced in full on page nine.)

**D** The name 'Dylan' first appears as a figure in the *Mabinogion*, a medieval Welsh romance.



**"A very perceptive question Mr Kelly..."**

**D** **Ronnie Hawkins**: "Dylan told me that he had sold 12 million records since he became a Christian. I told him to become a Moslem and he might sell 60 million."

**D** **New Yorker** film critic **Pauline Kael** dismissed Dylan's dismal four hour home movie about **The Rolling Thunder Review**, *Renaldo & Clara*: "It's what Louis and Marie Antoinette might have done at Versailles if only they'd had the cameras."

**D** 'The Great White Wonder' in March 1969 was rock's first bootleg. The double album consisted of songs from a 1961 demo tape in Minnesota, but was best known for introducing the world to 'The Basement Tapes' – the songs Dylan recorded with **The Band** in the basement of their Woodstock house 'Big Pink' during the summer of 1967. The tape had been circulated by Dylan's British publisher during 1968, and provided hits for **Manfred Mann** ('The Mighty Quinn'), **Julie Driscoll & The Brian Auger Trinity** ('This Wheel's On Fire') and those frenetic underground heroes, **The Tremeloes** ('I Shall Be Released').

**D** The best rock 'n' roll album never released is **Bob Dylan & The Band** at the **Royal Albert Hall** in May 1966. According to **Paul Cable** in his 1978 book *Bob Dylan: His Unreleased Recordings*: "Legend has it that a young man, greatly impressed with the concert, simply wrote to CBS to ask them if they would send him a tape of it. According to the legend, they answered him most mysteriously – ie, they sent him a tape – and the rest is history."

**D** In 1975, to celebrate the 61st birthday of **Mike Porco** – one of the first people to book him in New York in the early '60s – Dylan turned up, along with **Patti Smith**, **Tom Waits**, **Ramblin' Jack Elliott**, **Joan Baez** and **Phil Ochs**, to help launch **The Rolling Thunder Review**.

**D** Despite boxed sets like **Biograph**, the ten album bootleg 'Ten Of Swords' and the recent **Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3**, there are still dozens of Dylan songs that have never surfaced. Titles include: 'Standing Around Shoeing A Horse', 'The Death Of Robert Johnson', 'Blackjack Blues', 'Ballad Of The Ox-Bow Incident', 'Goin' Back To Rome', 'You Can Change Your Name', 'Goodbye Holly', 'Field Mouse From Nebraska', 'What Can I Do For You Wigwam Right' and 'Crosswind Jamboree'.

**D** Apart from Dion, Dylan was the only pop singer featured on the sleeve of The Beatles' 'Sgt Pepper' album.

**D** Gasp! Dylan wore the same brown jacket on the sleeves of 'Blonde On Blonde', 'John Wesley Harding', 'Nashville Skyline' and 'Self Portrait'.

**D** Dylan approached the Everly Brothers in 1969 about recording his recently written 'Lay Lady Lay', but in his mumbled version of the song the chorus came out as "lay across my big breasts", which Phil Everly figured would scupper any airplay, so he graciously declined.

**D** The first song Dylan performed on his 1974 American tour with The Band (at that time, the most successful tour in rock history) was the obscure and unreleased 'Hero Blues'.

**D** While recording 'Idiot Wind' for the 'Blood On The Tracks' album, Dylan wrote an extra verse while he was on his way back to the studio after having a soda.

**D** It is 1966. *Playboy* are interviewing Bob Dylan. *Playboy*: "In recent years... jazz has lost much of its appeal to the younger generation. Do you agree?"

Dylan: "... I mean, what would some parent say to his kid if the kid came home with a glass eye, a Charlie Mingus record and a pocketful of feathers? He'd say 'Who are you following?' And the poor kid would have to stand there with water in his shoes, a bow tie on his ear and soot pouring out of his belly button and say 'Jazz, Father, I've been following jazz'... Then the kid's mother would tell her friends: 'Oh yes, our little Donald, he's part of the younger generation you know'."

