

from *Inside A Prune*

Hello and a warm welcome to our last issue of 2005. We are putting this issue together amidst a feast of Dylan material that is reaching staggering proportions. It is impossible to turn anywhere at the moment without running into the man so many of us have spent so much of our lives searching for recordings of and information about.

To be honest, it is all a bit overwhelming. Just think, recent official releases include:

Bob Dylan: Live at The Gaslight 1962

The Bootleg Series Vol. 7

No Direction Home broadcast and DVD

The Live at Carnegie Hall bonus disc

The Bob Dylan Scrapbook 1956-1966

Chronicles in paperback

The BBC unearthing a good quality 'Ballad of the Gliding Swan'

That's without mentioning the bootleg release of the *Dont Look Back* outtakes. Then there has been the saturation coverage in newspapers and magazines and still Dylan books continue to come out and there are/have been the photographic exhibitions in Birmingham and Camden.

Can you take any more? Much as I am enjoying it all, and without meaning to sound ungrateful, I do have some misgivings. The first I voiced last time around, the concentration on the pre-1967 story, but also – isn't it all a bit easy? Finding rare Dylan is supposed to be hard! More seriously, on some days when faced with paper after paper full of Bob there is a harbinger of that dread day when he is no more. I am sorry to bring that up but it was a strong, creepy feeling I had some mornings, and I was wondering if I was alone in this or if any of you felt the same.

Still, let's all enjoy it for what it is, overwhelming though the amount of material may be. (So much so that the *Blonde on Blonde* outtakes on *Bootleg Series 7* were hardly mentioned recently when I was with three Bobcat friends – there was so much else to discuss.)

On top of everything, for me, is the unbelievably brilliant concert footage in *No Direction Home*; and not just the electric, oh the beauty of 'Visions of Johanna' and 'Mr. Tambourine Man' filmed live in '66 (would it be over the top to suggest that the 'to' in the latter is alone worth the entire output of many a lesser artist.

And then there is the 'Judas' moment and the 'Like a Rolling Stone' from Newcastle all through the film, and complete as one of the DVD special features; it's almost enough to make you forget that the special features include the 1966 Liverpool 'One Too Many Mornings' too...all this and so much more.

And let us not forget that He, that is Him, Himself arrives on these shores soon. The never ending Bob on his Never Ending Tour.

Meanwhile here at *Judas!* central we had a magazine all planned to come out about ten days ago but then we thought we really had to acknowledge the Scorsese film and soundtrack. Many thanks to Nick Hawthorne for writing his review of the latter in incredibly short time, and to Stephen Scobie and Peter Stone Brown for breaking all records and sending in a review of the film the very day after its two-night TV stint ended (not that it will ever 'end' on our playbacks.)

Thanks to all our other contributors too, of course. To Jim LaClair for answering the 1975 memory request so perfectly; to Mark Richardson for his offbeat memories from over 40 years ago; to Pádraig for producing an article that somehow manages to do justice to its subject (high praise indeed); to John Hume for the cover and to Robert Forryan for giving me a big ticking off for a small aside in my last article! I am delighted to have got you writing again and happily share your views on Mr. Seeger that will I guess be particularly useful to our, I am pleased to report, growing percentage of younger readers. (As Stephen Scobie once pondered, how do they absorb Dylan's history now, far less that of all those associated with him?)

If I may be allowed a small defence, had I reported or Mr Gray said that 'Seeger had previously had an axe at the event and wished that he had it in his hands to chop the microphone' it would not have made a huge difference to the point of the side-story. Incidentally, as you will by now know he reiterates his wish to have cut the cable in *No Direction Home*, a film in which he comes across as intensely irritating (in his younger guise especially) by the way, at least to this writer. He has a similar kind of effect on me when I see or hear him as Bono does, notwithstanding all the admirable acts you detail and despite another fine story described in *The Rose and The Briar*. Maybe I just don't like the people Dylan likes. I hope we are still friends though - after all we're off to see Nuneaton Borough with John Stokes soon. (Now that will baffle our overseas readers, surely?)

Thanks also to Guido Bieri and John Gibbens for excellent articles which came unsolicited one day – an editor's dream!

My own article was one of those that have been moved to a later issue as the need to cover some of the ongoing events seemed paramount. I include a short bridging piece to try and keep it in your minds.

Looking to the future, I fully expect reviews and reactions to all the ongoing to be present in the next issue too, so at the moment it looks like our celebration of *Desire's* 30 year 'birthday' will be in number 17, please contribute!

For now, enjoy the banquet, the shows and just keep believing.

Andrew Muir

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Broadswords and Sweet Liberty

Dylan's performances of 'The Roving Blade'

by Pádraig Hanratty

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Never-Ending Tour (NET) has been Dylan's choices of cover songs over the years. Although the actual performances of the songs have ranged from the sublime to the perfunctory to the ridiculous, the songs themselves shed some light on the inner workings of Dylan's performance art.

Sometimes the songs tell us where Dylan has come from. Other times, they remind us who his contemporaries are. They can also indicate Dylan's current concerns. And, of course, sometimes they tell us nothing more than that Dylan likes this song and thought it would be a blast to try and perform it live.

Not all his performances of cover versions work. (Needless to say, not all his performances of original material work either.) However, when they do work, they can serve as startling reminders of why people spend so much time following and analysing Dylan's constant touring.

One cover version that has always worked is 'The Roving Blade'. The song has been performed three times (so far) on the NET: Reims, 1992; Belfast, 1998; and Reno, 2000. Here are the song's lyrics (though it should come as no surprise that Dylan hasn't always stuck to the admittedly fluid text):

*In Newry town where I was bred and
born.
In Stephen's Green now I lie in scorn.
I served my time there to the saddlers'
trade
And I always was a roving blade.*

*At seventeen I took a wife,
And I loved her dearer than I loved my
life.
And for to keep her both fine and gay
I went a-robbin' on the king's highway.*

*I never robbed any poor man yet,
Nor tradesman ever have I caused to
fret.
But I robbed lords and their ladies at
night
And carry all home to my heart's
delight.*

*I robbed Lord Golding, I do declare,
And Lady Mansel in Grosvenor Square.
I shut the shutter and bade them good
night
And home I went then to my heart's
delight.*

*To Covent Garden I took my way
With my dear wife for to see the play.
Lord Fielding's men did me pursue
And taken was I by the cursed crew.*

*My father cried, 'My darling son.'
My wife she cried, 'I am undone.'
My mother tore her white locks and cried
That in the cradle I should have died.*

*When I am dead and in my grave
A flashy funeral pray let me have.
Six highwaymen for to carry me.
Give them broadswords and sweet
liberty.*

*Six pretty fair maids to bear my pall.
Give them grey ribbons and green
garlands all.
When I'm dead they will speak the
truth,
He was a wild and a wicked youth.*

*In Newry town where I was bred and
born.
In Stephen's Green now I lie in scorn.
I served my time there to the saddlers'
trade/
And I always was a roving blade.*

Just to clarify, a 'roving blade' is not a razor that has grown legs and started wandering the country.¹ The term 'blade' was once used to refer to a dashing young man who usually had a sharp wit and adventurous nature. It originates from a time when such men carried swords.

A blade is different from that other folk-song character, the rake. A rake is lucky enough to lead an immoral, debauched life. However, the term 'blade' doesn't carry such licentious connotations.

The Lord Fielding referred to is Henry Fielding, a judge who published a pamphlet in 1751 called 'An Inquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers'. The ideas in this pamphlet eventually led to the creation of the first professional police force, the Bow Street Runners in London. He was also a novelist and playwright; his most famous work was *Tom Jones* (published in 1749). Coincidentally, his most successful play was *The Tragedy of Tom Thumb*.

Each of Dylan's performances of 'The Roving Blade' is unique, and gripping in

its own right. Each time he sings the song, he seems to draw on different aspects of its story.

The 1992 performance from Reims is truly haunting, scary even. (It can be heard on the essential bootleg *Golden Vanity*.) Dylan sings the song alone with his acoustic guitar. His slow deliberate high-pitched delivery brings the song's tragic elements to the fore.

The image of a once-dashing blade now lying in scorn probably struck a chord with Dylan at this time. His own relationship with the audience seemed to be ebbing again. And his muse had apparently left him again as well. His personal life also was in turmoil, with Carolyn Dennis filing for divorce on 7 August, 1990. This adds poignancy to the way he sings 'my dear wife'.

Unable to summon up new lyrics, Dylan instead imagines a posthumous reappraisal of his old lyrics. In time, reacquainting himself with these songs would actually enable Dylan to tap into the spring of creativity that inspired his earlier songwriting successes.

The most disturbing aspect of the song is the way Dylan imagines the 'flashy funeral'. As in his performances of 'Lucky Old Sun', he seems to be longing for the release that death will bring. Although this is a feature of countless folk songs, Dylan's fondness for such sentiments perhaps gives an indication of his state of mind at the time.

The same concert featured performances of 'Everything Is Broken' and 'Desolation Row'. Interestingly, the show opened with Paul Simon's 'Hazy Shade of

Winter'. In the 1960s, Simon and Garfunkel performed chirpy covers of a number of old folk songs, including 'Pretty Peggy-O', 'Roving Gambler' and 'Barbriallen' (a variant of 'Barbara Allen'). Dylan has, of course, covered these songs during the NET.

The mood is much more buoyant the next time Dylan performs the song, in Belfast in 1998. This performance is one of those relatively rare occasions when Dylan explicitly acknowledges his venue:

I'm going to sing a song I haven't sung for a long time. I learned it a long time ago. Somebody just told me that the song came from around here so I'm going to try my best to see if I can remember how to play it.

The overall mood of the song is jauntier, with Dylan clearly revelling in rediscovering the song. His singing is more ragged than at Reims, and he's unable to sustain (or even hit) the high notes any more. However, the vocal is committed, living the narrative of the song in every verse. Indeed, the singing grows in confidence as the song progresses, with the band providing spirited accompaniment.

The Belfast concert opened with the first performance of 'Gotta Serve Somebody' since 1991 and also featured a rare performance of 'This Wheel's on Fire'. The concert was a double-bill with Van Morrison. Perhaps it was Morrison who pointed out to Dylan the local significance of the song.

When Dylan sings the song at the late show in Reno on St Patrick's Day, 2000, the mood is much more subdued. His voice is

full of wistful tenderness, as if he is looking back on his own raucous youth and not regretting one single action. The band provides stately accompaniment for what becomes one of Dylan's best vocal performances of the year, even though he mangles the word order of some of the sentences.

This version has its own pathos. Dylan's mother died less than two months before this performance, which adds poignancy to the line about the mother's 'white locks'.

He is clearly proud of his performance, given his enthusiastic 'Thank you' to the audience at the end of the song. This time, the song is being sung not because of the venue, but because of the date:

*Thank you! One of my Irish songs for
St. Patrick's Day.*

The Reno concert opened with 'Roving Gambler', which could be considered a companion piece to 'Roving Blade'. The concert ends with another cover version, a live disembowelling of 'Not Fade Away'.

As already noted, 'The Roving Blade' is a fluid text (as are many folk songs). Among the song's different titles are 'I Am a Roving Blade', 'Newry Town', 'The Newry Highwayman' and 'The Wild and Wicked Youth'.

Even the geography of the song is unfixed: although set in Ireland, it has the narrator suddenly robbing Lord Golding in Grosvenor Square and going to Covent Garden in London to see the play. One version of the song, 'Newlyn Town', is actually set in England; this version was recorded by Martin Carthy in 1966.

The song is connected to many other folk songs. One example is 'The Unfortunate Rake'. Another, 'Johnny Is a Roving Blade', was recorded by the Clancy Brothers.

'The Rake and Rambling Boy' tells a similar story, and ends with the following verse that brings to mind 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door' and 'Joey':

*Now when I die, don't bury me at all.
Just place me away in alcohol.
My forty-four lay by my feet.
Please tell them I am just asleep.*

Another very close relation is 'The Rich and Rambling Boy', which Joan Baez covered on her debut album. Its final lines also turn up in 'Railroad Boy', which Dylan performed with Baez in 1976:

*Oh when I die, don't bury me at all,
Place my bones in alcohol.
And at my feet, place a snow white dove
To tell the world I died of love.*

Another ballad, 'The Jolly Blade', starts as follows:

*In Dublin city where I was born,
On Stephen's Green must die in scorn.
'Tis there I learnt the baking trade,
Where I was counted a rolling blade.*

The English folk song 'The White Cockade' opens with the following lines:

*'Tis true, my love's enlisted
And he wears a white cockade.
He is a handsome young lad,
Likewise a roving blade.*

And in 'Dublin Jack of all Trades', we get the following:

*I am a roving sporting blade,
They call me Jack of all Trades.*

In Scotland, a similar character turns up in 'The Calton Weaver':

*I'm a weaver, a Calton weaver,
I'm a rash and a roving blade;
I've got siller in my pouches.
I gang and follow the roving trade.*

'Botany Bay' – a song with links to 'Jim Jones', which Dylan sang on *Good as I Been to You* – has the following verse:

*I was brought up in London town,
A place I knew full well;
Brought up by honest parents,
The truth to you I'll tell.
Brought up by honest parents
Who loved me tenderly,
Till I became a roving blade
To prove my destiny*

In America, 'Botany Bay' turned up as 'The Boston Burglar'. One verse in this song would much later be echoed in Dylan's own 'Cold Irons Bound':

*There goes the Boston Burglar,
In cold chains he is bound.
For the breaking to the Union Bank
He is sent to Charlestown.*

'The Roving Blade' uses the common device of setting out arrangements for the narrator's funeral. Similar lines are used in 'St James Infirmary', an old folk song recorded by Blind Willie McTell on his last album. Dylan performed 'St James Infirmary' in January 1960 during his concert at the Ten O'clock Scholar in Minneapolis. Many years later, he would use the song as the basis for one of his greatest songs, 'Blind Willie McTell'.²

In McTell's version, a dying crapshooter imagines his funeral procession:

*Eight crapshooters to be my pall
bearers,
Let 'em be veiled down in black.
I want nine men going to the grave
yard, bubba,
And eight men comin' back.*

The lines about one less person coming back from the graveyard echo 'Stackalee', another old folk song Dylan sang on *World Gone Wrong*. As it happens, it looks like a lot of people will be going to the crapshooter's funeral because he isn't satisfied with just six 'pretty fair maids':

*He wanted 22 women outta the
Hampton Hotel,
26 off-a South Bell,
29 women outta North Atlanta,
Know little Jesse didn't pass out so
swell.*

Dylan's performances of 'The Roving Blade' show that it has a special place in his heart. The simplest reason for this would be that the song, like many of the old folk songs he covered during the NET, reminds him of his early days as a performer, his wild and (not so) wicked youth. Perhaps he learnt the song from Martin Carthy during his trip to England in late 1962. Or perhaps he learnt it from the Clancy Brothers in the White Horse Tavern in New York.

Of course, there's more than mere wistful nostalgia for the salad days going on. Folk music plays a central role in Dylan's understanding of himself as a songwriter and as a performer:

Folk music is where it all starts and in many ways ends. If you don't have that foundation, or if you're not knowledgeable about it and you don't know how to control that, and you don't feel historically tied to it, then what you're doing is not going to be as strong as it could be. Of course, it helps to have been born in a certain era because it would've been closer to you, or it helps to be a part of the culture when it was happening.³

Back in 1966, Dylan famously contrasted what he saw as the commercial folk business with the authentic folk ballads:

And folk music is a word I can't use. Folk music is a bunch of fat people. I have to think of all this as traditional music. Traditional music is based on hexagrams. It comes about from legends, Bibles, plagues, and it revolves around vegetables and death. There's nobody that's going to kill traditional music. All these songs about roses growing out of people's brains and lovers who are really geese and swans that turn into angels – they're not going to die.⁴

Indeed, Dylan's fondness for folk (or traditional) songs is so strong that part of him would probably be happy to perform nothing but those. That was certainly his initial plan for the 1995 MTV Unplugged concert:

I wasn't quite sure how to do it and what material to use. I would have liked to do old folk songs with acoustic instruments, but there was a lot of input from other sources as to what would be right for the MTV audience. The record

company said, 'You can't do that, it's too obscure.' At one time, I would have argued, but there's no point. OK, so what's not obscure? They said 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door.'⁵

In a way, of course, some of Dylan's own songs have become old folk songs:

I wrote them because that's what I was in the middle of. It swept me up. I felt 'Blowin' in the Wind'. When Joan and I sing it, it's like an old folk song to me. It never occurs to me that I'm the person who wrote that.⁶

During an interview with Robert Hilburn in 2004, Dylan discussed his approach to songwriting. In one of his most revealing comments ever, he described the process by which he sometimes takes an old folk song and converts it into something new:

What happens is, I'll take a song I know and simply start playing it in my head. That's the way I meditate. A lot of people will look at a crack on the wall and meditate, or count sheep or angels or money or something, and it's a proven fact that it'll help them relax. I don't meditate on any of that stuff. I meditate on a song... I'll be playing Bob Nolan's 'Tumbling Tumbleweeds', for instance, in my head constantly – while I'm driving a car or talking to a person or sitting around or whatever. People will think they are talking to me and I'm talking back, but I'm not. I'm listening to the song in my head. At a certain point, some of the words will change and I'll start writing a song.⁷

Although 'The Roving Blade' doesn't have any vegetables or geese, it does contain a lot of themes that would appeal to Dylan.

On 'Highway 61 Revisited', Abraham was ordered by God to 'kill me a son'. In 'The Roving Blade', the mother declared that 'in the cradle I should have died'. In the 1992 performance, this verse takes on extra resonance because it brings to mind Dylan's jaw-dropping speech at the 1991 Grammy awards:

*Well, my daddy, he didn't leave me much, you know he was a very simple man, but what he did tell me was this, he did say, son, he said... you know it's possible to become so defiled in this world that your own father and mother will abandon you and if that happens, God will always believe in your ability to mend your ways.*⁸

A variation on the theme of loss of parents was explored in 'Nobody's Child', a song covered by The Traveling Wilburys. On that performance, Dylan sang the following lines in the character of an orphan:

*No mammy's kisses, no daddy's smile,
Nobody loves me, I'm nobody's child.*

However, sometimes the rambler willingly leaves home, as in 'I Was Young When I Left Home', one of Dylan's early performances:

*I was young when I left home,
And I've been all rambling around,
And I never wrote a letter to my home,
To my home,*

*Lord, Lord, Lord,
And I've never wrote a letter to my
home.*

Dylan's 'Long Time Gone' also explores how roving the highways leads to a separation from family:

*My parents raised me tenderly,
I was their only son.
My mind got mixed with ramblin'
When I was all so young,
And I left my home the first time
When I was twelve and one.
I'm a long time a-comin', Maw,
An' I'll be a long time gone.*

Like the roving blade, this rambler leaves instructions for his funeral:

*So you can have your beauty,
It's skin deep and it only lies.
And you can have your youth,
It'll rot before your eyes.
Just give me my gravestone
With it clearly carved upon:
'T's a long time a-comin'
An' I'll be a long time gone.'*

On Dylan's first album, he seemed to be romanticising death, trying to sing in the voice of an old blues singer wailing his last song. However, he was aware that it was all an act, as he noted on the liner notes of his second album:

I can sing it sometimes, but I ain't that good yet. I don't carry myself yet the way that Big Joe Williams, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Lightnin' Hopkins have carried themselves. I hope to be able to someday, but they're older people. I sometimes am able to do

*it, but it happens, when it happens,
unconsciously.*

From the 1980s, though, death seems to become a much less romantic reality in Dylan's performances. His stark performances of songs such as 'Rank Strangers to Me', 'Lucky Old Sun' and 'Lone Pilgrim' reveal a performer staring his mortality in the face. This all culminated in the graveyard-bound ruminations of *Time Out of Mind*.

However, 'The Roving Blade' looks beyond death to posthumous reputation. This form of earthly immortality was summed up by Dylan in 'Brownsville Girl':

*I don't have any regrets, they can talk
about me plenty when I'm gone.*

As the title suggests, 'The Roving Blade' is also concerned with rambling and walking and hitting the road. This has been a recurring theme in Dylan's work from 'Song to Woody' to 'Sugar Baby'. The NET is another manifestation of restless touring. And even though it never toured, the supergroup Dylan joined in 1988 was called 'The Traveling Wilburys'.

This particular rambling highwayman broke the law because of his love for his 'heart's delight'. Dylan sang of a similar situation in 'Tight Connection to My Heart':

*She said, 'Be easy, baby,
There ain't nothin' worth stealin' in
here.'*

It's not the first time that thieving has been seen as a sign of good character:

*No, I do not feel that good
When I see the heartbreak you embrace.
If I was a master thief
Perhaps I'd rob them.*

Of course, the romantic outlaw is a recurring character in Dylan's songs, and in the folk music tradition in general. A lot of the songs Dylan has covered concern outlaws: 'Pretty Boy Floyd', 'Friend of the Devil' and 'Roving Gambler', for example.

And a vast gallery of outlaws and thieves can be found in his own songs: 'Romance in Durango', 'Outlaw Blues', 'Wanted Man', 'All Along the Watchtower', 'Thief on the Cross', 'Billy', 'Joey', 'John Wesley Harding', 'Tweeter and the Monkey Man' and 'One More Cup of Coffee', for example. Indeed, the chimes of freedom were once tolling for all these (not always) honest folk who live outside the law:

Tolling for the rebel, tolling for the rake.

In 'Lenny Bruce', the term 'outlaw' is almost used as a compliment:

*He was an outlaw, that's for sure,
More of an outlaw than you ever were.*

Scobie has examined why the outlaw figure would appeal to Dylan:

The outlaw figure's attraction is that he stands for the romantic outsider, the ultimate individualist; one who stakes his destiny against the forces of society and conformity.⁹

However, in Dylan's songs, as in 'The Roving Blade', the outlaw is not always successful:

*Dylan concentrates more on unsuccessful outlaws: those who are caught and condemned by the law, or betrayed and killed by their 'friends.'*¹⁰

This is what makes Dylan's outlaw songs so interesting. They are not the romanticized exploits of dashing heroes. The outlaw doesn't always win. The outlaw isn't always brave or clever. Indeed, the outlaw isn't always the good guy. The Jack of Hearts is probably the best example of an ambiguous outlaw. In fact, he's so ambiguous that we're not even sure he exists.

Dylan is acutely aware of the difference between legend and reality, the mythic exploits and the actual cruelty:

*In the song ['Jesse James'], Jesse robs banks and gives the money to the destitute and in the end is betrayed by a friend. By all accounts, though, James was a bloodthirsty killer who was anything but the Robin Hood sung about in the song.*¹¹

He subtly addresses this in 'John Wesley Harding':

*All along this countryside,
He opened a many a door.
But he was never known
To hurt an honest man.*

We're not told why Harding opened the doors; maybe he was opening the doors of the poor folks' houses to rob them or to murder the inhabitants. We're also not told how many honest men he did hurt that no one knows about.