**D** Dylan's least favourite song of 1972 was Neil Young's 'Heart Of Gold': "I used to hate it when it came on the radio... I'd say 'Shit, that's me. If it sounds like me, it should as well be me'."

**D** As 'Blind Boy Grunt', Dylan appeared on 'Broadside Ballads Volume 1', 'Broadside Reunion Volume 6' and as a special guest on the Richard Farina, Eric Von Schmidt and Ethan Singer album recorded in the basement of Dobell's Jazz Music Shop on London's Charing Cross Road in 1963.

**D** It is backstage at Madison Square Gardens in 1971. Dylan is preparing to appear at a benefit concert for Bangladesh. Organiser George Harrison asks Bob: "Do you think you could sing 'Blowin' In The Wind', the audience would just love it." Dylan replied: "You interested in 'Blowin' In The Wind'? Are you gonna sing 'I Want To Hold Your Hand'?"

**D** Songs from Dylan's 1962 debut album later covered included 'House Of The Rising Sun' (The Animals), 'Pretty Peggy-O' (Simon & Garfunkel) and 'In My Time Of Dyin' (Led Zeppelin).

**D** His fourth album, 'Another Side Of Bob Dylan', was recorded in one evening in 1964.

**D** Fairport Convention adapted the poem 'Jack O' Diamonds', which Dylan wrote for the sleeve of 'Another Side Of a Song on their 1967 debut album.

**D** Andy Warhol gave Dylan one of his expensive Elvis Presley prints; Dylan swapped it for a sofa.

**D** The figures pictured alongside Dylan on the sleeve of 'John Wesley Harding' are a neighbour of his at Woodstock, and two members of the troupe The Bauls Of Bengal. And what happens when you turn the sleeve upside down and look at the tree...?



PICTURE:REX FEATURES

"Phgnnpizz eonnspilh grnnddlet"

**D** The Woodstock Festival in 1969 was actually held at Bethel, about 40 miles from where Dylan and The Band had established themselves in 1966, but, out of deference to Dylan's influence, the organisers called it Woodstock.

**D** The Pete Hamill who wrote the original sleeve notes to 'Blood On The Tracks' is nothing to do with the former Van Der Graaf Generator singer, you'll be glad to hear.

**D** The first time Dylan's wife Sara sat down to watch her future husband on television she thought she was about to see Bobby Darin.

**D** Oddest Dylan show was at Toad's Place, New Haven in January 1990. A four-hour warm up for his European tour, Dylan cruised through Kris Kristofferson's 'Help Me Make It Through The Night' and Bruce Springsteen's 'Dancing In The Dark'.

**D** Dylan co-wrote The Byrds' 'Ballad Of Easy Rider', but refused to take any songwriting credit from Roger McGuinn.

**D** The main reason Dylan played the second Isle Of Wight festival in 1969 was "to visit the home of Alfred Lord Tennyson".

**D** It is December 1965, Dylan is questioned by the press: How would you define folk music? "As a constitutional replay of mass production." Do you think of yourself primarily as a singer or a poet? "Oh, I think of myself more as a song and dance man."

**D** Governor Jimmy Carter was Dylan's host in Atlanta in 1974: "I asked him if he wanted a drink, but he only wanted orange juice and would only eat the vegetables," Carter reported.

**D** "He didn't even invite me to sing at the inauguration. He had Charlie Daniels to sing. I never heard him quote any Charlie Daniels song." Dylan after being spurned by President Carter in 1977.

**D** Dylan has never been featured on the cover of *Time* magazine or had a Number One hit in either Britain or the USA.

**D** 'Blonde On Blonde' in 1966 was rock's first double album.

**D** Plans for a film to be made of Dylan's song 'Lily, Rosemary & The Jack Of Hearts' never materialised, neither did a film where Allen Ginsberg played Dylan's mother.

**D** Elston Gunn, Tedham Porterhouse, Robert Milkwood Thomas and Lucky Wilbury are some Dylan pseudonyms. He was christened 'Twerp' by the bitter sister of a former girlfriend.

**D** Asked by a reporter from the *Jerusalem Post* on his first visit to the Holy Land: Have you written any songs about Israel? Dylan replied "No, but I've written one about Yugoslavia."

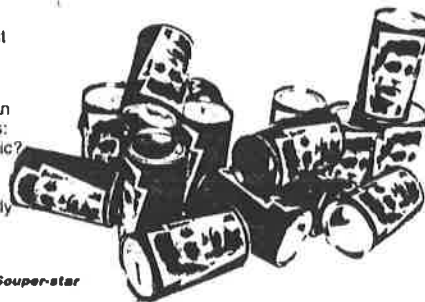
**D** 'Planet Waves' was originally titled 'Ceremonies Of The Horsemen'.

**D** Dylan's debut album cost CBS \$402 to produce.

**D** Dylan's song 'The Mighty Quinn' was inspired by a 1960 Anthony Quinn film about eskimos called *The Savage Innocents*. The joint Sam Shepard/Dylan composition 'Brownsville Girl' was inspired by a 1950 Gregory Peck film *The Gunfighter*. Dylanologist John Bauldie has found eight lines from the Humphrey Bogart films *The Maltese Falcon*, *Key Largo* and *The Big Sleep* turning up on Dylan's 'Empire Burlesque' album.

**D** Bob Dylan is 50.

**D** Patrick Humphries isn't, yet. But he did compile this list and he is also the co-author of *Oh No! Not Another Bob Dylan Book* (Square 1, £14.95).



Super-star

NME's considered verdict:  
**EIGHT DYLAN LPS**



**BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME (1965)**

DYLAN PLUGS in and the lights come on. Listen to the acoustic version of 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' on 'Bootlegs' to hear how much Dylan's demonic delivery screamed out for an electric backing. Raw, uncompromising stuff and the four extended tracks on Side Two binned forever the notion of the three-minute pop ditty.



**BLONDE ON BLONDE (1966)**

... UNTIL THIS. Pop's first double album is a white water ride through every neglected backwater of American popular music. Blues, mariachi calypso, carnival, Country and ragtime soundtrack Dylan's over-shifting raft of relationships (good, bad and indifferent) with women.



**DESIRE (1975)**

YOU WON'T believe this but... raggle taggle, Gipsy Kings, Mexican landscapes, New York shoot-outs, Tarot cards, myths and mystery. Dylan's strangest record, a wondrous, winding flow through a fairy tale world of Spanish romance and spaghetti western violence. Unlike any other.



**OH MERCY (1989)**

EMERGING FROM a whole decade blinded in a maze, dragged down by an undertow of corporate 'we know best' productions, Dylan relocates to a house in New Orleans and, with ambient rock wunderkid Daniel Lanois, fashions a soundscape that finally reflects the dreamlike quality of his best lyrics.

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Review Essay  
Bob Dylan Finds Mercy

James R. McDonald



HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED  
(1965)

"JUST DON'T play any of that BB King shit" was Dylan's only edict to guitar tyro Mike Bloomfield. Thus arrived 'Like A Rolling Stone', the benchmark cut of this extraordinary album, first spurt of the creative volcano that was '60s rock (step forward The Doors, Byrds, Jefferson Airplane - name your own). The greatest rock 'n' roll record of all time.



BLOOD ON THE TRACKS  
(1974)

AS NEAR to an 'honest' record as Dylan the chameleon could ever muster. Fuelled by a creative hiatus and a broken marriage, Dylan finds himself naked and alone. Passionate, confused, angry and almost unbearably intense. Not for the squeamish.



STREET LEGAL (1978)

'JOURNEY THROUGH Dark Heat' indeed. Approaching - but not yet in - his Christian phase, Dylan somehow manages to produce this epic of Biblical imagery and soaring Gospel swell. Unrated at the time, it blossoms with age and increasingly came to look like the last great Dylan LP, until...