Where once broadside ballads created myths, now outlaws' exploits can be publicised in new media:

*All across the telegraph
His name it did resound,
But no charge held against him
Could they prove.*

As new outlaws emerge, the new media follow their deeds:

*Your TV set is blown up, every bit of it
is gone,
Ever since the nightly news show that
the Monkey Man was on.*

This Presleyesque incident shows that the Monkey Man is capable of arousing deep hatred in some people. One other outlaw who certainly inspires strong feelings is Joey Gallo, the subject of Dylan's 'Joey'. Even Dylan seemed to have had second thoughts about his treatment of this mafia gangster:

Herman: *Back to Lenny Bruce, and the fact that it's again yet another Bob Dylan song about, as you even say in the song, an outlaw. A lot of the stuff, a lot of the songs over the years, Lenny Bruce, Outlaw Blues, Joey Gallo, Hurricane Carter, or Absolutely Sweet Marie, 'to live outside the law, you must live honest' [sic]. A lot of outlaw imagery and outlaws in your work. What is it about 'man as outlaw' that intrigues you so, you spend a lot of time on ...*

Dylan: *Well, it's not anything conscious. I guess it has to do with where I grew up, admiring those type of heroes, Robin Hood, Jesse James... You know the person who always kicked against the oppression and was... had high moral standards. I don't know if*

the people I write about have high moral standards, I don't know if Robin Hood did, but you always assumed that they did.

Herman: *You assume that Joey Gallo did?*

Dylan: *In some kind of way you have to assume that he did, in some kind of area. It's like... I've never written a song about some rapers, you know. I think what I intend to do is just show the individualism of that certain type of breed, or certain type of person that must do that. But there is some type of standard I have for whoever I'm writing about. I mean, it amazes me that I wrote a song about Joey Gallo.¹²*

The fact that Dylan occasionally still performs 'Joey' in concert indicates that he must still find the man interesting 'in some kind of area'. He performed the song in Brixton Academy, London, in 1995 the day that Reggie Kray was buried.

Although the outlaw is on the run, he is also free. He no longer is chained by society's conventions. He is free to travel wherever he wants to (or wherever he's chased to). He's not tied down to family or jobs. The six highwaymen in 'The Roving Blade' have 'broadswords and sweet liberty'. Their willingness to use their weapons frees them from the morals that others adhere to.

The roving blade is not just any outlaw. He's an Irish outlaw (albeit one who ends up in England). Dylan has shown a fondness for Irish¹³ songs over the years. He covered 'Arthur McBride' on *Good as I Been to You*, which gave him a chance to

sing the words 'shillelagh', 'a rock and a roll' and 'rowdy dow dow'. In the early days of the NET, Dylan performed stunning versions of 'Eileen Aroon', most memorably in Dublin in 1989.

Also on *Good as I Been to You*, Dylan performed 'Black Jack Davey'. Many variants of this song exist in Scotland, England, Ireland and North America. In Scotland, it is called 'The Gypsy Laddie'. A modern Irish version of the song, 'The Gypsy Rover', was written by Leo Maguire:

*Ah-de-do, ah-de-do-da-day,
Ah-de-do, ah-de-da-ay.
He whistled and sang till the green
wood rang,
And he won the heart of a lady.*

*The gypsy rover came over the hill,
Down through the valley so shady.
He whistled and sang till the green
wood rang,
And he won the heart of a lady.*

A modern-day parody of the song was written by Miles Wooton:

*Go fill up the tank of the 4-litre Jag,
For the Mini is not so speedy-O.
And I will drive till I find her alive
Or dead with the hippies and the
beatniks-O.*

*What makes you leave your house and
your car,
The washing machine and the telly-O,
Your children three (not to mention me),
To go with the hippies and the
beatniks-O?*

In Minneapolis in 1960, Dylan sang 'Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye', another song

with Irish roots. The Clancy Brothers performed this song as a darkly comic piece:

*Ye haven't an arm, ye haven't a leg,
hurroo, hurroo.
Ye haven't an arm, ye haven't a leg,
hurroo, hurroo.
Ye haven't an arm, ye haven't a leg,
Ye're an armless, boneless, chickenless
egg,
Ye'll have to put with a bowl out to beg.
Oh Johnny I hardly knew ye.*

The basic story of 'Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye' would later turn up in a much more sombre guise in Dylan's 'John Brown'. Although the melody for Dylan's song was based on 'Nine Hundred Miles', another possible source for the song is the Irish 'Mrs McGrath':

*Oh, Teddy, me boy, the old widow
cried,
Yer two fine legs were yer mammy's
pride.
Them stumps of a tree wouldn't do at
all,
Why didn't ye run from the big cannon
ball?
Wid yer too-ri-aa, fol de diddle aa,
Too-ri-oo-ri-oo-ri-aa.*

During the recording sessions in the Big Pink, Dylan sang a version of Brendan Behan's 'The Royal Canal'. Many years later, he sang it again during an interview with Bono at Slane:

Dylan: *I know the solo lyrics to 'The Royal Canal'. I used to sing it all the time.*

Bono: *How does it go?*

Dylan: *[sings] 'The hungry feeling came over me stealing, as the mice were squealling in my prison cell.'*

Bono: *That's right, yeah!*

Dylan: *[continues] 'That old triangle went jingle jangle, all along the banks of the Royal Canal.'*

Bono: *That's right, when did you read that?*

Dylan: *[there's no way stopping him now] 'In the female prison there's seventy women. It's all over there that I want to dwell. And that old triangle goes jingle jangle, all along the banks of the Royal Canal.'*

Bono: *Have you been to the Royal Canal?*

Dylan: *No. I used to sing that song though. Every night.¹⁴*

The lyrics of 'The Royal Canal' may have been ringing in Dylan's ears when he wrote about the 'jingle jangle morning' in 'Mr. Tambourine Man'. Also, as Michael Gray has pointed out,¹⁵ the reference to the smiling seagulls in 'When the Ship Comes in' might come from the following lines from 'The Royal Canal':

*On a fine spring evening,
The lag lay dreaming,
The seagulls wheeling high above the
wall,
And the old triangle
Went jingle jangle,
Along the banks of the Royal Canal.*

In the Big Pink, Dylan sings 'the seagulls beaming', instead of 'the seagulls wheeling'.

Brendan Behan himself once turned up in '11 Outlined Epitaphs', Dylan's liner notes for *The Times They Are A-Changin'*:

*with the sounds of Francois Villon
echoin' through my mad streets
as I stumble on lost cigars
of Bertold Brecht
an' empty bottles
of Brendan Behan
the hypnotic words
of A. L. Lloyd
each one bendin' like its own song*

Also in the Big Pink, Dylan performed 'Roisin the Beau'. The song's title is a pun on 'rosin the bow'. In this Irish drinking song, it's not just the corpse who ends up soaked in alcohol:

*When I'm dead an' laid out on the
counter,
A voice you will hear from below,
Sayin', 'Send out a hogshead of whiskey
To drink with Ol' Roisin the Beau'.

Then get you half a dozen smart
fellows.
Let them all stagger an' go
An' dig a great hole in the meadow
An' in it put Roisin the Beau.*

Other songs that Dylan has performed have Irish connections. 'The Water is Wide', performed by Dylan and Baez during the Rolling Thunder Revue, has its origins in 'Carrickfergus'. When Baez played Vicar Street in Dublin in 2004, she sang a beautiful version of 'Carrickfergus'.

In February 1991, Dylan raised a few eyebrows by opening a concert in Glasgow with an instrumental version of Percy French's 'The Mountains of Mourne'.

At the first NET concert, in Concord in 1988, Dylan performed 'The Lakes of Pontchartrain'. The melody of this song is derived from 'Lily of the West', which Dylan covered in his ramshackle *Dylan* album. (Although Columbia seemed to be deliberately releasing dodgy Dylan performances on that album as punishment for his defection to Geffen Records, his version of 'Lily of the West' is actually very good.) 'Lily of the West' can trace its roots back to early Irish ballads.

On his first album, Dylan performed a whimsical version of 'Pretty Peggy-O'. He has since returned to it a number of times during the NET. This song was originally a Scottish ballad, set during the English Civil War. The Clancy Brothers performed it as 'The Maid of Fife-i-o'. Although the song appears to have no Irish origins, its first line refers to 'a troop of Irish dragoons'.

On the Gaslight tape, Dylan sings 'The Cuckoo'. He later returns to the song on 'High Water'. The lines praising the cuckoo's beauty also turn up in the Irish song 'Bunclody':

*If I was in Bunclody I would think
myself at home,
'Tis there I would have a sweetheart,
but here I have none.
Drinking strong liquour in the height of
my cheer,
Here's a health to Bunclody and the
lass I love dear.

The cuckoo is a pretty bird, it sings as
it flies,
It brings us good tidings and tells us no
lies.*

*It sucks the young birds eggs to make
its voice clear,
And the more it cries cuckoo, the
summer draws near.*

One other relevant song here is 'One Irish Rover'. It was written by Van Morrison, and Dylan performed a duet of the song with Morrison for an Arena special in 1989. Dylan has also performed it a number of times during the NET.

Dylan has befriended many Irish performers over the years, including Bono and Van Morrison (who both took part in that Slane interview) and Paul Brady. In 1989, the Pogues (without Shane McGowan) played support for Dylan. And in 1992, Sinéad O'Connor put in a memorable appearance at the 30th anniversary concert.

However, perhaps the most influential friendship in this regard has been with Liam Clancy.

The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem were at the forefront of the revival of Irish music in Greenwich Village during the early 1960s. It was at this time that they became acquainted with Dylan. As Dylan mentioned during the Slane interview:

Irish music has always been a great part of my life because I used to hang out with the Clancy Brothers. They influenced me tremendously.¹⁶

Paddy Clancy was head of Tradition Records. When John Hammond was looking for a harmonica player for Carolyn Hester's record with Columbia, Paddy recommended Dylan. And Liam Clancy was one of those who persuaded Mike Porco to let Dylan play at Gerde's

Folk City. Apparently, all this exposure led Dylan to declare 'I'm going to be as big as the Clancy brothers, man!'¹⁷

Dylan was drawn to the Clancy brothers for a number of reasons. Part of it had to do with the excitement, the 'spontaneous combustion',¹⁸ of the folk revival around Greenwich Village. As Liam Clancy notes:

Greenwich Village was an island to which people escaped from repressed backgrounds... Two things we all had in common: we were all escaping something, and we were all finding something else... In the Village we were all refugees, escapees from our own private jails, trying to remake our soul on our terms.¹⁹

An important piece of the folk revival was the Clancy Brothers third album for Tradition Records. Robert Shelton wrote the liner notes for the album. He described the music as:

the rushing, clean waters of Irish folk music, with its lilting charm, fierce independence of spirit, melodic inventiveness and whimsical view of life.

At the time, a debate raged about the difference between pure authentic folk music and commercialized popular folk music. Shelton argues that while folk music does not always make easy listening, it is always gripping:

The audience began to understand that folk music can sometimes be a bit rough around the edges and not always the most technically polished, yet the conviction and belief and artistry would still be there.

The album contains a rich mixture of songs that aims, according to the jacket sleeve, 'to explore all the moods and lines of the Irish song'. Among the songs on it that Dylan would later return to are 'Brennan on the Moor', 'The Maid of Fife-i-o', 'Roddy McCorley' and 'Eileen Aroon'. (It also contains a song called 'The Stuttering Lovers'. A stuttering lover would later turn up in 'Ugliest Girl in the World', an ugly little song co-credited to Dylan and Robert Hunter.)

On that album, 'The Jug of Punch' returns to the theme of funeral arrangements. Like the rake and rambling boy, the narrator wants to make sure he has some refreshments with him for the journey to afterlife:

*And when I'm dead and in my grave
No costly tombstone will I have.
Just lay me down in my native peat²⁰
With a jug of punch at my head and
feet.*

Dylan would also cover other songs (not all of them Irish songs) from the Clancys' repertoire, such as 'Wild Mountain Thyme', 'Young, But Daily Growing' and 'Moonshiner'. He heard the Clancys singing these in the White Horse Tavern, a bar where Dylan Thomas took his last drinks in 1953. In *Chronicles*, Dylan evokes the atmosphere of a Clancy Brothers concert there:

The rebellion songs were a really serious thing [in the White Horse Tavern]. The language was flashy and provocative – a lot of action in the words, all sung with great gusto. The singer always had a merry light in his eye, had to have it. I

loved these songs and could still hear them in my head long after and into the next day. They weren't protest songs, though, they were rebel ballads... even in a simple, melodic wooing ballad there'd be rebellion waiting around the corner.²¹

Dylan, of course, would progress to larger stages than the White Horse Tavern. 'One of the gang,' as Liam Clancy noted, 'had suddenly broken loose.'²² However, Dylan stayed in touch with the Clancy brothers. He attended their concert in White Plains on St Patrick's Day, 1969 and apparently even discussed with them the possibility of buying a farm in Ireland.²³ In 1992, the after-show party for the 30th anniversary concert took place in Tommy Makem's Irish Pavillion, where Dylan sang a verse of 'Roddy McCorley'.²⁴

The Clancys were there to praise Dylan because some years earlier, Dylan had stepped forward to praise the Clancys:

When we were doing this documentary on The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem, Dylan hadn't given an on-camera interview since he did the thing for The Weavers and Woody Guthrie, and our manager, Maurice Cassidy, approached management through Los Angeles and all the bullshit. There was a very remote possibility that Dylan would ever do this sort of thing again, and he gets a telegram back the next day saying 'Yes, Dylan wants to do a film interview.' So he rang to thank the manager guy, who said 'Hey, don't thank me – the man himself wants to do it.' And he did a lovely tribute, and it was out of old friendship.²⁵

This exposure to Irish ballads would influence Dylan's own songwriting. Liam Clancy has noted how effectively Dylan absorbed the influences that were around him:

He was a teenager, and the only thing I can compare him with was blotting paper. He soaked everything up. He had this immense curiosity. He was totally blank and was ready to suck up everything that came within his range.²⁶

Although a comprehensive examination of the impact of Irish songs on Dylan's songwriting is beyond the scope of this article, a few notable examples can be identified.

One of the Clancy Brothers' most popular performances was 'Brennan on the Moor'. It tells the story of a highwayman similar to the roving blade. Shelton's liner notes romanticized both Brennan himself and the source of the song:

Pat learned this song from his father's mother, a tall woman who wore a big, black cloak and hood and was known throughout the neighborhood for her fine singing... It is one of the evocations of the bold outlaw that have lived so long in folklore, from Robin Hood to Jesse James.

Dylan would use this song as the basis for 'Rambling Gambling Willie', which opens like many 'come all ye' Irish ballads:

*Come around you rovin' gamblers and
a story I will tell
About the greatest gambler, you all
should know him well.*

Dylan would later use this type of opening in other songs, such as 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' and 'Masters of War'. He would acknowledge his debt in *Biograph*:

You know, ['The Times They Are A-Changin'] was influenced of course by the Irish and Scottish ballads... Come All Ye Bold Highway Men, Come All Ye Miners, Come All Ye Tender Hearted Maidens.

Like the roving gambler and the roving blade, this rambling gambler is an idealized portrait. His prowess clearly extends beyond the gambling table:

*He had twenty-seven children, yet he
never had a wife.*

Needless to say, despite all his winnings, the gambler remains a humble friend of the poor:

*But Willie had a heart of gold and this
I know is true,
He supported all his children, and all
their mothers too.
He wore no rings or fancy things, like
other gamblers wore,
He spread his money far and wide, to
help the sick and poor.*

Tommy Makem recalls the night Dylan stopped him and the Clancys in the street to listen to his song:

[Dylan stopped me to] sing me a long murder ballad that he had written to the tune of some song he had heard Liam and myself singing. There would be twenty verses in it, and he would sing the whole lot for you. I thought, God, it's a very interesting thing this young fella's doing.²⁷

Clancy gave Dylan some constructive feedback on his song:

*The nature of poetry is brevity. You've got fantastic ideas, fantastic poems, but learn to distill them.*²⁸

Dylan, of course, would only sporadically adhere to the maxim that 'poetry is brevity'. 'Rambling Gambling Willie' was included on the original pressing of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. However, it was later dropped in favour of 'Bob Dylan's Dream', an idealized portrait of folk singing:

*By the old wooden stove where our hats was hung,
Our words were told, our songs were sung,
Where we longed for nothin' and were quite satisfied
Talkin' and a-jokin' about the world outside.*

'Bob Dylan's Dream' is based on 'Lord Franklin', an English ballad which Dylan learnt from Martin Carthy. 'Lord Franklin' in turn was based on the Irish ballad 'The Croppy Boy'. In 2003, the *bête noire* of the 30th anniversary concert, Sinéad O'Connor, included a haunting version of 'Lord Franklin' on her album *Sean Nós Nua*.

Some other Dylan songs show the Irish influence. 'With God on Our Side' is based on Dominic Behan's 'The Patriot Game', which itself was based on an earlier Irish ballad, 'One Morning in May'.

'Farewell' gets its melody from 'The Leaving of Liverpool', an Irish song the Clancys used to perform. Like many other songs, 'Farewell' deals with the lure of roving off into the storm:

*Oh the weather is against me and the wind blows hard,
And the rain, she's a-turnin' into hail.
I still might strike it lucky on the highway goin' west
Though I'm traveling on a path beaten trail.*

Dylan's farewell to the folk clique, 'Restless Farewell', comes from an old Irish drinking song, 'The Parting Glass'. 'Restless Farewell' presents us with not an idealized generous outlaw, but an idealized generous folk singer:

*Oh all the money that in my whole life I did spend,
Be it mine right or wrongfully,
I let it slip gladly through the hands of my friends
To tie up the time most forcefully.*

In 1995, Dylan performed an astonishing version of this song at Frank Sinatra's 80th birthday party, ending the song with a wonderfully quirky 'Happy birthday, Mr Frank'. It's easy to see why the song would appeal to Sinatra:

*So I'll make my stand
And remain as I am
And bid farewell and not give a damn.*

According to Shelton, Mercury Records claimed in a publicity release that 'The Mighty Quinn' was based on an Irish folk song.²⁹ However, it's likely that this is nothing more than an assumption based on the song's title. (Its alternative title is 'Quinn the Eskimo', so maybe it's based on an old Inuit folk song.) Dylan offered the following extremely helpful clarification on the song for *Biograph*:

I don't know what it was about. I guess it was some kind of nursery rhyme.

Dylan often sings songs in the character of another person. When he sings 'I', he isn't necessarily referring to Bob Dylan (or indeed Robert Zimmerman). Examples of this would include 'North Country Blues' (sung in the voice of a miner's wife), 'The Ballad of Donald White' (sung in the voice of a murderer), and 'Romance in Durango' (sung in the voice of someone being hunted for the murder of Ramon). In the *Biograph* notes, Dylan suggested that 'I'll Be Your Baby Tonight' could be sung from a baby's point of view. 'Joey' becomes a more palatable song if we assume it's being sung in the voice of a fellow gangster. In "*Love and Theft*", each song seems to be sung by a different character.

Although this device is common in many forms of literature and song, Dylan links it to Irish songs in *Biograph*:

A lot of folk songs are written from a character's point of view. House of the Rising Sun is actually from a woman's point of view. A lot of Irish ballads would be the same thing.

Another device used in Celtic music is 'mouth music'. This is when words are sung just for their sound and rhythm, rather than their meaning. It turns up in the music of a lot of cultures. In Irish music, it is manifest in forms such as cantering, caoining and sean nós singing. The lyrics of such songs are often nonsense words, chosen because their sound evokes the song's mood. The words might mimic the sound of musical instru-

ments. Examples of this can be seen in the lyrics of 'Mrs McGrath' and 'The Gypsy Rover' already quoted in this article.

Dylan's 'I'm Not There (1956)' is a wonderful example of this approach to singing. 'Santa Fe' uses the same approach. And on the concert stage, Dylan has often resorted to his own brand of 'mouth music' when the lyrics escape his memory.

References to Irish songs sometimes turn up in unexpected places. '2 x 2' mentions 'The Foggy Dew'. 'Whiskey in the Jar' turns up in 'Cold Irons Bound'. The fifes and drums in 'Where Teardrops Fall' bring to mind 'The Green Fields of France', Eric Bogle's song that is based on an old Irish melody. The fife and drums turned up much earlier in 'The Unfortunate Rake' (and the many songs that sprang from it, such as 'Streets of Laredo'):

*'Don't muffle your drums and play
your fifes merrily,
Play a quick march as you carry me
along,
And fire your bright muskets all over
my coffin,
Saying: There goes an unfortunate lad
to his home.'*

Dylan has made no secret of his debt to Irish songs.

*Then, you know, there are a lot of
melodies which I heard [the Clancys]
sing close up that I took and I made
some myself, you know. I wrote some of
my own songs to some of the melodies
that I heard them do. That happened
too.³⁰*

Indeed, he has sometimes gone out his way to educate people on the roots of some of his songs:

I've taken lot of my earlier songs from a lot of old English ballads and Irish ballads and stuff like that, so people will probably relate to that a lot more over there [in England] than they do here [in America]. Here, I'm not really sure if people are aware of where songs like 'Master of War' or 'Girl from the North Country,' where those songs originate and come from.³¹

It wasn't just the melodies that Dylan adapted. For example, he once argued that 'Joey' used similar devices to old Irish ballads:

Dylan: But [writing long ballads about outlaws is] an old tradition! I think I picked that up in the folk tradition, when I was singing nothing but folk songs for years. There are many songs, a lot of Irish ballads, Roddy McCorley, names escape my mind at the moment...

Herman: There must be a hundred songs about Jesse James?

Dylan: Jesse James, Cole Younger, the US bandit, Billy The Kid... of course the English ballads had them and the Scottish ballads had them and the Irish ballads. I used to sing a lot of those songs and that just kind of carried over with me into the... whatever the special brand of music that I play now is.³²

He loved both the subject matter and the gusto with which the songs were performed. In the act of performance, legendary people could come alive:

Liam always sang those ballads which always would get to me... I'd never heard those kind of songs before... close up, you know... All those legendary people they used to sing about – Brennan on the Moor or Roddy McCorley... I wasn't aware of them, when they existed – but it was as if they'd just existed yesterday... I would think of Brennan on the Moor the same way I would think of Jesse James or something, you know.³³

Of course, the songs of rebellion were also sung with a rebellious voice³⁴:

Ah, mainly because of the, you know, the dynamics they sang with, and the subject matter they sang about and... they just reached a lot of people, you know, with their exuberance and their attitude – mostly it was attitude.³⁵

In *Chronicles*, Dylan makes an interesting contrast between songs in his repertoire and the Irish songs he heard in the White Horse Tavern:

There were songs like that in my repertoire, too, where something lovely was suddenly upturned, but instead of rebellion showing up it would be death itself, the Grim Reaper. Rebellion spoke to me louder. The rebel was alive and well, romantic and honorable. The Grim Reaper wasn't like that.³⁶

However, Dylan would never become a great songwriter by simply mimicking Irish songs:

I was beginning to think I might want to change over. The Irish landscape

*wasn't too much like the American landscape, though, so I'd have to find some cuneiform tablets – some archaic grail to lighten the way. I had grasped the idea of what kind of songs I wanted to write, I just didn't know how to do it yet.*³⁷

Sounes has noted how Dylan saw something of his own culture in the language and expression of these songs:

*Bob was fascinated with the rich language of these traditional Irish songs, and moved by the passion of the performances. Although the songs came from a different place and time, the characters reminded him of American folk heroes.*³⁸

Of course, many of the Irish songs dealt with outlaws, rebels and people who lived somewhat beyond conventional society. Rebelling against the status quo, these mythical figures carved their own identity outside the social norms. Tommy Makem has commented on how Dylan was attracted to the roving blades in these songs:

*One of the things that he liked about the songs we sang was that it was rebellion music.*³⁹

Perhaps part of what attracted Dylan to these characters was that they had broken free from their upbringing and had the sweet liberty to reinvent themselves on their own terms. Of course, this was part of the attraction of Greenwich Village itself, according to Liam Clancy:

We were all kind of orphans of the storm. We were artists who didn't know what the artistic mind meant because it

*was rejected in all the places that we came from, like me coming from a small town in Ireland and Dylan coming from Hibbing.*⁴⁰

However, what also attracted Dylan to the songs was his friendship with the Clancys and his admiration for Liam Clancy's singing:

*But you know one of the things I recall from that time is how great they all were – I mean there is no question, but that they were great. But Liam Clancy was always my favorite singer, as a ballad singer. I just never heard anyone as good, and that includes Barbara Streisand and Pearl Bailey.*⁴¹

Liam Clancy also had great admiration for Dylan. He once gave a particularly acute analysis of Dylan's controversial performance at the Newport festival in 1965:

*I found myself standing there with tears streaming down my face because – I saw the butterfly emerging from the caterpillar. I also saw, for the first time, the immense value of what the man was about.*⁴²

Another Irish group that Dylan was fond of was the McPeake Family. (They also performed 'Brennan on the Moor'.) Bono thought the McPeake Family was a punk band, so Dylan tried to enlighten him:

Dylan: *There's another group I used to listen to called the McPeake Family. I don't know if you ever heard of them?*

Bono: *The McPeake Family! I'd love to have heard of them, with a name like that.*

Dylan: *They are great. Paddy Clancy recorded them. He had a label called Tradition Records, and he used to bring back these records; they recorded for Prestige at the time, and Tradition Records, his company. They were called The McPeake family. They were even more rural than the Clancy Brothers. The Clancy Brothers had always that touch of commerciality to them – you didn't mind it, but it was still there, whereas the McPeake Family sang with harps. The old man, he played the harp – and it was that [gestures] big – and the drums.*

Bono: *Were they a real family?*

Dylan: *Yeah, they were a real family; if you go to a record store and ask for a McPeake Family record, I don't know, I'm sure you could still get them in a lot of places.⁴³*

In each performance of 'The Roving Blade', Dylan draws on those aspects of the song's story that attract him on the night he's singing it: separation from parents; roving the highways; living outside the law; stealing for a lover; the approach of death. However, one element that's in each performance is Dylan's fondness for these old Irish ballads.