BIOGRAPH (1985)  
BOOTLEG SERIES VOLS 1-3  
(1991)

TWO BRILLIANT attempts to put Dylan's gallon into the quart pot. The former is 'greatest hits', the latter is 'greatest bits'. The latter can't fail to entrance Dylan fans, the former can't fail to make Dylan fans of all but the clothed and lame-brained.

Since he releases an album every few years which critics usually love and hail as his return, Bob Dylan, is often described as a chameleon in the rock industry. The idea of a "comeback album" was first used with the 1975 "Blood On The Tracks" album, then in 1983 with "Infidels," in 1985 with "Empire Burlesque," and most recently in 1989 with Dylan's recent "Oh Mercy," his first album released on a new recording contract (CBS Records, OC 45281, 1989).

Following upon the release of three relatively weak and slow-selling albums—"Knocked Out Loaded," "Down in the Groove," and "Dylan & The Dead"—all released between 1986-89, such a description might seem relevant, except for one fact: Dylan has released *several* critically acclaimed albums in each decade since his quick rise in the music world in 1962. Notorious for protecting his privacy, Dylan seems to respond to his critics in a number of ways on "Oh Mercy," stating on the album's final track, "Shooting Star": "Guess it's too late to say to you/The things you needed me to say."

While the comeback status incumbent upon Dylan due to this album may be debated in other avenues, one thing is certain: with the release of "Oh Mercy," Dylan, together with producer Daniel Lanois, has crafted an album rich in musical texture, laden with religious allusion, dark in its personal and social vision, and intense in a fashion both relaxed and vibrant.

And it contains a few surprises as well. Name another Dylan album, for instance, which uses a dobro on several tracks. Name another Dylan album which also uses mercy keys. Name another Dylan album which uses cricket sounds to begin a track ("Man in the Long Black Coat"). It can't be done, since these are all Dylan firsts.

The credit for these firsts, as Dylan has admitted, must go to producer Lanois, who by now is at the forefront of rock producers, having produced U2's "The Unforgettable Fire" and "The Joshua Tree," Peter Gabriel's "So," Robbie Robertson's solo album "Robbie Robertson," and the Neville Brothers' "Yellow Moon."

Dylan granted Lanois full control of "Oh Mercy's" musical texture, while Lanois himself pushed Dylan to expand the lyrical texture. "It was thrilling to run into Daniel," Dylan said, "because he's a competent musician and he knows how to record with modern facilities. For me, that was lacking in the past" (Gundersen, "Dylan on 'Mercy' for the record"). Dylan said he first thought of asking Lanois to work with him after hearing the Neville Brothers' covers of Dylan's "With God On Our Side," sung by Aaron Neville in an almost acappella style, and "Ballad of Hollis Brown" ("Yellow Moon," A&M Records SP 5240, 1989). Lanois, Dylan said, "had an understanding of what my music was all about" (Gundersen, "Dylan on 'Mercy'").

That understanding is evident in the ten songs on "Oh Mercy." With musicians including Lanois himself on nine of the ten tracks, and several members of the Neville Brothers' band, including guitarist Brian Stoltz, bassist Tony Hall, drummer Willie Green, and percussionist Cyril Neville, the music pushes Dylan's voice to the forefront of the album. Gone are the sometimes obtrusive female backup singers Dylan has used several times this decade.

Dylan's voice, occasionally careless, and sometimes dispassionate on recent releases, is full-throated, brooding and certainly the soul of this album. Lanois, Dylan said, "managed to get my stage voice, something other people working with me never were quite able to achieve" (Gundersen, "Dylan on 'Mercy'").

Although there are most likely no certifiable "hits" on the album, the intent seems to have been to produce an exceptional product, rather than an uneven work laced with one or two gems. Nevertheless, several songs seem destined to be added to the lengthy list of Dylan masterpieces. Included must be "Political World," "Everything Is Broken," and "Man In The Long Black Coat."

The tone for the album is set by the opening track, "Political World," a hard-rocking catalog of Dylan's sense of the decade: bleak, impersonal, full of grim desperation. "We live in a political world/Under the microscope/You can travel anywhere, even hang yourself there/You always got more than enough rope."

The political aspect of the album, long considered a Dylan trademark, is further evidenced on the songs "Everything Is Broken," a chronicle of spiritual and psychic dislocation, and "Disease of Conceit," a sermon-like account of the evil Dylan sees in the modern world.

Political too, but approaching the subject from a spiritual perspective, are "Ring Them Bells," and the hauntingly beautiful "Man In The Long Black Coat." With Dylan playing piano, accompanied by Lanois on guitar and Malcolm Burn on keyboards, the gospel inspired "Ring Them Bells" is a plea for mercy: "Ring them bells/For the blind and the dead/Ring them bells/For all of us who are left/Ring them bells/For the chosen few/Who will judge the many/When the game is through."

The highpoint of the album is certainly "Man In The Long Black Coat." A slow narrative tortuously whispered in staccato fashion to the rhythm of an American Indian beat, the song tells the story of a woman who leaves a man for a dark stranger—Satan, perhaps, but more likely

death. The narrative is further complemented by a series of reflections on conscience, and religious and emotional commitment. Responding to the preacher's sermon which says, "Every man's conscience is vile and depraved/You cannot depend on it to be your guide," Dylan responds: "There are no mistakes in life, some people say/And it's true sometimes, you could see it that way/People don't live or die, people just float."

The Indian beat is also used in "Where Teardrops Fall," on the surface a song about meeting a former lover in another place, but perhaps an eulogy to Dylan's long-time friend and collaborator, guitarist Jesse Ed Davis, a victim of drug overdose in 1989.

Dylan continues his restless examination with love and self on the remaining tracks. On "Most Of The Time," Dylan examines, in his usual self-taunting manner, his mood after a relationship breakup, and on "What Good Am I," questions his worth as a lover through a series of self-probing questions.

The album's final two songs, "What Was It You Wanted" and "Shooting Star," are both examples of Dylan's vague response to either former lovers, friends, or perhaps critics, each song suggesting his refusal to succumb to criticism of someone's vision of what he should be or do: "What was it you wanted/tell me again, I forgot" ("What Was It You Wanted"); "Seen a shooting star tonight/And I thought of you/If I was still the same/If I ever became/What you wanted me to be" ("Shooting Star").

In addition to the stripped-down sparseness of the album, the most gratifying quality about this album is its summation of so many aspects of Dylan's career. No criticism is likely, for instance, of his continual use of religious themes here, even though Dylan was much maligned for his three so-called "born-again Christian" albums of the late 70s. Religious references abound on this album: St. Catherine, St. Peter, the sermon on the mount, and the sacred cow. Close examination of his work, however, evidences such references back to the 1968 "John Wesley Harding" release.

More importantly, though, is Dylan's further exploration of social issues from a penetrating personal perspective. While his world vision remains sometimes tormented, bleak and forlorn, this album suggests that Dylan finds there is mercy possible in the world. As Dylan remarked in a recent interview, "I feel like I've gotten a lot more tolerant of everything" (Gundersen, "He's still painting his masterpiece").

### THE WIT AND WISDOM OF

## BOB

## DYLAN

"How many protest singers are there?"  
"How many? One hundred and thirty six"

"I'm just trying to answer your questions as good as you can ask them"

"I wanted to be a movie usher. It's been my lifelong ambition to be a movie usher, and I have failed, as far as I am concerned"

"What are your songs about?"  
"Oh, some are about eleven minutes, some are about five or six"

"My real message? Keep a good head, and always carry a lightbulb"

"I'm just as good a singer as Caruso...and I can hold my breath three times as long if I want to"

"I would not want to be Bach. Mozart. Tolstoy. Joe

Hill. Gertrude Stein or James Dean/they are all dead. The Great books've been written. The Great sayings have all been said"