Over the years, Dylan has performed many songs with Irish origins. And he has also used either the melodies or attitudes of Irish songs for his own songs.

Perhaps these Irish melodies remind him of riotous drinking sessions in the White Horse Tavern. Perhaps they remind him of the days when he and Liam Clancy and Tommy Makem were roving blades.

Perhaps they remind him of the sweet liberty that all independent spirits yearn for.

Whatever the origins of Dylan's fondness, there's no doubt that his exposure to these tales of blades, rakes and broadswords brought a new cutting edge to his creative development as a performing artist.

Notes

1. That's the image that came to my mind when I first saw the song title. It reminds me of how sometimes words can accidentally conjure up the wrong image. In recent years, a lot of muggers in Dublin use blood-filled syringes to threaten their victims. One day, I was telling a friend that there had been 'another syringe attack' down the road the other night. When the friend stopped laughing, he asked me how many giant syringes were roving the streets in that part of Dublin. Perhaps the Roving Syringe is a distant cousin of the Roving Blade!

2. For a detailed analysis of the origins of Dylan's 'Blind Willie McTell', see 'Bob Dylan, Blind Willie McTell and 'Blind Willie McTell"' in Michael Gray, *Song & Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan*, Cassell (2000).

3. *Rolling Stone*, 22 November, 2001

4. *Playboy*, January, 1966

5. *USA Today*, 5 May, 1995

6. *TV Guide*, 11 September, 1976

7. *Los Angeles Times*, 4 April, 2004

8. For more on the origins of this speech, see Andrew Muir, *Razor's Edge: Bob Dylan and the Never Ending Tour*, Helter Skelter Publishing (2001), p. 75

9. Stephen Scobie, *alias bob dylan revisited*, Red Deer Press (2004), pp 157-58

10. Stephen Scobie, *alias bob dylan revisited*, Red Deer Press (2004), p. 158

11. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles Volume One*, Simon & Schuster (2004), p. 82

12. WNEW-FM Radio, Dave Herman interview, London, 2 July, 1981

13. When referring to 'Irish songs', I mean songs that were sung in Ireland. Such songs were not necessarily sung in the Irish language. Sometimes, these Irish

songs were just variants of English or Scottish songs, so it's not always clear in which country the song originated. Also, it has to be admitted that Dylan would not always be aware of the Irish origins of the songs he was performing.

14. *Hot Press*, 24 August, 1984
15. Michael Gray, *Song & Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan*, Cassell (2000), p. 28(n)
16. *Hot Press*, 24 August, 1984
17. Liam Clancy, *Memoirs of an Irish Troubadour*, Virgin Books (2002), p. 254
18. 'Patrick Humphries Interview', *The Telegraph*, 18, Winter 1984
19. Liam Clancy, *Memoirs of an Irish Troubadour*, Virgin Books (2002), p. 254
20. This leads neatly into my second-favourite joke of all time: 'What do you call an Irishman buried in a bog for a thousand years? Pete!' And, for the record, my favourite joke is: 'This horse walks into a bar. The barman says, 'Why the long face?' Perhaps the bar in question is the White Horse Tavern.
21. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles Volume One*, Simon & Schuster (2004), p. 83
22. Liam Clancy, *Memoirs of an Irish Troubadour*, Virgin Books (2002), p. 254
23. Anthony Scaduto, *Bob Dylan*, Helter Skelter Publishing (1996), p. 262
24. Howard Sounes, *Down the Highway*, Black Swan (2002), p. 28
25. 'Patrick Humphries Interview', *The Telegraph*, 18, Winter 1984
26. 'Patrick Humphries Interview', *The Telegraph*, 18, Winter 1984
27. Howard Sounes, *Down the Highway*, Black Swan (2002), p. 28
28. Howard Sounes, *Down the Highway*, Black Swan (2002), p. 140
29. Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home*, Da Capo (1997), p. 163
30. 'Derek Bailey Interview', *The Telegraph*, 18, Winter 1984
31. Capitol Radio, Tim Blackmore Transatlantic Telephone Interview, London, 15 June, 1981
32. WNEW-FM Radio, Dave Herman interview, London, 2 July, 1981
33. 'Derek Bailey Interview', *The Telegraph*, 18, Winter 1984
34. Of course, there is a darker side to all this drinking and hot-blooded rebelling. In an episode of *The Simpsons*, a St Patrick's Day parade descends into a drunken riot. Kent Brockman, Springfield's news anchor, asks the following stinging question: 'All this drinking, violence, destruction of property! Are these the things we think of when we think of the Irish?'
35. 'Derek Bailey Interview', *The Telegraph*, 18, Winter 1984
36. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles Volume One*, Simon & Schuster (2004), p. 83
37. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles Volume One*, Simon & Schuster (2004), p. 83
38. Howard Sounes, *Down the Highway*, Black Swan (2002), p. 116
39. Howard Sounes, *Down the Highway*, Black Swan (2002), p. 117
40. Howard Sounes, *Down the Highway*, Black Swan (2002), p. 117
41. *Hot Press*, 24 August, 1984
42. 'Patrick Humphries Interview', *The Telegraph*, 18, Winter 1984
43. *Hot Press*, 24 August, 1984

A Word For Pete

by Robert Forryan

'He... was threatened with prison, barred from practicing his trade, harassed by his government and condemned by his country's media'

Mike Marqusee

In *Judas*, Number 14, there was an excellent article by Andrew Muir entitled 'Songs From, But Not Out of, History', which traced the links between Scottish folk song and the art of Bob Dylan. It was hugely informative and I much enjoyed Andrew's writing. But I do have a nit to pick.

My nit relates to Andrew's comments on Pete Seeger and his alleged role in the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. Andrew wrote: 'Michael Gray, in one of his superb touring talks on Bob Dylan, managed to both entertain and re-awaken the awareness of his audience... by asking us why, in the famous incident when Pete Seeger tried to cut the cables to Dylan's electric set at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, was there an axe there in any case? None of us had considered this before; the answer he then provided was that Seeger had been using it to, in his eyes, bolster the authenticity of a workshop he was giving on work-songs – and this from a man who had a servant to do such things for him.'

I am not sure how much of the above is attributable to Michael Gray and how much to Andrew, but I think it a crying pity that Pete Seeger's name has to be so unjustifiably dragged through the mire again by those who should know better. The simple, though less interesting, truth is that Pete Seeger did NOT take an axe and try to cut any cables at Newport '65. I can find no reputable biography or history of that event which claims that he did. It is one of the great myths of 'Dylanology'.

But for years now a kind and generous man, who has done much for the cause of folk music and who has supported and encouraged numerous young musicians, has been subjected to barbs and criticism from the admirers of Bob Dylan. They should hang their heads in shame. Not only is there no evidence for the axe incident, neither is there any reason to suppose that Bob Dylan himself has anything but the greatest respect for Pete Seeger.

I will come back to the cutting of the cable issue later – it is easily dealt with. For now I want to address the lesser, but equally unnecessary comments made by Gray/Muir. The first of these is the ‘dig’ at Pete Seeger for even having an axe at a music festival. A live song is itself a performance. It is akin to theatre. People use all kinds of ‘props’ when performing. It’s not about ‘authenticity’, it’s about lending a visual element to enhance the aural. It’s part of the act. When a singer sings of his broken heart he or she may be happily married, but they act the part of the broken-hearted. They ‘put on’ a sad face. So what is wrong with swinging an axe when singing a work song? People have done that for centuries. You might even claim it is part of the folk experience. Dylan himself once carried a bullwhip around at a Newport Folk Festival but to my knowledge he has never herded steers. Bob Dylan wears a cowboy hat on stage and sings about Maggie’s Farm but I don’t think he has ever been a cowboy or a farmer. What’s to criticise?

The saddest and cheapest jibe though, is the one about Seeger having a servant. Pete Seeger came from a comfortable New England family. He went to private school and on to Harvard. He had the misfortune never to have known poverty. But these facts are all out in the open. Seeger has never pretended otherwise. Dylan himself is hardly working-class in origin. The word ‘servant’ is loaded with the baggage of inverted snobbery. Anyone who does a job serves somebody. In terms of using this against Seeger in the context of Dylan it seems only fair to ask: does Bob Dylan

chop the wood on his Minnesota Farm? Or cook his own meals or wash his own clothes or book his hotel rooms where someone will serve him? If servants are fine for Dylan why not for Seeger?

It may be that there are younger readers of this magazine who know little of Pete Seeger. A summary of his life and career might be helpful. Pete was born on 3 May 1919. His mother was a classical violinist and teacher, and his father, Charles Seeger, was a musicologist and classical conductor. Charles developed an interest in American Folk music during the 1930s and was one of those who collaborated with Alan Lomax in his attempts to revive that tradition. In 1935, when he was 16 years old, Pete Seeger attended a Folk Festival at Asheville, North Carolina, that had been organised by Bascom Lunsford. It changed his life. Pete immediately loved the honesty and relative unsentimentality (when compared with the radio songs of the day) of folk song. He was soon learning the banjo.

In 1938 Pete quit Harvard and went on the road for the first time. He cycled around New England, painting water colours which he exchanged wherever he could for bed and board. By 1939 he was an archive assistant at the Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress and already beginning the process of steeping himself in the history of folk music. He began to go on field trips with Alan Lomax.

A crucial date was 3 March 1940 which was the time Seeger first shared a stage with Woody Guthrie – at a benefit for migrant workers at the Forrest Theatre,

New York. Later that year, when he was just 21 years of age, Pete hooked up with Woody and spent a year travelling across the South with Guthrie, riding the rails, singing and playing the banjo. He lived the life that Dylan, at 21, could only pretend to have lived. I don't imagine he took his servant along. In the following years he joined Guthrie, Huddie 'Leadbelly' Ledbetter, and Alan Lomax as a key figure in the return of folk music to the forefront of American cultural life. In the early 40s, Seeger helped Woody and Lee Hays to form The Almanac Singers, a fluid group who performed at labour and migrant workers' meetings. The Almanacs favoured pro-union and anti-fascist songs and recorded a number of LPs. But America's entry into the war in 1942 brought about their break-up. Seeger himself was drafted and spent three years in the army until December 1945.

After the war Pete returned to solo performing and recording until he joined the Weavers, a folk quartet, in 1948. From 1949 to 1952 they were hugely successful with hit records such as: 'Goodnight Irene', 'Wimoweh' and 'On Top Of Old Smokey'. In 1950 the Weavers were about to sign a contract with a network TV station when a blacklisting organisation attacked them and the contract offer was withdrawn. Pete Seeger had been a communist, but resigned his membership in 1951.

After his initial success, Seeger's career was stalled by his political beliefs. In 1952 the Weavers disbanded because of the blacklisting. This meant that he was banned from appearing on radio, in theatres or clubs, and could not record for

any of the major labels. He also lost his US passport.

Pete's response was that of an honourable and idealistic musician. He played free concerts to students at colleges across America throughout 1953. Mostly he performed traditional songs, along with songs by the likes of Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly. In this way, Pete became one of the leaders in the great folk revival in the States – a revival that would have its part in the later development and myth of Bob Dylan.

Seeger said of this period: 'I talked about how anyone from any walk of life could sing this kind of song himself. What I was getting at was the idea of flip-flopping the power structure, so every individual had some power, rather than all the power being centred on a few organisations... We don't need professional singers. We don't need stars'. In his book *Positively 4th Street*, David Hajdu comments: 'The idea surely ran counter to the prevailing cultural tenets of glamour and professionalism. Down with the aristocracy of the Hit Parade, up with egalitarian amateurism. A message with appeal to the disenfranchised, the disconnected, and the tone deaf alike'.

What came out of the 1950s revival was, according to Hajdu, 'A rural vernacular music sung in untrained voices accompanied by acoustic instruments, folk put a premium on naturalness and authenticity during a boom in man-made materials, especially plastics. "It sounded real – it sounded like real people playing wooden things and without a lot of prettying up and fancy arrangements and gold

lame outfits”, said the singer and guitarist, Tom Rush... Folk music was down to earth when jet travel and space exploration were emerging; while Frank Sinatra was flying to the moon, Pete Seeger was waist deep in the Big Muddy’.

In the spring of 1954, a thirteen year old girl named Joan Baez saw one of Pete’s concerts in the gym of the Palo Alto High School. The effect was much like that which occurred for Pete as a 16 year old in North Carolina. The baton may not have passed but Joan wanted to join the relay for sure. A young man named Dave Guard attended the same concert. Afterwards he bought Pete Seeger’s booklet *How To Play the 5-String Banjo* and went on to form the Kingston Trio. To a great degree it was the Kingston Trio’s 1958 hit ‘Tom Dooley’ that forced folk back into the wider public consciousness in Britain as well as in America. Bob Dylan has spoken fondly of ‘Tom Dooley’ and it was a big, big record when I was at school that year. The unconscious, and maybe unintentional, influence of Pete Seeger has been huge.

But in the summer of 1955 Pete Seeger had been called before the House un-American Activities Committee – this was at the same time as Arthur Miller. Seeger was indicted on ten counts for refusing to answer questions about his personal and political beliefs. He had to wait another five years for his trial. When it came he was found guilty and sentenced to one year in prison. He was released after four hours pending an appeal. The case against Seeger was finally dismissed by the US Court of Appeals on 18 May 1962. Nonetheless, Pete had demonstrated his mettle by his

refusal to back down on his principles even at the risk of a prison sentence. The man deserves a better press than he gets in so many Dylan articles and books. The blacklisting continued, however, and Seeger did not appear on TV until 1967. One result of this was that Bob Dylan and Joan Baez both refused to appear on the ‘Hootenanny’ show in 1963 in protest against Pete’s situation.

By the early 1960s folk music was everywhere. As Hajdu has it: ‘Pete Seeger had reason to be proud: most musicians sang and played for free in Washington Square and passed a basket for change in the coffeehouses (or “basket/houses”). The principal measure of success for the majority of folksingers was peer approval. It was a system completely untainted by professionalism...’

And then came Bob Dylan. According to Howard Sounes (*Down The Highway*) Bob Dylan saw Pete Seeger perform at a concert in Madison, Wisconsin, in January 1961. Dylan was certainly in Madison at this time. Sounes says that seeing Seeger fired Dylan’s ambitions. I have found no other reference to Dylan seeing Seeger then, but it would be a good story, if true. Either way, it would not be long before Seeger heard Dylan sing and was immediately enthralled with this new talent. Pete said about Dylan then: ‘He didn’t have to hear (a song) five times, he’d hear it once and latch right on to it... This is the folk process’. Few people had a deeper knowledge or understanding of traditional music than Pete. Writing in *Sing Out!* magazine in the autumn of 1962, Gil Turner said: ‘One night, two months ago,

Bob came flying into Folk City where I was singing. “Gil, I got a new song I just finished. Wanna hear it? The song was ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’, one of his best efforts to date in my opinion. I didn’t recognise the tune at the time and neither did Bob, but Pete Seeger heard it and pegged the first part of it as an imaginative reworking of ‘No More Auction Block’”.

Seeger had been involved in the production of a new folk magazine – *Broadside*. It was he who introduced the young Dylan to *Broadside* and over the next few years the magazine published the lyrics to 29 of Dylan’s early songs – more than any other artist. I am not saying Dylan needed *Broadside* or that he needed Seeger, but that you can’t knock Seeger for his efforts on Dylan’s part.

By the time the young Dylan attended his first Newport Folk Festival in 1963, the Folk revival was probably at its zenith. When, at the end, everyone gathered to sing Pete’s anthem ‘We Shall Overcome’,

Hajdu claims: ‘Seeger was essentially proclaiming the triumph of the political folk diaspora. It had overcome the blacklist, television, the Hit Parade, Tin Pan Alley, and rock and roll; it had never been so prominent – indeed, no other music in America was as popular as folk’. More than 200 LPs of folk music were released in 1963, including *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*.

And not just in America. In 1961 in Britain there had begun a campaign to get Seeger to perform in the UK, and specifically to get him to play the Royal Albert Hall. This necessitated persuading the US government to return Pete his passport. Lobbying by the Labour Party, the Communist Party, the Co-operative Movement and the folk community eventually prevailed and Pete Seeger played before an audience of 5,000 at the Albert Hall on 16 November 1961. It was the biggest folk event of its time and was seen as the first great gathering of the folk



Almanac Singers 1941/2
 Woody Guthrie, Millard Lampell, Bess Lomax, Pete Seeger, Arther Stern and Agnes 'Sis' Cunningham

movement in the UK. It is hard to overestimate the significance of the name of Pete Seeger at this time. He was more than a celebrity, he represented an alternative way of viewing the world for thousands of young people of my generation.

And then came Newport '65. Although the evening of 25th July 1965 has now assumed mythical status in the history of rock music and the legend that is Bob Dylan, it began as something altogether different. Howard Sounes: 'Pete Seeger introduced the evening concert as being about the serious issues in the world. These issues included the ongoing civil rights struggle and the burgeoning conflict in Vietnam'. As we know, Dylan had another agenda. Mike Marqusee (in *Chimes Of Freedom*): 'Dylan wanted to play loud music, and for the same reasons that many in the years to come wanted to hear it: the visceral thrill. To the sober-minded side of the folk revival, the hedonism was alien. The meaning resided, at least in part, in the words, and they wanted to hear them'.

When Dylan and the band kicked into 'Maggie's Farm', Seeger was affronted and angry. 'I was screaming mad', he admits, 'You couldn't understand a goddam word of what they were singing'. Joe Boyd (in *The Telegraph*) appears to be the best eye witness of what happened. He went backstage at the start of Dylan's set 'and there I was confronted by Seeger and Lomax and, I think, Theodore Bikel or somebody, saying, "It's too loud! You've got to turn it down! It's far too loud! We can't have this! It's just unbearably loud!" And they were really upset. Very, very upset'.

In *Behind The Shades*, Clinton Heylin comments: 'Seeger himself admits that he was furious with Dylan, but only because he considered the sound so distorted that nobody could understand the words. Unlike Lomax, he saw nothing fundamentally heretical about playing with electrical instruments'.

Howard Sounes writes: 'The apocryphal story is that Seeger and/or Alan Lomax actually did attempt to cut the power with an axe – axes were available – Seeger had used one as a prop during a performance of work songs – but both men are adamant they did not attempt to cut the power... Seeger says, "I did not have an axe, and I did not cut the cable. I said if I had an axe I'd cut the cable" '.

Joe Boyd, who is credited by Heylin as being the most reliable witness, makes no comment about Seeger and an axe. At the behest of Seeger and Lomax, Boyd asked Pete Yarrow to turn the sound down but Yarrow refused. 'So I went back, climbed over the fence, and by this time all I could see of Pete Seeger was the back of him disappearing down the road past the car park'.

The likely scenario is that Pete was so angry when he made his remark about 'If I had an axe...', that when he stormed off in a fury, people said, 'old Pete's gone for his axe!' And so, in the retelling, the myth grew to the point where it is told that he actually did get an axe, and where Andrew Muir can write that about the time that Seeger 'tried to cut the cables'. But he didn't.

Pete Seeger now regrets his outburst at Newport. He says Dylan was 'singing a great song – one of my favourites... I

should have come out and said “Folks, don’t boo Bob Dylan’s guitar. You didn’t boo Muddy Waters or Howlin’ Wolf. They have electric guitars. Why can’t Bob have an electric guitar?”’

One man once lost his temper. A man who normally never lost his temper. One mistake which he later regretted. Why should he still be pilloried for this after forty years?

In any case, there were valid reasons for Seeger’s frame of mind that day. Mike Marqusee: ‘To this day, Lomax, Seeger and their allies get a rough ride from many Dylan fans, as if their offence was fresh. But their objections to the new music were not as groundless, philistine or shortsighted as some would claim. It is important to understand what seemed so precious to the old guard, so worth preserving, and why Dylan going electric threatened it. The Newport Festival was a nonprofit enterprise with a social mission. It provided a then rare showcase not only for hard-hitting topical songs but also for neglected black and working-class artists. It acted as a link between the southern civil rights movement and the folk community of the urban north. Lomax, Seeger and the like had suffered under McCarthyism, when the values of the popular front seemed to have been extirpated from American life. To them, Newport represented a cracking open of a long-closed door, a precious seed; it needed to be given appropriate nurture.’

Pete Seeger is an American hero. In his career he has released over eighty albums. He admits that his voice ‘is 75 per cent gone... I can’t hold a note or sing way out there any more’. He is no Dylan but he wrote a few enduring songs: ‘If I Had A Hammer’, ‘Where Have All The Flowers Gone’, ‘Kisses Sweeter Than Wine’, ‘Turn, Turn, Turn’.

He says: ‘The artist in ancient times inspired, entertained, educated his fellow citizens. Modern artists have an additional responsibility – to encourage others to be artists. Why? Because technology is going to destroy the human soul unless we realise that each of us must in some way be a creator as well as a spectator or consumer... Make your own music, write your own books, if you would keep your soul.’

‘And: ‘It’s not how good a song is that matters – it’s how much good a song does’.

Pete Seeger is not one tenth of the artist that Bob Dylan is. I’m not claiming that, though he has written a few memorable songs. He has stood up for his principles and been prepared to suffer imprisonment for his beliefs. He has, mostly, been on the side of the angels. Pete Seeger is one of the great men of the twentieth century. He deserves more credit than many Dylan fans and writers seem to be able to find it in their hearts to allow.

Postscript: The Mike Marqusee quote at the head of this article could have been written about Pete Seeger. In fact, it was written about Muhammad Ali. Two men black-listed by the American establishment, not for their actions, but for their beliefs.

The Road Less Travelled

A Review of 'No Direction Home: The Soundtrack - the Bootleg Series Volume 7'

by Nick Hawthorne

*'I was born very far from where I'm supposed to be...so I'm on my way home' –
No Direction Home, Bob Dylan, 2005*

The theme of 'home' is all over this collection of songs, put together to make up the soundtrack to Martin Scorsese's identically-titled documentary on Dylan's life up to 1966 and doubling up as the seventh instalment in Columbia's Bootleg Series.

The phrase 'no direction home' can, of course, be found in Dylan's seminal work, 'Like a Rolling Stone', in the song's central chorus:

How does it feel

How does it feel

To be without a home

With no direction home

Like a complete unknown

Like a rolling stone?

From the earliest beginnings of Dylan's career, he has written and sung songs that deal with home in one way or another; running away from home, being away from home, rambling, a sense of isolation, having no place to fit. From one of his very earliest original songs, 'Song to Woody', through to much more recent songs such as 'Mississippi', Dylan has found himself a long way from home and longing to get somewhere else. To where is something he has spent apparently 45 years trying to figure out; this collection takes us on the early part of his amazing journey.

It also adds to the plethora of 60s Dylan that Columbia have made available in a myriad of ways, enshrining the period of Dylan's career from 1960-1966 in the annals of history. We have already had two complete live concerts from the 60s released in the Bootleg series, as well as numerous studio outtakes and other live performances, and now this. Columbia can surely consider that they have done justice to Dylan's 1960s oeuvre and turn to the rich mines of the rest of his career for the next few instalments of the *Bootleg Series*.

The series has been successful, despite the odd Dylan fan getting their knickers in a twist over selections and sequencing. Each volume has come with illuminating liner notes, expansive and glorious photography and a genuine attempt at dating and placing the material contained. Not always with total success, but Columbia are to be commended for their efforts. This seventh volume is no exception. It looks fabulous, and cleverly uses outtakes from actual album cover photo shoots on the cover of the CD jewel case and the meaty booklet within. On the booklet we get one of the shots from the *Freewheelin'* sessions, and on the CD jewel case we get a shot from the *Bringing It All Back Home* shoot. The message mirrors that of the music – ‘what is inside is familiar, but looked at from a different point of view’. The back cover shot of the booklet is very clever as well – a shot of Dylan on his motorcycle, pointing the next direction Dylan was to take on his journey, after the story told by ‘No Direction Home’ concludes.

The booklet itself is what we have come to expect – superb photographs and a lot of notes and information. There is a slightly bizarre and not entirely successful essay by Andrew Loog Oldham, former manager, producer and biographer of The Rolling Stones. An odd choice and an odd essay that will very much come down to individual taste. There are some far better notes from Al Kooper about the *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde* sessions. Finally, there is a song-by-song guide provided by Eddie Gorodetsky, an award-winning writer and friend of Dylan’s who was the writer on the

sitcom *Dharma and Greg* when Dylan appeared in it in 1999, and who also appeared in *Masked and Anonymous*. Details of the dates and personnel for each song are supplied, not always completely accurate. Still, there is lots to enjoy.

At this point there needs to be a huge disclaimer that this review is being written before the author has had the opportunity to see the documentary, which is really the wrong way round. The soundtrack album is normally heard after the film, and it is the film that gives it context; especially so with this particular soundtrack, which is telling a story through the songs. However, we are given a little helping hand by the introduction in the booklet which states:

This is not a soundtrack in the traditional sense. The film’s structure plays fast and loose with time, using a generous helping of unearthed footage from Dylan’s controversial 1966 tour of the British Isles as a centrepiece. The compilers of this collection used the songs in the film as a reference point, finding alternate takes, rare live performances and unreleased tracks that amplify the pivotal sequences in the film and avoid duplication with previously released tracks.

‘Fast and loose with time’! Sounds like our Bob...

The first song on this two-disc album fits firmly into the historical category. This is exciting stuff from that point of view – a clip of an apparent Dylan original recorded sometime in 1959, called ‘When I Got Troubles’. For some reason, we only get a minute and a half of this and it fades

out giving the distinct impression that there was more. If there was, it seems ridiculous not to include it here. The CD notes tell us that the song was recorded 'by Bob's high school friend Ric Kangas' which helps us date it a little as Dylan graduated from Hibbing High School in June of 1959, not that it could not have been recorded later in the year by the same friend of course. Several early reviews of the album have though noted that Dylan made this recording when he was 17, which would date it sometime between January and May 1959. Whichever, Dylan was very young when he recorded the song. The CD booklet also describes the song as 'most likely the first original song recorded by Bob Dylan' which, as we have no evidence to disprove this, we must take as being good enough for now and is pretty exciting historically.

The song is, however, far from being remarkable artistically. Dylan keeps a rudimentary guitar rhythm, which includes booming over hit notes, while singing coyly and tentatively on a song that clearly could benefit from a more robust vocal performance, almost a scratch vocal actually, or the sound of someone singing so as not to disturb anyone. The brief clip includes a little break in the guitar figure, a stop-start before the song fades out. Not bad, nothing special but as the first example of Bob Dylan singing and playing solo, maybe even one of his own songs (though the lyric is so generic it could easily have been learnt or heard or developed as was Dylan's wont) tremendously historic for Dylan fans and the perfect place for this

collection to start. The song fades as mentioned above, as if you were twiddling the knob of an old radio and came across this quiet ghostly song that is there one minute and gone the next, which may have been the effect aimed for.

There are of course recordings of Dylan circulating from before this period, these being the recordings he made with John Bucklen in 1958, but those are very basic home recordings of experimentation with rock and roll and rhythm and blues. 1959 seems to be the time that Dylan started getting into folk music and moving beyond the rock and roll which he had been playing up to that point. On 31st Jan 1959 he saw Buddy Holly perform (three days before Holly's death) and after this, while making regular trips to Minneapolis, Dylan seems to have been opening up to folk music, maybe realising that it held greater possibilities for him.

There could be a number of reasons for this...folk and blues could be played alone on the guitar, with no need for a band. Dylan had been in his fair share of bands and was frustrated by people stealing his players. Playing solo afforded you total freedom and independence. Folk music was also coming into vogue as something controversial. Odd to think that folk music, now considered old fogeyish and staid, was then considered more rebellious in a way than rock 'n' roll. Folk music brought with it a beatnik scene, an affiliation with the beat writers (despite the beats' preference for jazz) and a counter culture that was different to the rock and roll of the time. For Dylan, this must have been very appealing.

The album moves to its second track, and one of the highlights of the entire set. One of the numerous pleasures of Dylan's book *Chronicles – Volume One* is that it helps bring recordings from the periods he writes about in the book to life and make them seem very relevant and three-dimensional, even more so than they seemed already. This is especially true of the early recordings, as the best parts of *Chronicles* are undoubtedly the superb chapters about Dylan's arrival and early life in New York, and about his life before that in the twin cities of Minneapolis and St Paul. This is the first release of Dylan music since *Chronicles* was published, and the book has undoubtedly brought to life the world all this music was being created in.

The song is titled 'Rambler, Gambler' and is listed as being recorded by a university student in 1960. It has actually been circulating for some time, but in much inferior quality, as it is part of the so-called Minneapolis Party Tape. This dates from September 1960, so we have moved on almost 18 months from 'When I Got Troubles'. The circulating version of the Minneapolis party tape was recorded by Bonnie Beecher, an early girlfriend of Dylan's, and is in very poor sound quality – almost unlistenable. It features 11 songs and lasts about half an hour. One of the songs, listed as 'Roving Gambler', is this second song – 'Rambler, Gambler'. The sound quality, while still not perfect by any means, is a huge improvement on what circulates amongst collectors, so there is clearly a very good version of this tape available. With the benefit of this improved sound quality, we can hear what

a superb performance this is by Dylan, amazingly only 19 years old at the time.

The song is one of those typical folk mishmashes. It shares much of its lyric with 'Wagoner's Lad', which Dylan has performed several times on the Never Ending Tour. It also shares some lyrics with a version of 'Moonshiner', a song Dylan has sung so memorably. The song is also known as 'I'm a Rambler, I'm a Gambler' but has nothing in common with the song 'Roving Gambler' that Dylan performed on the Karen Wallace tapes of May 1960, and of course many times since. The voice Dylan uses on the song is what makes the performance, as with so many of Dylan's great performances.

The Wallace tapes of May 1960 revealed Dylan singing in a voice very different from the one we would hear on his debut album, *Bob Dylan*, only a short time later in 1961. His voice on the Wallace tapes is more considered, more delicate, closer to Hank Williams than Woody Guthrie. It was before the Guthrie influence had truly taken effect. The Minnesota Party Tape from a few months later was reported to show Dylan's more Guthrie-influenced voice, but to be honest, it is hard to hear on the circulating recording. Dylan does perform a number of talking blues, both by and influenced by Guthrie, so the influence was certainly there. But this much clearer recording of 'Rambler, Gambler' lets us hear a quite different Dylan voice again. The vocal is very careful, very soft – pretty even, poised and lilting at times. His pronunciation is at times very precise. Listen to the way Dylan sings 'If you get into trouble just you write after me', among other examples.

It is a beautiful performance and gives us a side of early Dylan that had not been officially released before – a true gem. And the song clearly had staying power for Dylan, as not only did he sing ‘Wagoner’s Lad’ several times on his Never Ending Tour, but he also quoted from the song in *Chronicles*:

‘There’s a lot of things I didn’t have, didn’t have too much of a concrete identity either. I’m a rambler – I’m a gambler, I’m a long way from home.’ That pretty much summed it up.’

The next song is the first live performance in front of a proper audience to appear in this collection, and is a cover of Guthrie’s most famous song, ‘This Land Is Your Land’. The recording comes from the famous concert at the Carnegie Chapter Hall in New York on November 4th 1961. Famous because it was Dylan’s first appearance in a proper concert hall, an annex of the main Carnegie Hall that held around 200 people, though it was probably not even half full that night. There have been seven songs from this concert circulating for some time (‘Pretty Peggy-O’, ‘In the Pines’, ‘Gospel Plow’, ‘1913 Massacre’, ‘Backwater Blues’, ‘Young but Daily Growing’ and ‘Fixin’ to Die’). Those seven songs have been a highlight of most Dylan fans’ collections of early material, as they give a fascinating insight into how Dylan was developing his performing style.

He comes across as very funny, self-deprecating, shy and giggling at times – perfecting that Charlie Chaplin act he reportedly had going. The audience laughs

a lot. The songs are also very worthwhile, giving some great performances, as Dylan goes through some of his songbook at the time. ‘Young But Daily Growing’ in particular is a stand-out, as Dylan again shifts his voice to the material and the mood he is trying to create, avoiding the harsher, nasal Guthrie-influenced voice for something softer and smoother that wrings every last drop of emotion from the song. Clinton Heylin reported in his day-to-day guide to Dylan that ‘This Land is Your Land’ was performed, but this gives us the first chance to hear it. And it is a beautiful, wistful performance of the song, measured and controlled, far removed from the more sing-a-long anthemic readings it has been afforded many times since.

In the first three songs we have gone from Dylan being 17 and at High School, starting to get into folk and blues music after his interest and involvement with rock and roll and rhythm and blues, to him performing a composed and beautiful version of a traditional folk song as old as the hills at the age of 19, to him singing a song by his hero Woody Guthrie in a 200-seater concert hall at the age of 20. Young but daily growing indeed, and growing so fast. The start and speed of Dylan’s journey is encapsulated by these first three songs. His journey in search of something, that rather than taking him away from his home, took him in search of it.

The next song is the sort of inclusion that will have some of the blinkered brigade whining into their beer. ‘Song to Woody’ is not an outtake of that song that had not been circulating, or a rare live version. It is the album version that can be

found on Dylan's self-titled debut album. A song that every Dylan fan will own and have heard a thousand times or more. So why include it here? Because it is absolutely vital to the film that Scorsese made and to this soundtrack which complements it, that's why. The first Dylan original to be recorded and officially released by Dylan – a tribute to his hero, set to the tune of the Guthrie song '1913 Massacre' (which you may note is one of the songs performed by Dylan at the Carnegie Chapter Hall above) – the song is of massive historical importance when considering Dylan's career. And the song's opening line is very telling:

'I'm out here a thousand miles from my home'

There's that word 'home' again. Significant that it should appear in the first line of the first original song officially recorded by Dylan. Significant also that the subject matter should be his hero Guthrie, and the musical life and journey he is about to embark on. The song is just that – an embarkation.

There should be no complaints that this song is included here. It has every reason to be, and it would have been a glaring omission if it were not here, as would the very last song on the collection, also officially released before, but we will come to that later. To stay true to the historic story being told here, it was important to have something from Dylan's first album, and this was the only track that could have been included.

The fifth track is another highlight. 'Dink's Song' (named, Dylan says, after the

person he learnt the song from) is taken from the so-called Minnesota Hotel Tape, recorded on 22nd December 1961. Although Dylan says he learnt it from Dink, the song was actually discovered by Alan Lomax who heard a woman named Dink singing the song in 1908. The recording was not made in a hotel at all, but rather at Bonnie Beecher's apartment, which was known as the Beecher Hotel because of all the people that stayed there! Excellent quality recordings of this tape have been in circulation for a long time, and in fact were included on the first ever Dylan bootleg, 'Great White Wonder', which began to circulate way back in 1969. And as anyone who has heard the recordings from 22nd December will know, 'Dink's Song' is a real gem, and it is again fitting that such a highlight should be finally officially released here.

In fact, an excerpt from the song was released on the *Highway 61 Interactive* CD-ROM that Columbia released some time ago, and the song was also available to listen to on the bobdylan.com website, but here it is in all its glory. Dylan maintains a choppy guitar rhythm perfectly, aided by his tapping foot, and sings this fantastic song brilliantly. Again the voice is something quite different to anything we have heard on this collection so far. This is harder, more affected with the Guthrie whoops in the voice – snarling some lines, adding the light and shade. A sad, sad song, and this performance at 20 years old is truly remarkable. To get inside of a song sung by an old black woman from the turn of the century to this extent demonstrates the genius of Dylan, even at this young

age. It is another song of desertion and isolation and longing, brimming with sexual need and its refrain brimful of woe:

'Fare thee well, my honey, fare thee well'

The next song is also from that 'Minnesota Hotel Tape', another song that has been officially released already (albeit, curiously, alongside an alternate 'Times They Are A-Changin'' on a special edition of the 2001 album *"Love and Theft"*), and another song that features the theme of home.

'I Was Young When I Left Home' is another of Dylan's finest performances from the early part of his career. The song is based on the traditional folk song '900 Miles' (or '500 Miles'), which Dylan probably learnt through Guthrie, but Dylan only bases his own song on the older one, and comes up with something different, and feeling both old as the hills and wholly original. It is maybe easy to see why it was included with *"Love and Theft"* if you bear that in mind. The song reads like it should be sung by a much older person, with a voice perhaps steeped in experience and regret. It is easy to forget when listening to this that Dylan was 20 when he performed it. Twenty.

The song tells the first-person narrative story of someone who left home when they were young, travelled around and 'never wrote a letter to my home'. The singer hears bad news from home, his mother is dead, his younger sister is 'all gone wrong' and his father needs him home. But the singer has not prospered after leaving home, and finds himself in poor shape, 'not a shirt on my back, not a penny on my name', and does not want to go home in that state. He has neither the

means nor the will, and is perhaps too drenched with shame. The lyric reveals a close relationship with the mother before he left home, indicating that it may have been a problem with his father that led to him leaving. A situation that would mirror Dylan's own pretty closely. The song is another sad and lonely and heartbreaking song. Dylan's own introduction to the song spells this out:

I sorta made it up on a train...It must be good for somebody, this sort of song. I know it's good for somebody. If it ain't for me, it's good for somebody.

The song has a 'Lord, Lord, Lord' refrain that gives the song a sadness other words could not conjure. The refrain is sung as if with a sorrowful shake of the head, not able to find words to express the pitifulness of the situation and the uselessness of it all. Dylan's performance is towering, from his vocal performance to the chiming guitar which is as sad and lonesome as the vocal, it has everything. It also contains another of Dylan's central themes – the wind. Dylan has been singing about that all of his career too, the wind that blows him away from or towards home perhaps. Here the singer laments:

*Used to tell my ma sometimes
when I see them riding blinds,
gonna make me a home out in the wind.
In the wind, Lord in the wind.
Make me a home out in the wind.
I don't like it in the wind,
Wanna go back home again,
but I can't go home thisaway.
Thisaway, Lord Lord Lord,
and I can't go home thisaway*

The two themes are united in that line, 'gonna make me a home out in the wind'. Dylan has been looking to the wind for answers or signs throughout his career, as he frustratedly acknowledged in the 2001 song 'Lonesome Day Blues':

*'Last night the wind was whisperin'
somethin'
I was trying to make out what it was
I tell myself something's comin'
But it never does'*

It is a timeless and peerless performance from Dylan.

Next up we move to an outtake from Dylan's second album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. The song in question is 'Sally Gal', a song well known to Dylan fans, as live versions from the era have circulated as well as studio versions from the *Freewheelin'* sessions. The song is another adapted from a folk song, this time Woody Guthrie's 'Sally Don't You Grieve'. Several takes of this were cut and this one may well have not circulated before. It is an ebullient performance, a folk rave-up full of chugging harmonica, like the folk equivalent of 'Twist and Shout'. This version most likely comes from March or April 1962 and features a bass part to augment the sound a little. The song is another that sticks to the folk theme of rambling away from home:

*'Well, I'm just one of them ramblin'
men,
Ramblin' since I don't know know
when.
Here I come and I'm a-gone again.'*

The next song is a familiar one to all – 'Don't Think Twice, It's Alright'. This is not

the album version, but the version recorded for Witmark Publishing in March 1963. Dylan is now 21. Dylan recorded many songs for Witmark over a two-year period, apparently so the publishing company could see if anyone wanted to record the songs. The version comes after the album version that was on *Freewheelin'*, so gives us a rare opportunity to hear an album song recorded again after it was released. In this case, the version is not very different and, while not superseding the original, it is none too shabby either.

Next we get another familiar song, 'Man of Constant Sorrow', and another song of rambling from home full of trouble and woe...when I got troubles indeed. This version comes from a recording for a television show entitled *Folk Songs and More Folk Songs*, both the audio and video of which have been in circulation for a while. This is a typical performance of this traditional folk song from Dylan, and another that adds to the journey we have been taken on throughout this album. Although this song has now been brought to wider acclaim by the Coen brothers film *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?*, it is as old as the hills. Dylan's version is thought to be quite unique; in true Dylan fashion, he has taken the song and developed his own variation on the melody and order of the lyric.

The next four songs all come from two concerts Dylan performed in New York in 1963. 'Blowin' in the Wind' and 'Masters of War' both come from the Town Hall concert on the 12th April 1963. Several performances from that night have already been officially released, including the

wonderful 'Tomorrow is a Long Time' and the spoken word 'Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie', neither of which would have been out of place here. Several of the songs from this concert formed part of the planned 'In Concert' Dylan album shelved by Columbia, probably due to the rate at which Dylan was developing his art. Neither of these songs was on that planned release, but it was known that 'Masters of War' had been performed that night. However, 'Blowin' in the Wind' was not previously thought to have been played at the show. We now know that it was, and it is particularly affecting, taken at a slower pace than usual and exquisitely and delicately sung. Rather a meditation than the anthem it has so often appeared to be.

In fact both performances are excellent, capturing Dylan at the peak of his protest singer period. A year later that would be in the past, he was moving so fast. That is what makes this series of performances so engaging – they capture a snapshot of a speeding bullet.

'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' and 'When the Ship Comes In' both come from the later Carnegie Hall concert on 26th October 1963. As with the Town Hall show, incomplete recordings from this concert have been in collectors' hands for many years, and some songs have been officially released (such as 'Who Killed Davey Moore?'). Songs from this concert formed the other half of the shelved 'In Concert' album mentioned above. Columbia are also giving away a CD of further songs from the concert to US buyers of various Dylan material. This contains 'The Times They Are A-Changin',

'The Ballad of Hollis Brown', 'Boots of Spanish Leather', 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune', 'North Country Blues' and 'With God on Our Side'. Although 'When the Ship Comes In' has circulated previously 'Hard Rain' had not, and these are two more stellar performances, particularly Hard Rain which sounds glorious.

The next song takes us back to the studio for one of Dylan's more famous outtakes, another that has circulated for a long time but not been released officially. The song is 'Mr Tambourine Man' and this is the early version that was recorded for *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (the song of course would eventually be rerecorded and released on *Bringing it All Back Home*). The version is notable as it features Rambling Jack Elliot and also notable because it is pretty terrible. As Jack Elliot himself said:

'They made a tape of Dylan and me, 'Hey, Tambourine Man.' I listened to it once, and I never want to hear it again. It was real bad singing. Amazingly bad.'

This was the demo version that was sent to the Byrds and led to their version of the song, and David Crosby concurred over the artistic merits of the performance:

'our manager...he brought us a demo of Dylan and Ramblin' Jack singing "Tambourine Man," which was truly awful - two guys that were not too sharp on staying on tune - but it was a great song.'

The version is quite different from the released version, and vastly inferior. Again, a clip of it had been officially released

before on the *Highway 61 Interactive* CD-ROM. It has historical worth as being the first recorded version of a classic Dylan song, but little artistic merit. We are now in June 1964. Dylan is 23 years old.

The next song is a Dylan classic of similar vintage. This version of 'Chimes of Freedom' comes from the Newport Folk Festival on 26th July 1964, and has again been circulating for a while. It is a superb performance of a tremendous song that has had few live performances, not just in the 60's but throughout Dylan's career. It is of huge historical and artistic merit and to have it here in great quality is a real bonus. These last two songs have seen Dylan build on the kind of songwriting we first encountered on this collection in 'Hard Rain', lengthy symbolic poetic work, a medium he was continuing to work with, to test and probe and expand. There would be many more of these kinds of songs in the immediate future.

The first disc of this soundtrack should have ended there, but in yet another quirk of Columbia's when it comes to Dylan albums and sequencing, they bring forward a song that belongs on the second disc to end the first. It feels wrong and totally out of place when you listen and breaks up the rhythm and pacing of this journey. It defies any logic whatsoever.

So we end with the first of two outtakes from *Bringing It All Back Home*, this one being 'It's All Over Now Baby Blue'. This version has circulated for some time again and features a slight, but effective, change to the melody line which is rather pleasing. And so ends the first disc of this set, and what will turn out to be the best disc of the set. There is so much gold on

the first disc, so much history and so many brilliant performances (plus one execrable one). As the years roll by, the recordings and live performances from the early 60s seem to grow in stature, a view borne out by the sheer quality of much of what we have heard so far. 'Rambler, Gambler', 'Dink's Song', 'I Was Young When I Left Home', all the 1963 live performances from those two landmark concerts, and the live 'Chimes of Freedom' are performances that will hold up to many, many repeat listens.

The second disc is largely made up of studio outtakes/rehearsals from Dylan's three mid-60s masterpieces, *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*, and it makes for an interesting and at times exhilarating listening experience. However, the heights of disc one are never quite scaled.