"Forget about those Hollywood people telling you what to do - they're all gonna get killed by



the Indians - see you in your dreams"

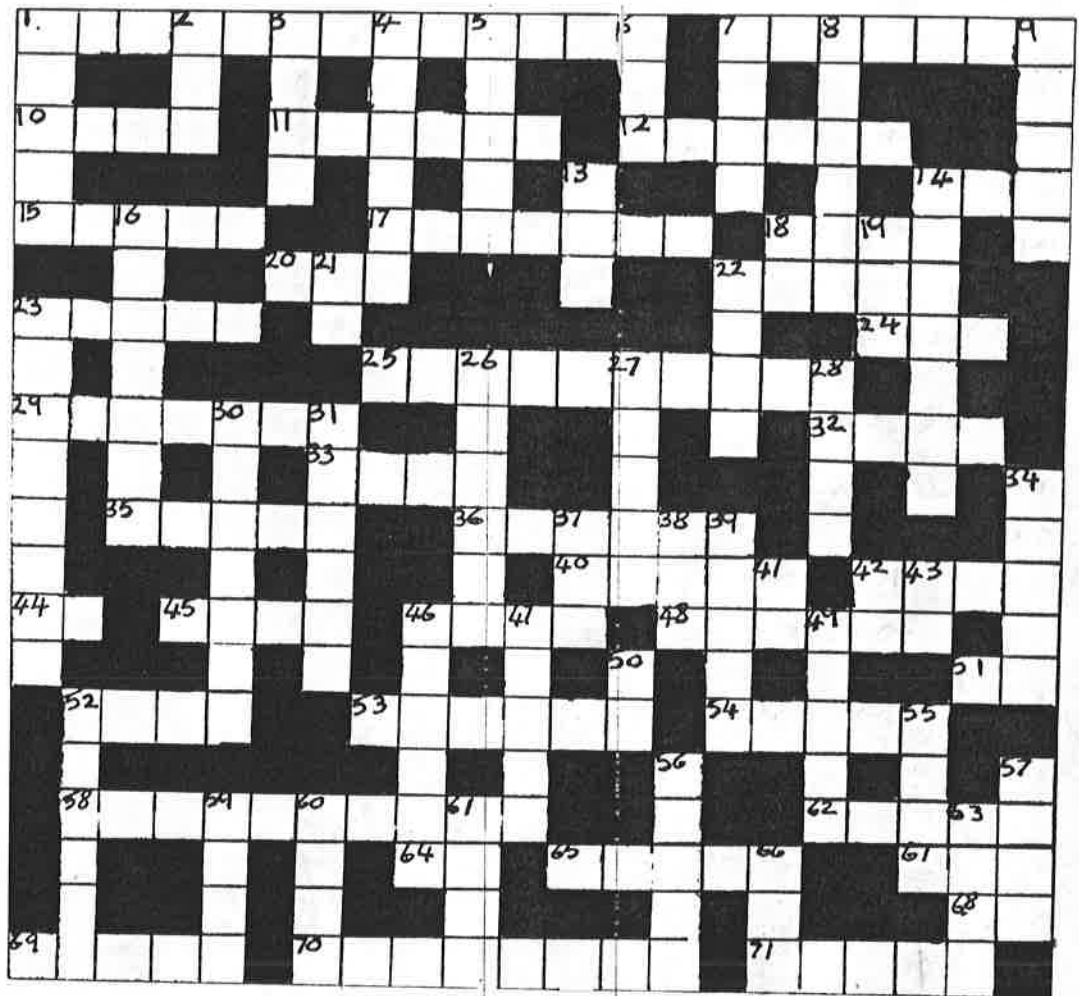
"Do you think of yourself primarily as a singer or a poet?"

"Oh, I think of myself as a song and dance man"

"What made you decide to go the rock'n'roll route?"