We get an alternative version of 'She Belongs To Me' to kick things off, recorded in January of 1965 and previously uncirculating. Then there is an interruption (and how) in proceedings as we are whisked to the Newport Folk Festival again, a year later than 'Chimes of Freedom'. It is 25th July 1965 and Dylan is 24 years old. This is one of the most famous and historic of all Dylan recordings – Dylan's first electric performance in concert, and what a storm it created. A storm that would rage through to the end of the 1966 tour and through Dylan's motorcycle accident and withdrawal from the spotlight (at least that was the idea), a storm that would affect the rest of his career and shape the way his career would be viewed in retrospect. That all began

with this seminal performance of 'Maggie's Farm'.

It has of course been circulating in audio and video form for ages and almost everyone will be familiar with it, but it is important for these historic recordings to be released officially and it sounds fabulous here. There have been better performances of 'Maggie's Farm' since this one, as the music becomes very one-dimensional with no chord changes where you feel there should be chord changes, but none more dramatic. The performance is alive with energy, like a damaged power line twitching in the street. It is notable for Michael Bloomfield's incendiary guitar licks, which intertwine with Dylan's machine-gun vocals for an all-out assault on the senses. No wonder some of the audience were taken aback. This moment will no doubt prove a pivotal moment of Scorsese's film and it acts as a bridge to the soundtrack, connecting all that has gone before it, from the earliest beginnings in 1959 when Dylan was unknown, through his rise from Guthrie clone to protest folk singer extraordinaire, packing out concert halls, to the sessions of his daring album *Bringing It All Back Home* which combined acoustic and electric songs.

It is at this point that 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue' should have appeared – and instead of a studio outtake, we should have had the acoustic version from that Newport set of 1965. At that show Dylan memorably reappeared after the storm of his electric set to perform two acoustic songs, one of which was a dramatic reading of 'Baby Blue', during which the lyric took on extra meaning given the

circumstances. It can be seen as a farewell, fond or otherwise – a kiss-off to those he would be leaving by the wayside on the path he had chosen to follow. The booklet notes that this is a key moment in the film and there can be no logical reason for not including it here, on a set dominated by key historical pieces of the jigsaw.

Next we have five outtakes from Dylan's masterpiece *Highway 61 Revisited*, the first of which is an up-tempo and pounding 'It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry', or 'Phantom Engineer' as it was known in its earlier incarnations. Here the song benefits again from Bloomfield's tremendous electric blues guitar playing which tears the song up, causing Dylan to really push his vocal, holding those notes forever and exclaiming with excitement 'Alright!' at one point as Bloomfield peels off a majestic solo. The song would of course be slowed down for inclusion on the album, as Al Kooper explains in the soundtrack's liner notes:

...but...when we tried it as a ballad, with Bloomfield's Corrina-like licks dancing around Bob's haunting vocal, the fast version died on the cutting room floor

Coming after the rapid-fire 'Maggie's Farm' it makes for a real sucker punch. An outtake of 'Tombstone Blues' follows, which starts out on acoustic guitar before the more familiar sound of the song kicks in, augmented by a funky fuzz-tone bass. This take features backing vocals on the chorus, which are, the liner notes tell us, from the band. This is more raucous stuff with yet more skin-stripping guitar from

Bloomfield, and the song is building in intensity when Dylan breaks down laughing and gasps 'I can't sing!'

'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues' is a more restrained version than the one which would appear on the album, and is a stately masterpiece. Many of these outtakes have not circulated before, and they are a joy to hear. Listen to the guitar figures Bloomfield plays on this song, totally different from the fret-burning blues he was peeling off elsewhere. Here he deftly adds late-night calypso figures all over the song, giving it a charm that the studio version replaced with a wasted varnish. Dylan's vocal is right on the money, rolling with the gentle waves the band is creating. What is evident though is that the lyric has not quite had its final polish, with several famous lines subtly different, and always inferior to the final version. One likes to think of Dylan listening to the playback and thinking 'that's fine, that's fine, that's not quite right, need to change that a little.'

The version of 'Desolation Row' presented offers a flip side to the studio version, which was acoustic, with Charlie McCoy threading gorgeous finger-picked almost Spanish-sounding guitar through the epic absurdist poem. This version gives us a heavier, grungier, droning version, something like 'Desolation Row' might have sounded if the Velvet Underground had recorded it on one of their less cement-mixery days. Al Kooper plays electric guitar, and with bass and Dylan's own acoustic guitar and vocal the song is given a sinister stomp. It is quite startling to hear the song performed this way, after being so

used to the version as it exists. Here, after every verse you get a three-step downward spiral of chords and notes, minor key and creepy. Dylan's vocal again features some lyric changes to the released version. This version replaces:

'They're spoon feeding Casanova to get him to feel more assured'

with:

'They're spoon feeding Casanova the boiled guts of birds'

which seems an entirely appropriate image in this film noir version of the song. David Lynch's eyes would surely light up if he read a script such as this.

The final glimpse into the *Highway 61 Revisited* sessions is given by a take of the title track itself. This take was recorded before Al Kooper suggested to Dylan that he use a police whistle throughout the song (which he did to such memorable effect). This version seems the least interesting of all the outtakes thus far, not that it isn't a very listenable and damn fine take on the song, but just because it offers very little that we don't get from the original. It feels like it is missing something, and you end up hearing the police siren even though it isn't there.

Three outtakes from Dylan's next masterpiece *Blonde on Blonde* follow, and what a varied three they are. The first is a slow, smouldering take on 'Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat', which shows us the flip side of the song and is the strongest of all these outtakes. He seemed to be trying many of these blues in both fast and slow versions, and they all seem to work equally well in

both. These sessions took place in January 1966, and Dylan is now 24 years old. It is only 26 months since his Carnegie Hall performance in New York. This performance smokes along through the vocal and the harp and guitar solos. There are some lyric changes, additions in this case:

*Well I don't drink whisky
No I don't drink gin
Well I'm so dirty honey
I been working all day in a coal bin
Right now I wanna see you
Honey will you let me in
Your brand new leopard skin pill box
hat
Well can I be a chauffeur
Honey can I be your chauffeur
Well you can ride with me
Honey I'll be a chauffeur
Just as long as you stay in the car
If you get out and start to walk you
just might topple over
In your brand new leopard skin pill
box hat'*

Both verses sound improvised on the spot (the latter as a tribute to Memphis Minnie's 'Me and My Chauffeur Blues'), with Dylan searching for the rhymes and pay-off lines, and the whole performance has a loose atmosphere to it. This song would get the reverse treatment to 'Phantom Engineer', and would be speeded up for the album and subsequent live performances.

'Memphis Blues Again' is more rehearsal than outtake. It disguises the famous riff on the song and adds a halting and funky organ break at the end of each chorus. The song is funkier all round than

the released take, which had that riff fully developed and moving into something that flowed and rolled into anthemic rock, a place it has remained in in its hundreds of subsequent live performances. This version has much to recommend it, but towards the end Dylan either forgets words or loses himself and the whole thing starts tailing off, with Dylan humming and just using it as a workout.

Dylan has lost his way with the song, but he and the band would continue to work on it. And that demonstrates the interest there is with many of these outtakes and performances. 'Leopard-Skin' aside, none matches their released counterparts, but they do offer great insight into Dylan's creative process, where a song starts from and where it ends up and how it continued to be altered and worked on in live performances. Dylan's songs have always been alive, their ever changing beats based on what Dylan referred to as the inherent architecture of the song. Here we get to listen to that process, see what worked, what didn't, and how earlier models were changed into the songs we know and love.

Finally, for the studio outtakes at least, we arrive at 'Visions of Johanna', a song that already exists in several incarnations. The *Blonde on Blonde* version seems perfect, and Dylan's acoustic version on the 1966 tour equally so. The liner notes on the album say they were looking for something different to add here, and they certainly have done that. This version of 'Visions', or 'Freeze Out' as it was alternatively titled, is again something the Velvets might have come up with. This version

was cut with The Band, and Levon Helm's anvil-bashing drumming (you can hear Mo Tucker in his playing) sets the foundations of a relentless stomp through the song, during which Robbie Robertson darts daring guitar patterns. Dylan was certainly blessed with the musicians he was working with for these sessions...if it is not Bloomfield on guitar it is Robertson, if not Helm on drums then Bobby Gregg or Kenny Buttrey. You couldn't find better players anywhere. As you listen to this, you can imagine this being played in the second set of those 1966 shows instead of the first, and what a highlight that would have been. That will have to remain a fantasy but at least we have this and that is good enough. Dylan ends the take with a howling cry – he is a long long way from home.

All the outtakes demonstrate the artistic fist that was gripping Dylan in 1965 and 66. He had already sped to that point, experiencing a dozen lifetimes in a few short years, and was now almost drowning in creativity. Take everything that appears on *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde* and everything that appears here and all the outtakes from the sessions that were already released on Biograph and the first three volumes of the Bootleg series and all the other takes of songs that circulate and it still is not everything, there is still more in the can. It was no wonder that he would feel sufficiently spent and drained and used and exhausted to withdraw from it all the same year as these recordings were made. And when he reappeared he would never be the same again.

The soundtrack ends with two performances of total drama. The film will

have been mirroring the journey that the soundtrack has taken us on and the destination for both is the UK in 1966 and the ground breaking tour with The Band (now minus Levon Helm and plus Mickey Jones) that would define Dylan's career for decades to come.

The story is well known by now, and with the release of the 1966 Manchester Free Trade Hall Concert a few years ago everyone has heard the drama for themselves. We creep into things with a version of 'Ballad of a Thin Man' from the ABC cinema in Edinburgh on the 20th May 1966. The song was a highlight of every electric set of the tour, as Dylan moved from the middle of the stage to a piano at the side, eking every piece of drama and malice from the song with an imperious sneering vocal. This version has circulated, but not in this quality, and even though the liner notes warn of less than perfect sound quality the version sounds superior to that released from Manchester on the live 66 album. These two final songs have been selected very carefully, this one for its attack on all the people who didn't get it – all the people wearing blindfolds and blinkers. All the people, as Dylan himself put it, that he wanted to 'needle'. All the people who could not follow him on the path he showed at Newport in 1965.

And everything ends with a song that has already been released officially, a song which everybody knows so well, and a moment that every Dylan fan and probably many music fans around the world know all about.

Judas!!!!!!

That is what is clearly shouted at Bob Dylan by a baying Manchester audience member. The entire electric set that night had been full of slow hand clapping and shouts of fury against the band, the sound and Dylan himself. The atmosphere was...electric. 'JUDAS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!'

I don't believe you...you're a LIAR

Was Dylan's equally famous retort. Then in the background:

get fucking loud

Drama that couldn't be invented. And then Dylan and The Band crash into a deafening, ear-splitting, slow and savage version of 'Like a Rolling Stone', the song that defines this whole project, and maybe Dylan's whole career. You sit listening to Dylan screaming out the words:

How does it feel

How does it feel

To be without a home

With no direction home

Like a complete unknown

Like a rolling stone?

You can hear the anger in his voice, the hurt in his voice, the arrogance in his voice, the 'fuck you' in his voice and most of all you can hear the journey he has made since the start of this soundtrack, in only seven years. As Dylan said in the quote at the very top of this review, he thinks he was born a long way from where he was supposed to be...born a long way from home. He seemed to do all that he could to turn his back on his own past, via diversion and invention. He was welcomed into folk music like a prodigal

son and found himself wearing clothes that he found uncomfortable. In 'Chronicles Volume One' Dylan said:

The folk music scene had been like a paradise that I had to leave, like Adam had to leave the garden. It was just too perfect.

And he went on to add:

The road out would be treacherous and I didn't know where it would lead but I followed it anyway.

Which brings us to the poem by Robert Frost from which I took this piece's title:

*TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

This article is dedicated to Max Hawthorne. Many thanks to Homer and 1880 or so for their assistance with it.

One of first things *No Direction Home* hits you with is the bleak vast whiteout nothingness of a Minnesota blizzard and it seems like time stops and it seems like the film stops and at first you're not even sure what it is and you have to stop and think about that, and then it moves back and forth in time to on-stage madness and back to this '50s town in the middle of the bleak whiteout nowhere. And then in the shadows you see him much older talking about the sounds the radio brought in late at night from far away and perfect – you see some kid sleeping next to a blasting radio and I had to stop think how some people now barely know what a radio is or what it did. And I think back to how late at night, long after I was supposed to be at sleep I'd lie in bed, the radio right behind me, turned down real low, twisting that dial real real slow to try and get those sounds in from far away, which wasn't all that easy because I was living on the outskirts of the radio capital of America, which had hundreds of stations of its own, but late at night you could tune in Louisville Kentucky. Windsor Ontario and sometimes Nashville, but it was a different world then.

And then some of the guys who were coming in on the radio, Hank Williams, Webb Pierce, Gene Vincent, Johnny Ray take the screen, and it doesn't matter who they did or didn't show. And the guy in the shadows comes back to say just what those sounds on the radio in the night did to him, did for him and even now he can't really explain it, but it's written in the lines of his face and it's there in the centuries of his eyes.

And slowly it builds to reveal someone who was always ready to move on, lest anyone catch up with him, yet for someone who never wanted to look back, when he does look back on his first girlfriends, the camera provides a priceless moment when he says, 'Those girls brought out the poet in me,' and he is on the verge of cracking into hysterical laughter and trying his best not to, and for anyone looking for something to be revealed, it's all right there in those few seconds.

And so the film leaves Hibbing, moving briefly to Minneapolis, perhaps the place where he truly found his destiny and all this time there are flash forwards and the cast of characters slowly emerges, all people who were there, people who took part, people who knew him, people he knew and people who were aware.

One of the best surprises is Paul Nelson, cofounder of *The Little Sandy Review*, a tiny alternative to *Sing Out!* magazine, who later became managing editor of *Sing Out!*, and his chronicle of what went down at Newport in 1965 is the one I've always referred to, the one I've kept and perhaps that one article did more to enhance what went on that night than anything else that came after. And some of the stories Nelson tells show this is no mere puff piece.

But more important Minneapolis was where Dylan first truly immersed himself in folk music and Woody Guthrie; Dylan really talks about how Guthrie affected him, how his songs 'could show you how to live,' and luckily we are treated to film clips of Guthrie, and film clips of Odetta singing a field holler, 'Water Boy' and playing a massive guitar and Dylan talks about how her rhythm showed him a whole other way of playing and along the way more characters such as Tony Glover are brought into the picture. Glover was a great harp player and member of the incredible blues trio Koerner, Ray & Glover. And Koerner, Ray and Glover, were deep, deep into the blues and their playing backed it up. Few came as close as they did, and they never got either the recognition or the money they deserved, but there's a whole lot of people who found about Blind Willie McTell, or Big Joe Williams or Sleepy John Estes because of those guys.

And then the film moves to New York and Greenwich Village and not only the folk music scene, but the beat scene. And the film through brilliant use of old film clips and photographs interspersed with

memories of a whole new group of characters captures it, what people looked like, what buildings looked like and from those scenes the feel of what it was like. Liam Clancy, brilliant in a bar with a half mug of beer, letting the actor in him come out, as he lets you in on how incredible thing it must have been to watch Dylan grow and change, and how he was so many things at once and always moving, always changing, and how Dylan wouldn't let him alone, but there's no doubt at all how much he truly loves, respects and is amazed by him and when he speaks the word poet, or the word comic, or talks about Dylan Thomas or Chaplin, or the word writer it's done with reverence: that a poem is a sacred thing, that art is a sacred thing, something of wonder to be cherished. And some may wonder why is this Irish guy in this movie? Perhaps along with providing a non-American view not only of Dylan, but of America and Greenwich Village, it just might be that Bob Dylan got a whole bunch of his best melodies from songs that Liam Clancy sang.

And then there's Dave Van Ronk, intellectual ragtime, bluesman, who applied jazz to guitar and came up with something different. Astute, brilliant, in his own life extremely political, never taking part in the songs for politics movement or whatever it was, though he befriended most who did. And even though Dylan took from him in a way that would make some people furious for life, to his credit – and he deserves as much credit as anyone deserves – he's able to see the humor in it, that in the end it's comedic drama in the grand play of life.

And then Izzy Young, sometimes gruff, totally New York, proprietor of the Folklore Center, a store that was as much of a way of life as anything, that probably barely broke even all of its existence, but was Mecca for anyone interested in folk music. And you could go in there and spend hours just looking at stuff, and if you went in often enough he'd talk to you and if he got to know who you were, he'd really talk to you. Asides from not really making a living at the Folklore Center, Izzy presented concerts, usually in churches, and wrote what was essentially the gossip column for *Sing Out!* magazine, 'Frets and Frails,' where he'd make no bones about putting Dylan down at times. But when he says: 'it was worth it, the guy wrote great songs,' it gives where he's coming from a whole other perspective.

While all these interviews are happening interspersed at times with Dylan's own comments on the scene and of course music, the film flashes forward to glimpses of England, 1966, sometimes for a second, sometimes more. But more and more people are introduced. John Cohen, musician, photographer, filmmaker, perceptive, honest, you wish he'd talk for hours. Bruce Langhorne, guitarist for so many different people, Odetta, the Clancy Brothers, on the scene seemingly forever, his eyes lighting up as he describes the *Bringing It All Back Home* sessions, the fun, the freedom, the only person in the film to give Albert Grossman credit.

Suze Rotolo opening up another window, gently, on what what those times were like and then Joan Baez, and

great is the only word to describe her in this interview. And while some of the stories told here, she's written about or talked about, it's a whole other thing watching her tell it, because as painful and hard as it might be, she is able to see past that and to see her tell about Dylan writing in her house and asking what she thought is incredible.

Also not to be discounted is Mark Spoelstra, in fact the only other person in the film who was part of the so-called topical song movement, to also have his songs published by *Broadside* and to be on the *Broadside Vol. 1* album along with Blind Boy Grunt. Spoelstra was one of the most talented and also one of the least known of that whole group of people. A great 12-string player and a strong soulful singer, as well as a poetic writer, his career was pretty much derailed because he was a conscientious objector during the mid-'60s. While he had already recorded two albums for Folkways, he managed a breakthrough album *5 and 20 Questions* (with liner notes by Richard Farina) on Elektra in 1965, but because he was in alternative service, he wasn't able to tour to promote it and though he issued a few other recordings later on including some on Columbia, his career never really blossomed.

There is also Allen Ginsberg, describing how he wept when he first heard 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall,' because he realized that the torch had been passed, and the memory almost breaks him up again. But it's not only the people, but how the interviews are used to build up to a picture of not only what the times were like but how they felt.

And throughout all this Dylan is constantly soaking everything in, constantly moving, realizing when his first album is finally released that he's way past it, and suddenly writing, turning out song after song, anywhere he can and not even sure why.

And then things start moving real fast, and at the Newport Folk Festival for all intents and purposes he was crowned if not the king, the new young prince, the spokesmen of the spokesmen and a month later he's singing for thousands at the March on Washington and you have to remember that most people there or watching it on television had no idea who he was.

A little over two months later the president is shot. A week later I saw Dylan for the first time in concert. The theater was nowhere close to being full and probably many of those attending took the short train ride from New York City to Newark, Newark, New Jersey.

A few weeks after that, he was given the Tom Paine award, and I remember hearing about that from people that I knew long before I read about it, and at the same time the press, the big magazines, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Life* with *Newsweek* being the most damaging had already started their assault. And while the movie doesn't go into this, the gist of the assault was along with things like dirty, punctuates his words with obscenities, photos with captions such as 'bearded bodyguards,' and ultimately: really a Jew from Minnesota.

The point is however that he'd only had the crown of the new folk messiah, the new Woody Guthrie for less than five

months, and was giving it up, though his third album, the one that in a sense was the most overtly political wasn't even released yet, though its final track provided a clue that he'd already moved on.

At this point enters Bob Neuwirth, who would be for all intents and purposes the backstage ringmaster of the Bob Dylan circus. And while 'It's Alright Ma' plays in the background he points out that nothing like this had ever been written before, and he's right. And he also points out that at that time, none of the people doing things that are shown in this movie, whether writing songs, playing music or making movies were doing it to make money. They were doing it to do it, they were doing it to say something, doing it because they had to do it. And then as if to qualify it all, he points out that the size of the concerts Dylan was playing wasn't all that huge. 'Twelve-hundred people' he says, there's probably that many people right now waiting for the D train at Sheridan Square.

And then, there is Al Kooper telling once again the story of the 'Like a Rolling Stone' session and even though he's told this story dozens of times, he remains charming and funny, doing giving a hysterical imitation of producer Tom Wilson. Along with that is a great story from Tony Glover on how 'It Takes a Lot to Laugh' reached final arrangement and this is in tandem with footage of producer Bob Johnston in which he shows that he attended the Sam Phillips school for crazed southern record producers was not the only maniac from the South to produce great records.

And so it keeps building, first to Newport '65, then to Forest Hills, and if there's questions about booing at Newport, there's no questions about Forest Hills, it's all in Paul Nelson's eyes when he talks about it being scary. I was at that show, and it's a miracle that a riot didn't break out that night. That's how intense it was.

Throughout it all, the film keeps fast-forwarding to 1966, Dylan on-stage with marvelous footage of solo acoustic renditions of 'Mr. Tambourine Man,' and 'Visions of Johanna' shown for the first time. But each time it goes forward it gets a little more intense and a little scarier whether onstage or off.

As it goes on the press conferences and interviews grown more and more absurd, with Dylan at first playful and funny and at the end plain exhausted, and the questions asked more bizarre, from the very strange person at the San Francisco press conference asking about the Highway 61 Revisited album cover to reporters who had never heard a song, let alone an album, had no clue at all who they were talking to and were probably fed questions by an editor or in some cases a TV producer. It's easy to see why Dylan treated the press like he did, not to mention the fans.

And through it all, there are magnificent performances and yes, they're not complete. But so what? It's not a concert film, it's a filmography of a certain period. And the performances say it all, just the growth and the change of his onstage presence is amazing as he grows from a sometimes comical bumbler, to a performer dead-sure of what he's doing to the

frenetic maniac with megaphone hands on 'Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat.'

What this live footage also does whether it wants to or not is chronicle the loss of innocence. The guy who could giggle back one-liners while moving with the grace of a manic Chaplin has turned into some dour stoned marionette taunting, daring the audience. 'This is a folk song,' he sneers to one English crowd. At as it gets closer to the end you see how exhausted he is, strung out on speed and god knows what else, and the impact is devastating because it hits you how close he was to not being. And hitting even harder is that the insanity and the absurdity of the whole situation, this constant furor appears to be ultimately about playing with a band. And Dylan is generous towards that band in the interview, 'They were gallant, like knights, sticking with me through all that. I have to give them credit.'

Sometime back in the early '70s in some crazy store that sold all kinds of things from records and books to hash pipes and t-shirts, I came across this sort of huge book/magazine titled *Praxis One, Existence Men and Realities*, with a cover photo of Bob Dylan in Israel wearing a yarmulke. I bought it immediately of course. In an article on *John Wesley Harding*, was an illustration, a kind of cartoon illustration of drawings taken from photographs. The first was Dylan playing an electric guitar in the studio, the next was the suited Dylan with shades, playing the electric with surrounded by a halo of light. The next was the same picture except it was a skeleton playing a

guitar of fire. The final panel was the *John Wesley Harding* picture with an acoustic guitar drawn in at his side. The last few scenes of *No Direction Home* reminded me of that drawing.

No Direction Home is a near perfect depiction of a period of time, what it meant and a man who was and shall remain one of the most important figures of that time, and for those who know one of the most important figures of music period. As Dave Van Ronk says in the film, 'If you believe in a collective American unconsciousness, Bobby tapped into it,' or as Joan Baez says, 'If you go along for the ride, he goes way deep.'

What Martin Scorsese has done is by taking old footage from a variety of sources, photographs and people's recollections, is tell a cohesive story designed for maximum impact. And he did it brilliantly. There are little things one can quibble over, a '64 photo in a '63 sequence, this song or that album not being mentioned, one part of a story over another. For the most part such complaints are minor. As Bob Dylan once

said describing how he figures out what songs he's going to perform, 'It's not so much what to put 'n, but what to leave out.' And yes some people and some stories are left out. But there's a million things to realize while watching this and while thinking about it afterwards. One is that the majority of people interviewed for this movie all had very good reasons to be totally damning but instead they all were generous.

And as for the interview with Dylan himself, well he's as sly as ever, but he does let out some things and some things you have to be on the ball to catch. Sometimes it's just in the way he phases something, at other times, it's how he tries (often failing) to hide a smile and sometimes it's in what he doesn't say.

And of course the gimme crowd will complain about the songs, and how they're cut or how they're used, and they'll want more and more and more, but it's not a concert film.

But if you want to know how it felt, then *No Direction Home* will certainly point the way.

Not A Definitive Person: or, All Directions Home

by Stephen Scobie

1. Martin Scorsese structures *No Direction Home*, his magisterial but problematic film about Bob Dylan, around paradoxical references to 'home.' The title is itself a denial. Dylan, in what is arguably the definitive performance of his career, claims that he has NO direction home. But what he says in the opening moments of this movie is somewhat different. And what he says at the end is different again.

Here's how it begins: 'I had ambitions to set out and find, like an odyssey, going home somehow – set out and find this home that I'd left a while back, and couldn't remember exactly where it was. But I was on my way there, and encountering what I encountered on the way was how I envisioned it all. I didn't really have any ambition at all. I was born very far from where I was supposed to be, and I'm on my way home...'

So much for Duluth, or Hibbing, or Minnesota.

And then Scorsese cuts into 'Like a Rolling Stone,' 'with no direction home.'

And here's how, almost four hours later, it ends:

Bob is utterly, devastatingly wasted. It's 1966, and he isn't anywhere near home. In fact, he's damn near dead. He's giving an interview which he clearly doesn't want to give. He rubs his fingers to his eyes, and he rocks back and forth, looking as if he is about to pass out at any moment. 'I want to go home,' he says. 'You know what home is? I don't want to go to Italy no more. I don't want to go nowhere no more. You end up crashing your private airplane in the mountains of Tennessee, or Sicily. I don't know. I just want to go home.'

And then Scorsese cuts into 'Like a Rolling Stone,' 'with no direction home.'

Only this time he includes the introduction.

That infamous person in the audience yells 'Judas!' And Bob epically responds: 'I don't believe you. You're a liar!' And then he turns to the band, and yes, yes, yes, finally we have it on film, at last it is clear and indisputable, here it is, the greatest Dylan line of all time: 'PLAY IT FUCKING LOUD!'

Everything – Bob, the film, the concert – comes home. 'Bringing it all back home.' That's always been what it's all about. 'Home.' It's the secret/sacred word in the whole Dylan vocabulary.

2. Even so, Liam steals the show.

The best moments in Scorsese's film come from Liam Clancy. He gives an impromptu bar-room performance of 'Girl of the North Country,' which is I think the finest cover version of a Dylan song that I have ever ever heard; it is gorgeously, absolutely, painfully beautiful. Then at one stage he recalls giving advice to Bob (after, he claims, thirty pints of Guinness): 'No fear, no envy, no meanness.' And at another point he says, 'In old Irish mythology, they talk about shape-changers. He changed voices, he changed images, and

it wasn't necessary for him to be a definitive person. He was a receiver, he was possessed, and he articulated what the rest of us wanted to say and couldn't say.' All that I, personally, have ever wanted to say about Bob Dylan is encompassed in that comment. I really shouldn't write this review. I should just quote that line, shut up, and go home.

But as Samuel Beckett said: I can't go on. I'll go on.

3. I have a weakness for the name 'Dylan'; I spot it everywhere. Any combination of the letters 'Dyl' will catch my eye, from the oddest of angles. Sometimes, of course, I end up looking at a strange chemical product called Dylex; or, more sadly and predictably, at a volume of Dylan Thomas. Sometimes I just idly get caught by 'idly'. The other day, I went to a party at the house of a new colleague, who had recently moved into town, and I hadn't been in his living room for more than a couple of minutes before I noticed, at the end of a miscellaneous bookshelf, his copy of *Chronicles: Volume One*. (Earlier in the day, I had bought a paperback copy myself, not because I needed it, but for its prefatory fifteen pages of excerpts from rave reviews.) The name 'Dylan' just grabs my attention, at any time, in any form.

For the past month or so, it has been more than usually inescapable. I could scarcely open a newspaper without seeing a story about the new *Bootleg Series* album, or the forthcoming PBS documentary, or the 'sellout' to Starbucks. Friends who know of my obsession have been kindly bombarding me with reminders: 'Stephen, I don't know if you've heard, but apparently Martin Scorsese has made a film about Bob Dylan...' And I smile politely and allow how, just possibly, I may already have heard...

September has been Dylan saturation month. (I'm tempted to say that there has been a 'flood' of material, and then to quote all the Dylan lines about 'down in the flood', or 'high water everywhere', but in the aftermath of Katrina and Rita these references might be somewhat questionable.) The exposure has been in its way very nice – it's pleasant to have one's obsession gratified – but it's also been rather troubling. All the attention paid to Bob has been concentrated, to an almost maniacal point of exclusion, on the years from 1961 to 1965, thus reinforcing the most limiting and pernicious myths about his career. The much vaunted 'new' material has either not been particularly new, or else has not revealed anything illuminating about Dylan's artistic achievement. At the end of this month, I am certainly very glad to have seen and heard all this flood, but I can't say that my view of Bob Dylan (as opposed to my view of Liam Clancy) has drastically changed.

4. By far the most negligible contribution to the Great Bob Dylan Month is *The Bob Dylan Scrapbook: 1956-1966*. This volume is, frankly, an attempt by Simon & Schuster to cash in on the success of *Chronicles*. There are some good things about it: the enclosed CD of Dylan interviews has fascinating moments; there are some lovely photographs; and the pull-out scraps of handwritten and typewritten lyrics are impeccably reproduced. Interacting with the book is a whole lot of fun.

But the main text, by Robert Santelli, is utterly insipid and boring. It has nothing new to contribute to Dylan studies. Indeed, it blithely perpetuates two of the biggest errors in Dylan criticism. It repeats the myth about *Hard Rain* being inspired by the Cuban Missile Crisis (a story explicitly disavowed in the liner notes to both *Bootleg Series 7* and the

Starbucks Gaslight tapes). And it repeats Bob Spitz's egregious misquotation of the 'drug song' reference to 'Visions of Johanna.' This text is lazy, irresponsible journalism. Enjoy the book for its inserts. Just don't read it.

5. I don't like Starbucks coffee. It's too dark and strong and bitter for me. But I went in anyway to buy my copy of the Gaslight concert. Nor am I particularly bothered by HMV's fit of snit about the Starbucks exclusive deal. I can live in the corporate world.

So I have just two comments on this disc. One, it is superb sound quality, far better than any previous release.

Two, it's ridiculously under-representative. Standard bootleg versions of the Gaslight concerts have 17 tracks; this one has 10. Lovely, gorgeous 10. But still only 10. What happened to the other 7?

6. As for the *Bootleg Series 7 / No Direction Home* soundtrack CD, I have mixed feelings. It's wonderful, I want it, I couldn't be without it. There are splendid recordings here (and again, even if you already have six bootleg copies of the Minnesota Hotel Tapes, you don't have 'Dink's Song' in this kind of sound quality). There is a magnificent version of Woody Guthrie's 'This Land Is Your Land,' which is so often reduced to an anthemic, feel-good sing-along, but is here given a slow, almost philosophical reading. And it's certainly good to hear the infamous Newport 'Maggie's Farm' in full contrast to its inane introduction. There's all sorts of things I like on this record.

But at the same time, it really doesn't add any new insights or startling innovations. Of all the alternate versions of officially released tracks, there are none which I do not find fascinating, but also none which I would prefer to the released version. I love the rough, slow, bluesy 'Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat,' and I am delighted to hear two new verses to it, but I still think he made the right choice of which take to release on *Blonde on Blonde*.

Which begins to raise an interesting question. We (that is, Bob Dylan collectors and addicts) have always assumed that his archives contain hidden treasures, unreleased songs that will radically change all our assumptions about his work – in the way which, for instance, unreleased songs like 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' or 'Blind Willie McTell' did. But here is what appears to be an exhaustive trawl through the archives, and it produces nothing equivalent. Lovely songs, for sure, but nothing that is going to change the whole way you think about the singer's career.

Maybe it's all over? Maybe we have heard it all?

7. The same question, I'm afraid, haunts Scorsese's film. Again, it's wonderful; I will watch it over and over again; I love it. But again, it doesn't tell me anything about Bob Dylan that I didn't already know. Am I just a jaded scholar and completist? Over the past few weeks, I must have internet read a hundred ecstatic reviews, which tell me that 'even Bob Dylan fans' will have their 'jaws drop' at the previously 'unseen material' Scorsese has had access to. Well, sorry, but I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of moments I had not seen before. Is that just me, the collector, boasting? Or is it the fact that Dylan oddities are in far wider circulation than this film's reviewers know about?

And excuse me, what is Scorsese doing with some of his editing choices? There is this sublime sequence of Dylan improvising a rap on a London store sign advertising the

bathing of dogs and the selling of birds. The whole scene was shown at the Seattle exhibit this year, and it is one of the supreme moments of Dylan's performance art. Scorsese chooses to edit it down to less than one minute, and loses most of its impact. Even the 'Judas' incident is muffled. Sorry, the reverential attitude towards Scorsese's editing skill simply does not hold up for me at the crucial moments.

There are also huge holes in this film, which surely need some explanation. As I've said, the film concentrates obsessively on the early 60s; yet it contains no interviews at all with the musicians most responsible for the sound of these years, the back-up band from these years, The Band. Some of these choices are obvious: Richard Manuel and Rick Danko are, alas, dead; Garth Hudson, it appears, talks to no one; Levon Helm has quarreled with everyone; but what happened to Robbie Robertson? – who is, by all accounts, a close friend and collaborator of Martin Scorsese. His absence from this film speaks volumes about at least one direction home.

8. So here is the crucial question about the Dylan flood, the Dylan month. It has all assumed – apparently (and this is a major point) with Dylan's approval – that the key period is indeed 1961-1966. And yes, there is a good deal to be said for this argument. These were the years when Dylan broke onto the music scene, and transformed the whole face of 'folk music'; made it political, and then personal; turned it inside out and then left it; brought it all back home as a rock singer and transformed that genre too; became in a single year the most influential singer in the history of popular music; laid down the three greatest albums the world has ever seen ... yeah, it's all there.

But it's not just that. There is also everything after that – the splendour of the *Basement Tapes*; the austere glory of *John Wesley Harding*; the mellow loveliness of *Nashville Skyline*; the minimal masterpiece of *Planet Waves*; the naked emotion of *Blood on the Tracks*; the high drama of *Desire* – oh shit, I could go on, all the way through the 80s and 90s – has there ever been a greater album (I mean this seriously) than *Street-Legal*? – not to mention the all-encompassing re-visions of *Good As I've Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong*? – and we aren't even talking about *Time Out Of Mind* or "*Love and Theft*" – NONE of which are even mentioned in Scorsese's film.

We seem to be back in that old tired myth about Dylan going out in a blaze of glory when he yells 'Play it fucking loud!' to The Band. It's as if Dylan had truly died in that 1966 motorcycle accident, as so many of his so-called fans wish he had, becoming an avatar of John Keats, dying young for his art. But he didn't. Thank God he didn't. Survival is a much more impressive achievement. I'd still much rather hear Bob Dylan live in concert in 2005 than dead in 1966.

9. So let's come back to Liam Clancy. What he says is true, Bob Dylan is still a shape changer, still a receiver. His performance today is just as alive, just as a dynamic, as anything on this movie. He changes shape with every song. He still receives the whole tradition, and passes it on.

Or listen to Allen Ginsberg, who in this film 'looks just like a ghost,' and still, dying, has the presence to speak the truth. Dylan, he says, 'has become a column of air ... identical with his breath.' Even Liam doesn't come as close as that. Thank you Allen, still, for everything. If there was a home that Bob was trying to get back to, Allen, dearest, it was you.

61 Minutes: A Second

by John Gibbens

1. A second reading of *Chronicles* shows how artful it really is. The first went by fuelled on pure fascination and with the taste of its strangeness keeping you wanting more. The first book I'd read for quite some time that I kept back the last few pages of, not wanting it to end, like the final spoonful of a fine chocolate mousse, home-made by madame.

2. What were the main surprises? The number and richness of its tributes. No character seems to enter without the intention to praise them. One long Acknowledgements page made to stand at the forefront of a life's work.

3. And? The shock of leaping from chapter 2 to chapter 3 – from this generous eye with nothing to win and nothing to lose, to the outrageous bitterness of the blast against, of all things, the counterculture.

4. You couldn't miss on the most cursory reading the deeply contrarian or tricksterish aspect of the form: the way that the narrative vaults the very years of the songs and records and events that are the sine qua non of the book itself. The hole is glaring on the first run through. With hindsight or a second pass, the weird structure becomes less unreasonable, not so mule-headed and more beautiful in its own right.

5. The chapter I least enjoyed at first was the fourth, 'Oh Mercy', which was the one I enjoyed most the second time around...

6. Time travels strangely here, and you can easily lose all track of it. Each time the author takes a retrospective starting point, rather than make it the beginning of a forward-moving narrative, he begins to free-associate around it, flashing forwards and backwards all over the place. Yet the effect seems more true to the actual associative organisation of our memories than any artificially constructed day-stream would be. The technique is reminiscent of the 'epiphanies' or 'radiant moments' espoused by James Joyce in his own fragmented and fictionalised 'autobiography', *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

7. Joyce, funnily enough – and sadly, to my mind – is the only individual to really catch the sharp side of Dylan’s tongue in the book – ‘the most arrogant man who ever lived’. Even Ezra Pound, after a damning little resumé, is only dismissed with: ‘I never did read him.’ These writers crop up during an account of a meeting with Archibald MacLeish. It’s odd that Dylan thinks of asking him to explicate Joyce, then drops the idea, but doesn’t mention that MacLeish, 20 years earlier, had vigorously defended the awarding of the Bollingen Prize to Pound for his *Pisan Cantos*, and had campaigned to get him released from mental hospital, and his indictment for treason quashed.

8. What is the meanin’ of ‘Markin’ Up the Score’? The first thing that comes to mind is a sporting reference. Dylan saves till the end the fact that Lou Levy, with whom the book opens, is a baseball fanatic. But he does drop in on a sports champion on the first page – Jack Dempsey. (Later, in the desperate hour recorded in ‘New Morning’ he’ll compare his situation to a boxer’s; in fact, to both of the boxers in one match.) So, if this is a contest, how does the score stand? It surely shows Dylan with a commanding lead: from complete unknown to major-label contract in about 10 months. Those months are the fixture around which the whole story, or at least this instalment, revolves.

9. ‘Markin’ Up the Score’ comes close to ‘Makin’ Up the Score’ in the scene where the little guy resolutely refuses to tell the publicity man, Billy James, the real score. So early in his supposed autobiography he

depicts himself making up a fictitious life story (and telling it to a man whose name combines the West’s two most legendary outlaws, Billy the Kid and Jesse James). We can’t say we weren’t warned.

10. So what is the point of Clinton Heylin scolding him for factual and temporal inaccuracy? Do I believe that Ray Gooch, Chloe Kiel and their apartment actually existed? Actually, I think it most likely that they didn’t. The very detail Dylan goes into about their furniture seems to tell me that. Do I believe I am seeing his world of people an’ things? Yes I do.

11. In 1798, Blake (I mean William, not Blind) wrote in his copy of the Bishop of London’s *Apology for the Bible in a Series of Letters addressed to Thomas Paine*: ‘I cannot conceive the Divinity of the books in the Bible to consist either in who they were written by, or at what time, or in the historical evidence which may be all false in the eyes of one man & true in the eyes of another, but in the Sentiments & Examples given to us of the perverseness of some & its consequent evil & the honesty of others & its consequent good. This sense of the Bible is equally true to all & equally plain to all. None can doubt the impression which he receives from a book of Examples.’

12. What kind of book is *Chronicles*? Fictional memoir, or memorial fiction, or automythography, perhaps. What it is least is a chronicle – a straight record of events in the order they happened. Perhaps the plural itself tell us so – how many chronicles is this, exactly? It also pulls our ears a little towards ‘canticles’ – in other words,

songs. It's a 'life' that is 'bigger than life', like the songs it says 'you want to write'. Crucially, 'chronicles' points to the word 'time', rather than 'memory' or 'self-life-writing'. It's a song where time really gets to stretch out.

13. 'Markin' Up the Score' could also refer to a musician making notes for a performance. In this case the 'score' is the author's lifetime, of which this telling is one performance.

14. A score is twenty. He says quite particularly, of John Hammond: 'He looked at the calendar, picked out a date for me to start recording, pointed to it and circled it, told me what time to come in and' [markin' up the score?] 'to think about what I wanted to play.' He particularises this again in the last few pages: 'John picked out a date on the calendar for me to come back and start recording...' And that date, carefully marked? The twentieth, of November 1961.

15. Talking of cunning hints, Jack Dempsey says, when he hears the 'kid' writes songs: 'Oh, yeah, well I hope to hear 'em some of these days.' Turn the page and the next line reads: 'Outside *the wind was blowing...*' He'd hear that one soon enough.

16. This author is a specialist in the creative misuse of language. One example from his recent lyrics: 'For whom does the bell toll for love?' There's one 'for' too many in that sentence, for it to mean what it originally meant. But as sung it means the bell is tolling for love – which could mean for the death of love. However, the

one that tolls for love is usually a wedding bell, not a funeral knell. So the following line – 'It tolls for you and me' – may mean we're getting married, not that we must die.

17. Another favourite from the same set of songs, though I'm not so sure this one is not a slip of the tongue: 'that I didn't have to want to have to deal with'. I had to deal with Mr Goldsmith, but I didn't want to: a statement of necessity. I didn't *have* to *want* to do that: a statement of courage.

18. So there was going to be a problem copy-editing this book. It would have been a shame to lose the gulping gaffe of 'a Honorary Doctorate'. Even the chaos of tenses in his encounter with Archibald Macleish – 'He got straight to it, starts right up the track'; shifting back and forth from 'tells' to 'told' – contribute to the portrait of confusion in this chapter. But why spell Zoot Sims with two m's, or *commedia dell'arte* with one? Past publishing ventures have shown Mr Dylan to be not the most assiduous reader of his own proofs, but I wonder if a marked-up set was even tried on him? Then again, the presence of meaningless mistakes may help to smuggle through more meaningful ones.

19. Word salad: chop two or more possible phrases up and toss them together: 'there was a noticeable shift on his part to represent me'; 'quickly all the great rags changed me overnight'; 'I didn't want to act selfishly on his time'; 'pretty whitewashed and wasted out professionally'; 'catchphrases and metaphors combined with a new set of ordinances that evolved into something different that had not been heard before'.

20. On second reading, I still find the description of the 'system' or 'style' or 'method' of playing that Dylan learned from Lonnie Johnson to be almost entirely opaque. I think it takes some deliberate application of skill to go on for three or four pages in a 'technical' discussion of a musical approach without ever making it entirely clear, or even partially clear, what you are talking about. Sometimes he seems to be talking about simply playing triplets; at others it seems to be a matter of picking out sequences of three notes from the scale of whatever key the song is in (regardless of the accompanying chord at the moment? – or is it the same sequence of notes throughout any one performance of any one song?) There are some stunningly impenetrable phrases in this passage: 'Because you're thinking in odd numbers instead of even numbers you're playing with a different value system.' 'There are an infinite number of patterns and lines that connect from key to key – all deceptively simple.' Oh really? 'Triplet forms would fashion melodies at intervals...' 'Thematic triplets...' '...some exploited fix point...' '...it's geometrical...' Of this whole description the best description is its own closing line: 'Nothing would be exactly right.'

21. On second thoughts, it would be as impossible to 'sivilize' the prose of *Chronicles* as that of *Huckleberry Finn*, a book conspicuously missing from the reading lists herein.

22. Rather than a beginning, middle and end, the book has an inside and an outside. Rather like the form that some

of Dylan's early LPs take, as described in my book *The Nightingale's Code* (Touched Press, 2001, available from www.touched.co.uk, or amazon.co.uk, or through your local bookshop. End of plug.) The ending comes back round to meet the beginning.

23. I met a man in the Village Voice bookshop in Paris who said he had typed a bookleg of *Tarantula* in the early 70s, when he worked at a shop called Unicorns in Brighton. He'd recently seen a copy going for £800 on eBay. He said the voice of *Chronicles* didn't seem to him to be Dylan's. He said his name was Mohammed bin Solomon, but I don't think it was.

24. Your life has a story, or call it a spiritual development, which a purely chronological telling may not most clearly represent. One step on the way may not have entirely preceded, in the daily order of events, the one that followed it. The two may have been more entangled in time than the sequence you later understand. If this book is not a record of the quotidian facts, to me it rings true as the story of the original growth of 'the Real man, the Imagination which liveth for ever', and of two trials on his later path.

25. The outside, which is the bulk of the book, deals with the preparation for the moment, 20th November 1961, when he was going to score his first grooves. We might think he wasn't 'standing in the gateway... heavy loaded, fully alive and revved up' until about April 1963, when he was putting the finishing touches to *Freewheelin'*. Then all the elements are

obviously in place. But as Dylan wants to represent it, even though he hadn't actually started to write the songs themselves, by the time he came to make his first record he had all the information to know what kind of artist he would be.

26. We could break down his preparation into a sequence of distinct (musical) epiphanies – though they're not presented in order of time. First, as the basis for all the rest, there's the epiphany of folk song – a kind of alternative order of reality which frees him from a timebound mind and culture.

27. Then there's the epiphany of Woody Guthrie, in which the collectivity of folk takes on a single personality. (Dylan recounts reading *Bound for Glory* after discovering Guthrie's songs. In *The Nightingale's Code* I followed Scaduto's account, which was that he read Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, which led him to *The Grapes of Wrath*, which led him to Guthrie's book, which led him to the songs. Who knows?)

28. Next there's the negative epiphany of Ramblin' Jack Elliott – a revelation of insufficiency. Emulation, no matter how devoted, will not fulfil the commission he feels that Guthrie has laid on him. That has already been done to completion by Ramblin' Jack.

29. Then there's the epiphany of Mike Seeger, a consummate traditional player at work – another one of insufficiency. Dylan's relation to the folk tradition cannot be a simple one of belonging. 'The thought occurred to me that maybe I'd

have to write my own folk songs... I would have to claim a larger part of myself'.

30. The epiphany of Irish rebel songs is not so heavily stressed, but seems vital – an ornate rather than a plain style in folk song, a spirit of rebellion not fatalism: both keys to the distinctiveness of his own songs.

31. Penultimately, the epiphany of Brecht & Weill – of an art of composed song that has the mystery and power of folk song. (Paul Williams in *Performing Artist*, his ongoing study of Dylan's art in its 'momentary' aspect, perhaps underplays the formal side of his creativity. Even I, who perhaps overplay it, was surprised by the stress that *Chronicles* puts on structure, in its encounters with the songs of Brecht & Weill and Robert Johnson and others, and in its own artful construction.)