"Carelessness! I lost my one true love. I started drinking. The first thing I know, I'm in a card game. Then I'm in a crap game. I wake up in a pool hall. Then this bix Mexican lady drags me off the table, takes me to Philadelphia. She leaves me alone in her house, and it burns down. I wind up in Phoenix. I get a job as a Chinaman. I start working in a dime store, and move in with a thirteen year old girl. Then this bix Mexican lady comes in...The first guy that picked me up asked if I wanted to be a star. What could I say?"

Crossword by Marie Crawford



ACROSS

- 1 Subterranean Blues? (8,5)  
 7 A king-sized town in June (7)  
 10 Ensemble (4)  
 11 Darkness On The Edge Of Town for him (6)  
 12 I Want You (6)  
 14 A Progressive Artist (3)  
 15 Many Americans think he lives, in their twisted way (5)  
 17 Don't follow (these) leaders (7)  
 18 Butterfly of the night (loose connection) (4)  
 20 &  
 60 Down Short deck (3,4)  
 22 Bitter sweet lady (5)  
 23 He was a knockout on the QE2 (5)  
 24 The late, great Thomas Edison's Band (1,1,1)  
 25 Neither T.S. Eliot nor Ezra Pound having a row after Dylan's Wasteland. (10)  
 29 Mark's gone for a pee! (7)  
 32 They're full of surprise (4)  
 33 Why the poor man is so alone (4)  
 35 Pennies from heaven? (5)  
 36 Behind your back they hiss (6)  
 40 Step into it (and you'll have it of course) (5)  
 42 God Knows it makes you cry (4)  
 44 Initially OK, but degenerates into garbage (2)  
 45 Don't look this way (4)  
 46 Going the same way as Cisco - and Sonny & Leadbelly too (4)  
 48 Opposite of 35 Across (6)  
 51 One For Peter Pan (INIT) (1,1,1)  
 52 Was it from Solid Rock? (4)  
 53 Has a flame proof floor (6)  
 54 Too blind to see it (5)  
 58 Inn for the disciple (5,5)  
 62 A simple Wilbury (5)  
 64 Worked out at Muscle Shoals (INIT) (1,1,1)  
 65 Empty headed (5)  
 67 Mrs Homer (3)  
 68 Rotten to the core? (INIT) (1,1,1)  
 69 This one is not an express (5)  
 70 Rapping (MC Hammering)? (8)  
 71 And I don't really care what happens next (5)

DOWN

- 1 A Good Read  
 2 Could be the finishing, or maybe the final  
 3 Maybe he'll hear from her again  
 4 Answer please  
 5 Blind Boy Grunt  
 6 Unhappy spouse  
 7 Fog  
 8 He brought you through it in Las Vegas  
 9 A deadly amount  
 13 Morning or Pony  
 14 It won't do you any good come the Hard Rain  
 16 The watchman's not the only one seeing things  
 18 It's all right for Raney  
 19 Wear it around your neck and put on a panama  
 21 A New LP? (INIT) ha  
 22 Avoiding these streets for a long time  
 23 Jack Nicholson  
 26 Hey you! A hunter's help means I gotta go  
 27 Dylan is R.A.Z.'s ego, kind of  
 28 Is this all your debutante knows about you?  
 30 He died a death, here of all places  
 31 You don't need a weatherman  
 34 Like these drums/An' Chinese gongs  
 37 Criticize  
 38 Retired businessman  
 39 Tangle(D) Up in Blue  
 41 Early in the morning  
 42 I and I  
 43 Was he paranoid?  
 46 Visions  
 47 Global Ripples  
 49 Betrayed by a kiss at this time  
 50 Not off  
 52 You may not see me tomorrow  
 55 I am ready to go anywhere  
 56 I am older than that now  
 57 You ain't goin' nowhere  
 59 Darkness falling early  
 60 See 20 Across  
 61 Robbie blew him away in The Last Waltz  
 63 You'll break one by verse two of the Wilbury  
 66 Folk magazine out on the streets Twist