32. Finally, and following swiftly, the epiphany of Robert Johnson, which wraps it all up. A songmaker as artful as Brecht & Weill – 'Songwriting for him was some highly sophisticated business' – but in the American tradition and as powerful a personal presence as Guthrie. The argument of Dave Van Ronk, that Johnson's songs are all derivative of other records, is recounted, it seems to me, not to show off Dylan's own acumen by contrast, but to emphasise how Johnson has formed an entirely individual art out of collective materials – the materials of a 'synthetic' tradition like Dylan's – which is primarily a tradition of recordings. From there on, Dylan implies, before he had even recorded *Bob Dylan*, he had the means to do all the subsequent work that he hasn't described...

33. By the time you read this, *No Direction Home* will have been shown. I wonder if Dylan's narration accounts for the missing mid-Sixties years in *Chronicles* – if the fact that he was going to tell the story in the film was taken into account in the writing of the book? Or if the narration will form the basis for a subsequent part of *Chronicles*?

34. In the closing pages, we hear of Lou Levy's dislike of the 'home-run ball' – 'the most boring aspect of the game' – which matches the lack of interest that the writer has displayed in his own home-runs – his hit songs.

35. The clip of film which he says, when you slow it down enormously, could not be anyone else but Robert Johnson, is definitely not Robert Johnson – unless it wasn't Robert Johnson who died in 1938. The clip shows a poster advertising a film called, fittingly, *Blues in the Night*, which was released in 1941. The speculation that it might be Johnson in the clip was definitively laid to rest as long ago as 1998.

36. Have you heard the not-so-enormously-slowed-down recordings of Johnson at www.touched.co.uk/press/rjnote.html that make him sound like a man?

37. The eight-second fragment of film slowed down might be seen as a metaphor for the few months of Dylan's early life that *Chronicles* expands on.

38. The figure who 'really is... has to be – couldn't be anyone else' but Robert Johnson, and yet isn't, might also be a metaphor for the character I feel 'really is' Bob Dylan in *Chronicles*.

39. Dylan adds one more hint 'to go with all of that'. Just after describing Johnson as the most important model for his mid-Sixties songwriting, he also acknowledges the influence of Rimbaud, and especially the latter's statement that 'Je est une autre' – 'I is someone else'.

40. The importance for Dylan of seeing the real Robert Johnson (who isn't) is that it shows he is not that haunted, tormented, demonic, obsessed and driven spirit of which we assume his blues to be the direct expression. He is 'childlike', 'innocent', 'angelic' and even like 'Little Lord Fauntleroy'. 'He looks nothing like a man with the hellhound on his trail.' It puts into concrete imagery something he's been saying before – that Johnson's songs are art, not life: 'There's no guarantee that any of his lines either happened, were said, or even imagined.' So you can be 'serious, like the scorched earth' when you're making things up, 'nothing clownish' about that.

41. Indeed the whole description of Johnson, coming at the end of this 'first-person' narrative, seems like one more reminder to think again: 'There are too many missing terms and too much dual existence.' 'Johnson masked the presence of more than twenty men.' According to this text, remember, he'd only recorded 'about twenty' songs – the score, again. (The actual figure is closer to thirty.) In other words, each of the songs could be a different man. 'I just couldn't imagine how Johnson's mind could go in and out of so many places.'

42. I met a woman called Penelope in Paris. She runs the Red Wheelbarrow bookshop. Like the Village Voice, she took

a copy of *The Nightingale's Code*, too. She hadn't read *Chronicles* but she stocked it, of course. Her father had recently died and she said whenever she unpacked a copy of Dylan's book she thought of her late father, because the picture on the back looked so much like a picture of him as a young man.

43. Stephen Scobie asked, in *Judas!* 12, if the many heroes and models who are namechecked in the book are 'all in some sense substitute fathers'. Interestingly, this strongest of all the role models, Robert Johnson, had as his 'musical father' a man that Dylan calls Ike Zimmerman. Talking of m's and double m's, he is also, in some sources, referred to as Zimmerman. (Ike = Isaac, son of Abraham = Abe, Dylan's father. 'It's strange the way circles hook up with themselves.') One website says that the young Robert met up with Ike when he headed back to his birthplace, Hazelhurst, Mississippi, to look for his real father. A couple of others record that Charles Dodds, who was Johnson's mother's husband (though not Robert's biological father), was a carpenter and furniture maker: or what Germans call a Zimmerman.

44. What is 'The Lost Land' (title of chapter 2)? 'That is the land of lost content, / I see it shining plain, / The happy highways where I went / And cannot come again.' (A E Housman) Turning suddenly, after this one, into the anger and bewilderment of chapter 3, 'New Morning', certainly makes it seem like that.

45. Maybe, also, the lost land is the South, the land that lost. 'American' folk music, after all, is overwhelmingly the music of the

South. The South and the Civil War crop up a lot in this chapter – he returns several times to the Southern roots of Ray Gooch, and talks about reading the newspapers of the Civil War years in the public library.

46. Is there a hint that, in studying the history – or, rather, the contemporary voices – of the period 1855-65, he sought, or found, a parallel, a map for his own mid-century, 1955-65? (The Gorgeous George incident, when the wrestling star seems to give him a kind of secret, personal approbation for his mission, occurs 'in the mid-'50s'. The whole 'outside' time frame of the book, 1961-ish, stands midway between this and the neck-break point in 1966.

47. The mid-nineteenth century was when the doctrine of Manifest Destiny was formed and promulgated – that the North American continent was given to the white races by God or some such higher purpose, for them to develop. It's a phrase that crops up at two cruxes in *Chronicles*: at the end of the first chapter – 'But now destiny was about to manifest itself' – and the end of the last – 'My destiny wouldn't be made manifest up here at Leeds Music'. The 'road of heavy consequences' that he's desperately trying to get off in the 'New Morning' chapter is a part of this destiny that was not manifest, and ironically counterpoints his faith in it.

48. In *The Nightingale's Code* (Touched Press, etc, you know the score), I wrote about the late Sixties' albums as being underwritten by a steely resolve, a rage, even, to extricate himself from a false position. The 'New Morning' chapter I felt

vindicated that rather powerfully. It's ironic that we get this sudden splenetic outburst – a taste of the 'killer Dylan' of the mid-'60s – in the context of his supposedly chilled-out country pie period.

49. 'New Morning' turns out to be bitterly ironic as a chapter title – as does 'Oh Mercy', which largely concerns itself with 'a cosmic kick in the pants'.

50. The chaos of tenses is widespread in 'New Morning', and creates the sense of a man who doesn't know if he's moving forwards or backwards, or whether to. Al Kooper 'had happened to discover Lynyrd Skynyrd' – but some time after this chapter is set. 'I was' in the studio 'with Johnston, and he's thinking that everything that I'm recording is fantastic. He always does.' And so on.

51. Clinton Heylin wrote that *Chronicles* contains 'not a single accurate date. I mean, not one.' Well, in fact there are two, at the end of this chapter: 'The MacLeish play *Scratch* opened on Broadway at the St James Theater on May 6, 1971, and closed two days later on May 8.' (This is by far the most chronologically confounded part of the book – yet he wants to be sure we understand that two days after May 6 is May 8!) One reviewer called MacLeish's play 'too arbitrary for a drama, too ambiguous for a history, and too shallow for a biography'.

52. Why is this the ending of the chapter? I don't think it's what it might seem to be – a dig at a play that failed (and which would almost certainly have succeeded had Dylan carried on with his collabora-

tion). Perhaps it's there to emphasise the truth of MacLeish's prophetic message – that no one wanted to hear it. 'The play spelled death for society with humanity lying facedown in its own blood. ... MacLeish was signaling something through the flames.' There's a foreshadowing here of the apocalyptic tone of Dylan's own Christian albums – and it is on *New Morning* that his Christian faith, his belief in Jesus as the Son of God, is first affirmed: 'Father of *whom* we most solemnly praise' – i.e., of Him whom...

53. The unpopularity of MacLeish's effort also seems to be stressed as a contrast to the popularity which Dylan is desperately trying to erase. 'As long as my records were still selling, why wouldn't I be thinking about recording?' In the light of the whole chapter, and of the indifference he evinces to the making of *New Morning*, this seems to mean that he will go on making records, not in order to sell more, but until he can make them stop selling.

54. The inside of the book is in marked contrast to the outside. Outside we have questing openness, a massive self-confidence. Inside, doubt, disillusionment, struggle. The inside is very poignant, and perhaps the more inspiring. The two parts of the inside are again in contrast with each other. The second, 'Oh Mercy', shows him climbing out of the slough that he has plunged into in the first, 'New Morning', where music appears to have become meaningless to him. It is as though one follows directly on from the other. But of course they don't, which opens the question of what lies inside the inside.

55. 'Oh Mercy' contains another sequence of epiphanies – of reaffirmations, this time. Only now they are more the gifts of others, rather than individual determinations, attempts at matching up to others. This is the first chapter in which we see Dylan actually making music. There is, first, a reaffirmation of singing (thanks to the unknown jazz singer), then of performing on stage, then of playing (thanks to Lonnie Johnson), then of writing songs, and finally of recording them (thanks to Daniel Lanois).

56. There are no grey flannel dwarfs to be found in 'Oh Mercy', but there is a motorcycle black madonna two-wheeled gypsy queen.

57. Popular music is becoming a literature. I mean by popular music what could also be called folk – the whole range of non-written music that, before the advent of recording, disappeared with its performance and could only be preserved in memory. Though not all folk was unwritten: there were printed ballads, with melodies, and hymn-books, and reading and writing musicians have always been there in jazz. (Thelonious Monk, a character I never would have expected to find there, says in *Chronicles*: 'We all play folk music.') (And on that subject: Bob Dylan, Don Cherry and Billy Higgins – now there's a dream band.) But now, in the era of the CD box-set, recorded music is being consolidated in standard texts and evolving a canon just like a literature.

58. In the convergence of popular music with literature, *Chronicles* itself is an important bridge. But Dylan's songs are a

more important one. In fact, they may be seen as the meeting point, powered by the closing of that circuit. However, folk and literature have been approaching each other for a long time – or have always been side by side. I began *The Nightingale's Code* with a long disquisition about 'folk' – the ideas of what it was that shaped the Folk Revival which Dylan emerged from; about folk as essentially a literary idea, a companion to the Romantic movement, and the ways that folk has been entwined with literature ever since. I knew this had to be the beginning, but I don't think I ever quite arrived at why. It's an argument whose arc is incomplete. The missing piece, I now think, may have to do with this canonisation of popular music that we currently see continuing apace.

59. Of course, Dylan has inspired a lot – and produced a certain amount – of literature already. But with *Chronicles* the great poet who was not necessarily a great writer has definitely entered the lists as a literary artist. And this goes along with some other recent landmarks to show how far he now is beyond the orbit of the 'pop star'; that his Rushmorisisation is well underway. One of the most distinguished English professors and literary critics of our time has published a study of him – though he does spend a disconcerting number of his pages acting as though his name were Brian, running about in pursuit of his intellectual trousers. And after *Invisible Emperor*, an excellent book about Dock Boggs which the publisher inexplicably adorned with a picture of Bob Dylan, the dean of American rock

critics has finally devoted a whole volume to a single Dylan recording, 'Like a Rolling Stone'.

60. I may have seemed to argue in *The Nightingale's Code* that 'folk' does not exist as such. But it has come home to me since that there is a special quality about the music on record that was not made for records – for example, a couple of personal favourites, the original Folkways recordings of Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley playing on porches, or the Nonesuch albums of *The Real Bahamas in Music and Song*. They have just those

powers of the 'unselfconscious' and the 'collective' that the theorists of the Folk Revival were striving to define, whose definitions I set about dismantling.

61. Phonography – 'voice-writing' – which has existed for little more than a century, has radically altered our relationship with music, which has existed for, say, 20,000 years. (For it strikes me as unlikely that the painters of the caves did not also make music, and I think poetry as well. After all, some of those figures appear to be dancing.) But these are other themes, for another time.

The Foggy Ruins of Dinner Time

by Mark Richardson

I am pretty sure that the first Dylan album I heard all the way through was *Another Side of Bob Dylan* – in a listening booth in the record department of the Owen Owen department store in Coventry in January 1965. LPs were expensive in those days, as I recall. £1.12.6 was a considerable chunk of one's weekly disposable income and you had to think about it hard before you laid it down on the counter. To help you make up your mind before plunging your hand into your pocket for the readies, you could get the assistant to play it for you into a little booth. You've probably seen them in those old black and white archive clips from films about the rise of The Beatles. If you were really lucky, you could hear the whole thing, if there weren't too many other listeners waiting. Anyway, I was knocked out by it. So much so that I was late home for the Saturday midday meal. When I was asked why I was late, I blithely informed my mother that 'I have been listening to a genius.' If those words stay with me, it is because of the part that Dylan would come to play, not just in my life, but in the lives of many of a whole generation.

As for 'genius', well I didn't have much to go on. As far as pop music went, even The Beatles had barely begun to liberate us from the lyrical poverty of Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard, Adam Faith and the Bobbys (Vee, Rydell and their like). The witty and clever songs of Chuck Berry, Leiber & Stoller, Goffin & King and the Brill Song Builders were still regarded as no more than disposable pap that you might hear through the crackle of Radio Luxembourg or on the Light Programme Sunday chart countdown. So, not yet being familiar with any of the real greats of poetry, ancient and modern, it is perhaps understandable that a sudden blast of 'Chimes of Freedom', 'My Back Pages' and, goddammit, even 'Ballad in Plain D' was a bit of a mind blower. So, if my response may seem, in retrospect, perhaps a little excessive, it was largely conditioned by the prevailing climate of the times.

Obviously I had heard of Bob Dylan at this point. If you read the *New Musical Express*, you couldn't avoid knowing about him. He was hip before there was hip – a new style that would stifle the dying, though still nonetheless impressive, breaths of 'cool' that had hung over the late 50s and early 60s. You could actually argue that Dylan invented 'hip' – the cruel, cutting, sarcastic persona that can be glimpsed in parts of *Dont Look Back* – the sunglasses, the skinny suits, the polka dot shirts, the ragamuffin birdsnest hair. Beyond all these was the simple essence of it's **new** and it's happening **here** and it's happening **now**. Never mind Dean and Sal endlessly rushing across America. This was what Dylan represented and would continue to represent for another 20 years before the legend became bigger than the man and the legend starting doing the shows and cutting the albums rather than the man. Back in early 1965, of course, no one was concerned with more than the next few months, never mind 40 years ahead. What we didn't know was that Dylan was beginning to cast aside the solo acoustic style while we were still revelling in it.

The extraordinary impact that the opening rimshot of 'Like a Rolling Stone' would make can barely be overstated. From that first sound, you knew that something had happened and everything had changed, forever. You could probably write a book about it. It wasn't the fact that there were drums on a pop record. We'd had beat groups for years. One particular pop group drummer was one of the most famous people in the world. It was the fact

that it was a drum on a Bob Dylan record. He's a folk singer, for heaven's sake. This was still a time when it was questionable, to some people, whether an acoustic guitar was acceptable, when you sang folk songs or in a folk style, never mind a whole group. Little did we know that there was a whole new tidal wave standing in the wings, ready to take the stage. Needless to say, the first major 'folk rock' hit would be a Bob Dylan song, performed by The Byrds. Well, who else could have written it?

Dylan toured the U.K. in 1965, but this was the last time we would experience him like this. No, I didn't go to any of the shows. Too young, too skint, too far away. So, what I knew of him came from the pages of the *NME* and *Melody Maker*. In today's information saturated world it seems incredible that there was so little access to the inside world of pop music. Now it seems that his concert reviews are posted on the internet before he's finished the final song of the encore. Back then it was a little harder to learn anything. Basically, we knew very little about the man, his history and his background. The snippets in the pop inky were pretty much all you had to go on. This did not seem to matter too much. Dylan was already up there with the omniscient immortals and no one had ever asked Zeus what his favourite colour was.

It was not until July of 1965 that I could actually purchase a copy of *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. With the money I earned from my summer job on a building site, I hurried to the record shop and walked out with a copy of my first ever

Bob Dylan album. I loved the cover, the black and white photograph, less forbidding than the awesomely stark photograph on the front of *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, the baffling sleeve notes and most of all, the songs. I had a few other LPs by this time and a portable record player, with an autochanger for the singles, but they didn't get much of a listen for a while. I must have played that record to bits. I hadn't heard it since that morning in the department store and I was swept away with what seemed to be the profundity, the wisdom and the downright incomprehensibility of it all. And the humour as well, of course. 'It's something I learned over in England' indeed. Above all, I thought 'This man is a *Poet*.' and this was nowhere more obvious than in 'My Back Pages' and 'Chimes of Freedom'. Let's face it, no one else in pop music was doing this stuff. (Well, of course, Phil Ochs was. Paul Simon was. I heard his first single, 'I Am A Rock' on Radio Luxembourg and I just *had* to have his album, when I could find a copy. So began a long and parallel admiration of these two songwriters and superstars. I'm not going to get into an endless analysis of which is the greater in any number of ways, or at least not here, but let me just say that you *can* enjoy and appreciate them both. It's not a case of one or the other.) Mr McCormick, my English teacher was not so impressed. Given our own choice of a poem to write an essay about, I opted for 'Chimes of Freedom' which I subjected to an exceptionally long and detailed analysis. Bad idea. I got a terrible mark, not, I suspect, for writing a bad essay (which it probably was) but for

writing an essay about a 'pop song'. In retrospect, the worst result was that he recommended that I should pay more attention to Dylan Thomas than to Bob Dylan. Unfortunately, for a while, later on, I did. In retrospect, I can't help feeling that with a *very few* exceptions, Dylan Thomas wrote some of the worst poems of the 20th Century. If you want incomprehensible verbosity, look no further than 'The Ballad of The Long Legged Bait'. He makes Dylan (Bob)'s more obscure songs transparent by comparison. So, no marks out of ten for teacher, then.

The next Dylan album I bought was the first. Ian, a school friend, sold me his copy for some unfathomable reason. I don't know why he sold it to me as he was really into Dylan as well. He was also the only person I knew who had even heard of Woody Guthrie. He probably wanted something a bit bluesier. I know that he caused an outrage in our music appreciation class when he played a record by the fantastic Dave 'Snaker' Ray (may he rest in peace). It was something *really* wild and ethnic, full of whoops and grunts. The music teacher didn't dig it at all, no, not one little bit, so that was it for ol' Dave. For me, it was an ear opener of the first order. When I heard the first Dylan album, that was another. It was like nothing I'd heard before – mostly old blues and folk songs, with very few of his own compositions. The primitive power, energy and enthusiasm of Dylan's performances was spell-binding and a doorway to the world of the blues. I liked Jimmie Rodgers, Johnny Cash and country and western music, but this was altogether something else.

What was incomprehensible at that time was how Dylan could have changed so much in so short a time. From 'Fixin' to Die' via 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' to 'My Back Pages' seemed a remarkable journey. To cap that with 'Like a Rolling Stone' and *then* 'Positively 4th Street' seemed to be a transition that was just beyond understanding. This was indeed the **here** and the **now** of what was happening and there was nobody within a hundred miles of Dylan. The more incomprehensible it seemed, the more we liked it. To a provincial teenager, it was strange and spoke of a big strange world out there. I must have heard *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited* somehow, though I didn't have my own copies for some time. It would take a while before all of these songs would become familiar, though familiarity would not lessen their impact or increase their comprehensibility. You heard Dylan's songs done by other people, though generally in comparatively conservative stylings. However, one record that did have a big effect was a Pete Seeger LP called 'Broadsides', which was full of songs by the new writers such as Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton and of course Dylan. This was

probably where I first heard 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall', which led me back to the source album. This LP was a signal that Dylan was not the only one doing what he was doing, although he was the first one to make a big breakthrough. *Before The Flood*, you might say.

What came after is the familiar story. The third and biggest of his electric rock albums followed by *The Tour* followed by *The Motorcycle Accident* and *The Years of Silence*. The paradox of course is that the less he said, the more significant he became in the lives of his followers. In his absence we felt his presence all the more strongly. He became the blank canvas upon which a million and one ideas were sketched. And the final irony of the age? When everyone else was turning it up to eleven, donning the gaudy styles of psychedelia and starting to go all mystical on us, Dylan was turning it down, unplugging and fooling around in the basement with his pals. Enter *John Wesley Harding*. In the three years since I was late for dinner, Dylan had gone from a big noise in the new world of pop culture to the voice and defining symbol of his generation. It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it. Or, just maybe, nice work if you can get it.

Dylan's and Rimbaud's Wounded Shoes and Bare Feet

by Guido Bieri

'Patti Smith says you were Rimbaud in a previous incarnation

*I don't know if she's right or wrong, but Patti Smith then, of course, knows a lot of deep details I might not be aware of. She might be clued into something that's a little beyond me. I know at least a dozen women who tell me they were the Queen of Sheba. And I know a few Napoleons and two Joan of Arcs and one Einstein.'*¹

In *Chronicles, Volume One*, Dylan has recently stressed the influence of French poet and adventurer Arthur Rimbaud on his work, thereby reminding researchers that there still is much to be gleaned from a close scrutiny of the poet and the singer-songwriter's relationship.² In his memoir, Dylan has this to say about his discovery of the *enfant terrible* of French literature:

*'To go with all of that [Robert Johnson's language], someplace along the line Suze had also introduced me to the poetry of French Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud. That was a big deal, too. I came across one of his letters called "Je est un autre", which translates into "I is someone else". When I read those words the bells went off. It made perfect sense. I wished someone would have mentioned that to me earlier. It went right along with Johnson's dark night of the soul and Woody's hopped-up union meeting sermons and the "Pirate Jenny" framework. Everything was in transition and I was standing in the gateway. Soon I'd step in heavy loaded, fully alive and revved up. Not quite yet, though.'*³

Dylan credits Suze Rotolo with introducing him to the poetry of Rimbaud: a minor detail finally settled. But the really interesting thing about this statement of Dylan's is that it expressly links the impact of Rimbaud's conceptual imagery with that of the sparse and elliptical blues language of Robert Johnson and the rigorous structure of Brecht. Not that this comes as a surprise, for Dylan's main influences have often been discussed and commented, even by him, but it really sums up things nicely, in my opinion.

But if *Chronicles* proves that Dylan's memory is far better than what has commonly been accepted, it does little to dispel the notion that he is hopeless with dates: 'someplace along the line' isn't a very helpful marker. We are thus unable to pinpoint the precise date of this momentous encounter between the poet and the burgeoning songwriter. It is also unfortunate that Dylan does not give any detailed account of how he was affected by Rimbaud's language, poetically or personally, as he does with Robert Johnson's music and lyrics. All we learn to know is that Bob's girlfriend Suze introduced him to the French Symbolist poets (Rimbaud, Verlaine, but also Nerval and Baudelaire, their common forerunner) roughly in the first half of 1962; until now she was merely known to be responsible for Dylan's discovery of German Marxist author Bertolt Brecht.

Though he had probably caught a glimpse of Brecht earlier on, it was around the Spring of 1963, when Suze was working as a set designer for a *Brecht on Brecht* production at the Theatre de Lys in New York City, that the German poet and playwright really made a deep, lasting impression on Dylan and contributed decisively to the shaping of his songwriting.⁴ Without getting into a necessarily complex and detailed examination, let us simply state here that Brecht's influence is at its most apparent on several songs written in September and October that year, and particularly on 'The Times They Are A-Changin'', 'When the Ship Comes In' and 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll', whereas Baudelaire's and

Rimbaud's influence were to prove more important from *Another Side of Bob Dylan* onwards. What comes to confirm this is that he gives Brecht and many others a name-check in his liner notes for *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (11 *Outlined Epitaphs*) whereas Rimbaud is significantly absent.

If Dylan's discovery of Brecht's works can be attributed with almost absolute certainty to the *Brecht on Brecht* production, it isn't quite as easy to identify the edition and translation of Rimbaud's poetry that opened up the Symbolist treasure trove for him. As already mentioned, it is very difficult to date with precision Dylan's introduction to the French poets. We can nevertheless try to narrow the time frame by putting different witness accounts together. There is an interesting comment by Dave Van Ronk reported in Anthony Scaduto's biography that can be dated to the earliest days of Dylan in New York, in 1961:

'Being a hayseed, that was part of his image or what he considered his image at the time. Like, once I asked him 'Do you know the French Symbolists?' and he said 'Huh?' – the stupidest 'Huh' you can imagine – and later, when he had a place of his own, I went up there and on the bookshelf was a volume of French poets, from Nerval almost to the present. I think it ended at Apollinaire, and it included Rimbaud, and it was all well-thumbed with passages underlined and notes in the margins. The man wanted to be a primitive, a natural kind of genius. He

*never talked about somebody like Rimbaud. But he knew Rimbaud, all right. You see that in his later songs.*⁵

We know that Dylan had a place of his own for the first time from January 1962 on, when he moved in an apartment on West 4th Street in Greenwich Village with his girlfriend Suze. But we also know that Suze sailed away to Italy on June 8, 1962, so she must perforce have told him about the French poet before that date, even if Dylan may have read his works only after her departure. We have thus apparently narrowed the time frame to the first five months of the year. However, Dylan and Suze Rotolo first met at the end of July, 1961, and as their relationship developed over the following six months, she might have turned Dylan on to Rimbaud even before they started living together. Nevertheless the reconstruction of the events permits us to say that Van Ronk's 'hayseed-theory' in this case doesn't hold absolutely true, as Dylan surely didn't know much about Rimbaud the first time he was asked, in these early days of 1961 in New York.

We may not be able to establish a date, but we might perhaps find out which edition of Rimbaud's poetry was the one owned by Dylan. Van Ronk's statement indicates that the book he saw was an anthology of French poets. We also know that Dylan neither spoke nor read any French at the time, so it stands to reason that the book was an English-language anthology (or a bilingual one). A very popular bilingual anthology from around that time frame was Angel Flores' *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to*

Valéry in English Translation, first published in 1958,⁶ which almost matches Van Ronk's description, even if it ends at Valéry instead of at Apollinaire.

If we accept, until any better evidence is forthcoming, that Dylan first read the Symbolist Poets in Flores' anthology, we may reach an interesting conclusion. This book does not include any selection from Rimbaud's correspondence, so Dylan could not have read there the famous 'Seer letters', where the 'I is another' theory is set down. Thus, it is obvious that Dylan, if he started out with Flores' anthology, must have later 'graduated' to other editions of Rimbaud's works. To my knowledge, the next one to be published was Wallace Fowlie's bilingual edition of Rimbaud's complete works with selected letters in 1966. For reasons we shall try to explain later in this article in late 1963 and the first half of 1964 Dylan's songs began to display a predominant influence of Rimbaud's imagery ('My Back Pages' or 'Mr. Tambourine Man', to mention but two obvious instances) whereas his conscious application of Rimbaud's poetical concept (the poet as a Seer) would not start before 1966, the time he probably 'came across' Rimbaud's Seer Letters.⁷ For if we read very carefully Dylan's words in his *Chronicles*, we should recognize that he only thanked Suze for introducing him to Rimbaud's **poetry**, whereas the moment he 'came across' one of the **letters** seems to have happened on a later occasion and is attributed neither to Suze nor anybody else.

'I'm only Dylan when I have to be', the artist once said, speaking of his musician's identity as if of someone else, an entirely

different person, and of course an instance of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde entity (if you'll excuse me for this comparison) thereby hinting strongly at his awareness of his having to deal with – at least – a dual personality, the oft mentioned 'split in the Gemini'. Far more relevant to our purpose here is that this statement distinctly recalls the archetypal Rimbaud affirmation '*Je est un autre*', 'I is another', from the first of the poet's two 'Seer letters'. In these May 1871 letters addressed to his professor and mentor Georges Izambard and to his friend Paul Demeny, Rimbaud explains his vision of the poet as a 'seer', i.e., one who is able to transcend his ego, incarnate into a different one, attaining the Unknown by a 'long, immense and rational disordering of all the senses'.

In his first Seer Letter to Izambard, Rimbaud writes:

'Now I am degrading myself as much as possible. Why? I want to be a poet; and I am working to make myself a seer: You will not understand this, and I don't know how to explain it to you. It is a question of reaching the unknown by the derangement of all the senses. The sufferings are enormous, but one has to be strong, one has to be a born poet, and I know I am a poet. This is not all my fault. It is wrong to say: I think. One ought to say: people think me. (...) I is someone else. It is too bad for the wood which finds itself a violin and scorn for the heedless who argue over what they are totally ignorant of!' (May 13, 1871).⁸

The second Seer Letter is addressed to Paul Demeny, a young poet he was intro-

duced to by Izambard. It explains in more detail the steps the poet must take to become a seer:

'I say one must be a seer, make oneself a seer. The Poet makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, and madness. He searches himself. He exhausts all poisons in himself and keeps only their quintessences. Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his super-human strength, where he becomes among all men the great patient, the great criminal, the one accursed – and the supreme Scholar! – Because he reaches the unknown! Since he cultivated his soul, rich already, more than any man! He reaches the unknown, and when, bewildered, he ends by losing the intelligence of his visions, he has seen them. Let him die as he leaps through unheard of and unnameable things: other horrible workers will come; they will begin from the horizons where the other collapsed!' (May 15, 1871).⁹

Rimbaud says that by getting to the Unknown the poet reaches a new level of consciousness, and that he thus becomes able to see himself from the outside. He says it's wrong to say, 'I think', and that we should say instead 'People think me'. Certain parallels are easily traced with Dylan's own vision of his self, at its most obvious, for instance, in the kaleidoscopic reduplications of Dylan's (and Sara's) shifting persona as portrayed in his film *Renaldo and Clara*, which among many other things, essentially deals with the

uncertainty of identity. However, the multiple meanings of Rimbaud's statement are very difficult to understand, and are also open to any kind of interpretation.¹⁰ We shall try here to deal only with essential similitude and verifiable facts. There is no question that, whether consciously in order to become a 'Seer' himself, or merely because of the *Zeitgeist*, Dylan did go through a rather extended period of "derangement of all the senses" through 1964-1966. His resulting visions are to be found in his songs of those hectic years as well as in *Tarantula*.

On a rather less highbrow level of analysis, Rimbaud telling his former professor that he knows that he's a poet may also easily remind us of Dylan's statements in his song 'I Shall Be Free No. 10': 'Yippee! I'm a poet, and I know it. / Hope I don't blow it', or in his liner notes to *Bringing It All Back Home*: '...a poem is a naked person ... some people say that i am a poet'. A further trivial parallelism might be traced regarding the pain that, according to the French genius, any poet must labour under in order to attain the deep understanding his calling requires. Doesn't this bring to mind instantly one of Dylan's most impressive achievements, the painful songs on his 1975 album *Blood on the Tracks*... And as everybody knows, there's a song on this very album in which Rimbaud and Verlaine share a cameo, 'You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go':

*Situations have ended sad,
Relationships have all been bad.
Mine've been like Verlaine's and
Rimbaud.*

*But there's no way I can compare
All those scenes to this affair,
Yer gonna make me lonesome when
you go.*

In passing, isn't it remarkable how Dylan tries to push the personal comparison between the poet and himself? In the above mentioned lines, he is not alluding to any poetical aspect, but to the violence and passion that characterised Rimbaud's love affair with the elder poet, and that brought it to a tragic end (it is well known that Verlaine shot Rimbaud in the arm, after a final quarrel at their Brussels hotel, and served two years in jail for this assault). Does Dylan perchance imply that the gift of poetry makes love far more complicated than it is or rightly ought to be?

And doesn't all this quite closely recall Dylan's painful and tragic discourse of separation, traced as sharply as with a razor's blade, in the fantastic 1966 *Blonde on Blonde* outtake 'She's Your Lover Now' (unfortunately only available in a truncated version on *The Bootleg Series Vol. 1-3*:

*The scene was so crazy, wasn't it?
Both were so glad
To watch me destroy what I had
Pain sure brings out the best in people,
doesn't it?*

Although the 1974 song 'You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go' was the first time that Rimbaud 'made it' to a Dylan composition, the songwriter has name-checked Rimbaud many times throughout the years. On a couple of occasions at least, he has been willing to admit that the French poet had been a major influence on his work, although he has

never really entered into a detailed discussion of the matter, at least that I'm aware of. In 1965-66, of course, Rimbaud like so many other people, came in handy when it was time to play games with the press. For instance, in the March 1965 *Village Voice* interview, Dylan acknowledged Rimbaud's influence with the surprising statement: 'I've read his tiny little book *Evil Flowers*', where the disfigured title corresponds of course to Baudelaire's major work.¹¹ When the interviewer told him he was thinking of Baudelaire, Dylan riposted: 'I've read his tiny little book, too', leaving the difficult decision to the baffled interviewer whether he had been put on before or just now – or both. However, later that year, during the famous San Francisco Press conference in December, Dylan mentioned Rimbaud as a 'favourite poet' with no second thoughts.

If Rimbaud's influence was prevalent essentially in 1964-65, as far as Dylan's writing is concerned, there can be but little doubt that Dylan has returned to the French poet's work over the years, every time the 'poet of rock 'n' roll' went through the 'unspeakable torture' of the seer's fate again – the years from *Blood on the Tracks* on seem to have been especially favourable for these experiences. Rimbaud's presence was certainly again very important during the Rolling Thunder Revue, particularly during its 1976 leg. Rimbaud had already been the ghost Dylan followed through the New Jersey nights when he had been inspired to write the songs for *Desire*; at least that's what he tells in his liner notes which were likely penned in late November 1975:

Where do I begin... on the heels of Rimbaud moving like a dancing bullet thru the secret streets of a hot New Jersey night filled with venom and wonder...

Arthur Rimbaud is listed in the 'thank you' section of the *Hard Rain* TV film credits, and we know that the white National electric guitar Dylan played on some shows was called 'Rimbaud'¹² In an interview for TV Guide done some time in August 1976, Dylan acknowledged the fact:

*'Yes. Rimbaud has been a big influence on me. When I'm on the road and want to read something that makes sense to me, I go to a bookstore and read his words.'*¹³

However, although it proves a temptation hard to resist, one ought to handle rather cautiously the Rimbaud parallels. We should at all costs resist the temptation to take Dylan for the Rimbaud of our time. Dylan hasn't quit writing to this day, and there is no way of knowing what Rimbaud would do today, how he would find his way through the jungle of modern life. We should be careful, lest we simply cater to a myth, albeit one that might be flattering to Dylan, and even reflect the way he sees himself.

On the other hand, it must be clearly understood that Rimbaud's influence, although important at a given time, has mainly to do with an approach to language and to the poet's self-reflection. There are not many literal borrowings from Rimbaud's poems in Dylan's songs, in the way that the blues and the ballad traditions

have offered him many verbatim lines, time and time again. *'Yes to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free'* is pretty close to Rimbaud's spirit and poetical voice, but cannot be traced precisely to any one of his poems, for instance. Dylan has often proved true to his confession in his *11 Outlined Epitaphs*: *'Yes, I am a thief of thoughts / not, I pray, a stealer of souls / I have built an' rebuilt / upon what is waitin''*. All things considered, I believe we should think that Rimbaud was important for Dylan mainly because he revealed to him a concept Dylan had been groping for in the dark: that of the artist as a separate being, almost an invention of another person.

But although it is hard to prove, time and again critics have referred to Rimbaud's direct influence on Dylan's songs, establishing parallelisms that I often find far-fetched in the extreme, usually because they refer to single lines or even isolated words. There are several examples of this in an otherwise excellent article by Chris Whithouse and the late John Bauldie, 'On The Heels of Rimbaud'.¹⁴ I find it mildly irritating, to tell the truth, to see parallelisms traced between lines that to my eyes have but little in common with any Rimbaud poem, especially when the very same lines appear almost verbatim in old folk songs. This is very patently the case of the 'Lord Randall' (a Child Ballad) elements in 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall': *'Oh where have you been, my blue-eyed son?',* etc. from *'O, where ha' you been, Lord Randal, my son?'* Must one really go all the way to Rimbaud's poem 'Le Bateau ivre' ('The Drunken Boat') for the line *'Dites,*

qu'avez-vous vu? ('Tell me, what did you see?'), even if it is repeated several times? I cannot believe Dylan had to borrow this from Rimbaud!¹⁵

Besides, if formal similarity or, more properly, echoes of Rimbaud's language may be traced in 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall', the fact remains that the two texts are widely different in contents and narrative structure. 'Le Bateau ivre' tells in the first person the story of a boat adrift down the river, its crew having been killed by Redskins, and of the fantastic and sometimes exalting visions the boat encounters on its endless and aimless journey. On the other hand, Dylan's song is a prophetic vision, which deals with the end of times and a world gone wrong, structured as a dialogue between a father and a son.

Dylan might have known Rimbaud's poem when he wrote his song, but it isn't really necessary. The simple yet effective question-answer structure derives probably from Tom Paxton's 'What Did You Learn At School?' However, the grid that holds the flood of negative images together is very similar to the Symbolist correspondence of the senses (or synesthesia), used by Rimbaud, and going back famously to Baudelaire in his benchmark poem 'Correspondances' (contained in Flores' anthology). The different visions and experiences of the song's young protagonist – where he has been and whom he has met, what he has seen and what he has heard – are described by him as an accumulative roster of images and feelings.

If there is anything in Rimbaud's small oeuvre I would compare the mood and spirit of 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' to, it

would be the second part of 'A Season In Hell' called 'The Alchemy of Words' (Alchimie du verbe), which was partially contained in Flores' anthology. More than concrete poetical visions with some resemblance, it is the negative view of the past as a failure, the hallucinatory vision of the world as a hell the two poets went through and – above all – the self-reflection of the poet in and the invention of a new poetic language (as mentioned by Rimbaud) "accessible, one day or another, to all of the senses" that makes Dylan's great song similar to the prose poem. And there is more. As Dylan claimed that every single line in 'Hard Rain' could lead to another song, so Rimbaud's vision is that 'to each creature several *other* lives belonged'. Aren't the hallucinations described by Rimbaud a likely source to Dylan's flood of images? Just one example among many others:

'I saw quite frankly a mosque in place of a factory, a school of drummers made up of angels, carriages on roads in the sky, a parlour at the bottom of the lake; monsters, mysteries.'

Furthermore the apocalyptic experience is both expressed in the song and in Rimbaud's prose-poem:

'My health was threatened. Terror came. I used to fall into a sleep of several days, and when up, I continued the saddest dreams. I was ripe for death, and along a road of dangers my weakness led me to the edge of the world and Cimmeria, a land of darkness and whirlwinds. (...) I saw the consoling cross rise. I had been damned by the

rainbow. Happiness was my fatality, my remorse, my worm. My life would always be too immense to be devoted to strength and beauty.'

And at the end of 'Hard Rain' the '*pellets of poison are flooding their water*' and other things that go wrong in this society and culture are perhaps an echo of one of Rimbaud's diagnostics of the poisons of Western civilisation, like this one:

'We eat fever with our watery vegetables. And drunkenness! and tobacco! and ignorance! and devotedness! – Isn't all that quite far from thought, and Oriental wisdom, and the original native land? Why a modern world, if such poisons are invented?'

Now, if ever there was a song I would spontaneously associate with 'Le Bateau ivre' it would be one or the other of Dylan's two great songs of liberty: 'Chimes of Freedom' and 'Mr. Tambourine Man'. In this case, I agree unreservedly with Whithouse and Bauldie's opinion, when they declare that 'Mr. Tambourine Man' 'owes a good deal to Rimbaud';¹⁶ I would add that this influence is at its most apparent in the song's second stanza with its 'magic swirling ship' the narrator wants to be taken on, and the disordering of the senses echoed in 'my senses have been stripped':

*Take me on a trip upon your magic
swirlin' ship
My senses have been stripped, my
hands can't feel to grip,
My toes too numb to step,
wait only for my boot-heels to be
wanderin'.*

I cannot help but recall Rimbaud's Seer letters: hasn't Dylan – or the song's persona, rather – been intent on 'a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses'? But I hear you say, that this has nothing to do with drugs. Dylan has always denied, it, true, and in the liner notes to *Biograph* he says that the song's origin might be traced back to Fellini's film *La Strada*, as well as something else he had on his mind down in New Orleans when he wrote some parts of the song... the Carnival, presumably. Nevertheless it is true that there is something of Rimbaud in this song, but not the symbols or metaphors and certainly not the subject material, nor, as far as the language is concerned, the rhythm or the rhymes. It is particularly the end of Rimbaud's poem, stanzas 19 to 25, which disclose parallels to Dylan's song:

*'Free, smoking, topped with violet fog,
I who pierced the reddening sky like a
wall
Bearing – delicious jam for good poets –
Lichens of sunlight and mucus of
azure;
Who ran, spotted with small electric
moons,
A wild plank, escorted by black
seahorses,
When Julys beat down with blows of
cudgels
The ultramarine skies with burning
funnels;
I, who trembled, hearing at fifty
leagues off
The moaning of the Behemoths in heat
and the thick Maelstroms,*

*I, eternal spinner of the blue
immobility,
Miss Europe with its ancient
parapets!
I have seen sidereal archipelagos!
and islands
Whose delirious skies are open to the
sea-wanderer:
– Is it in these bottomless nights that
you sleep and exile yourself,
Million golden birds, O future Vigor? –
But, in truth, I have wept too much!
Dawns are heartbreaking.
Every moon is atrocious and every sun
bitter.
Acrid love has swollen me with intoxi-
cating torpor.
O let my keel burst! O let me go into
the sea!
If I want a water of Europe, it is the
black
Cold puddle where in the sweet-
smelling twilight
A squatting child full of sadness
releases
A boat as fragile as a May butterfly.
No longer can I, bathed in your
languor, O waves,
Follow in the wake of the cotton boats,
Nor cross through the pride of flags
and flames,
Nor swim under the terrible eyes of
prison ships.'*

But the rhythm, atmosphere and language of stanzas 8 to 14, may also strongly suggest associations with both 'Mr. Tambourine Man' and 'Chimes of Freedom':

*I know the skies bursting with lightning,
and the waterspouts
And the surf and the currents; I know
the evening,
And dawn as exalted as a flock of
doves,
And at times I have seen what man
thought he saw!*

*I have seen the low sun spotted with
mystic horrors,
Lighting up, with long violet clots,
Resembling actors of very ancient
dramas,
The waves rolling far off their quivering
of shutters!*

*I have dreamed of the green night with
dazzled snows,
A kiss slowly rising to the eyes of the
sea,
The circulation of unknown saps,
And the yellow and blue awakening of
singing phosphorus!*

*I followed during pregnant months the
swell,
Like hysterical cows, in its assault on
the reefs,
Without dreaming that the luminous
feet of the Marys
Could restrain the snout of the
wheezing Oceans!*

*I struck against, you know, unbelievable
Floridas
Mingling with flowers panthers' eyes
and human
Skin! Rainbows stretched like bridal
reins
under the horizon of the seas to
greenish herds!' ¹⁷*

What a modern poetry Rimbaud wrote! And no wonder the Beat poets and Dylan chose him as one of their principal forerunners!

All things considered, I think that Rimbaud's real impact on Dylan's song-writing concept started to be felt in earnest early in 1964. On February 3, 1964 Dylan set out to 'ramble 'round the country', just like Woody Guthrie and Kerouac... but also like Rimbaud and Verlaine had done. He went on a three week-trip in his Ford station wagon, with his friends Victor Maimudes, Paul Clayton and Pete Karman, intending to meet people and play a few concerts along the way. The first evening they spent in Charlottesville, and although I will gladly admit this may sound a tad far-fetched, the town-name's resemblance to Charleville, Rimbaud's hometown, may have inspired Dylan to think about his 'alter ego'. Somewhere on their way down south, while Victor drove, Dylan began to write 'Chimes of Freedom' sitting at the back of the truck. Down in New Orleans Dylan enthused about the poet: '*Rimbaud's where it's at. That's the kind of stuff [that] means something. That's the kind of writing I'm gonna do.*' ¹⁸ We know that Dylan started writing 'Mr. Tambourine Man' shortly after leaving New Orleans and it was probably finished by April. On the return journey, as they were driving up north again, Dylan completed 'Chimes of Freedom'. It was finished before they arrived at Denver on February 15, where he played the song for the very first time.

'Chimes of Freedom' is probably Dylan's greatest song of freedom, and as

such it certainly repays a close look. But it is also a remarkably Rimbaud-like text. This hymn-like song describes a thunderstorm Bob Dylan may have really experienced with some friends, ducked inside a doorway, but it may more realistically have been inspired by a journey of the mind, fuelled by alcohol and hash, extensively indulged in during the trip. By means of the densely poetic language employed, this deceptively simple story is transformed into something very different, a renewed announcement of times a-changing. The awesome spectacle of the unleashed forces of nature unfolds its majestic power in symbolic images, which little by little acquire new meaning for the onlookers, at first cowed by the strong thunder and the bolts of lightning. Soon, however, the thunder intermingles with the sound of wedding bells in the distance – are these imaginary or real, or maybe only a memory? – and it all becomes something else: the technical procedure is not dissimilar to that of the Symbolist poets. The bells of the storm are tolling for different people – outcasts of society – while the lightning appears to be a sign for freedom flashing. These images, though metaphoric, are far from being surrealistic, as they are still anchored to reality by the narrator who tells the story.

Whithouse and Bauldie have searched for literal traces of Rimbaud in the song and I have followed the path they have opened. In this instance, the parallelisms between Dylan and Rimbaud are more evident. Rimbaud's "Motion", from his *Illuminations*, ends like this:

*'For from the talk among the apparatus,
the blood, the flowers, the fire, the
gems,
From the excited calculations on this
fugitive ship,
– One sees, rolling like a dyke beyond
the hydraulic-powered road,
Monstrous, endlessly illuminated –
their stock of studies;
They driven into harmonic ecstasy,
And the heroism of discovery.
In the most startling atmospheric
accidents,
A youthful couple holds itself aloof on
the ark,
– Is it primitive shyness that people
pardon? –'*¹⁹

This is strikingly similar to the first lines of Dylan's 'Chimes of Freedom':

*Far between sundown's finish an'
midnight's broken toll
We ducked inside a doorway, thunder
crashing
As majestic bells of bolts struck
shadows in the sounds
Seeming to be the chimes of freedom
flashing.*

Another prose poem included in Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, 'Devotion', prefigures the song's dedications and prayers for the victims.

Rimbaud:

*'For the shipwrecked (...) for the fever
of mothers and children (...)
For men (...) For the spirit of the poor.
And for a very high clergyman.'*

Dylan:

The chimes of freedom are

*Tolling for the luckless, the abandoned
an' forsaked
Tolling for the outcast, burnin'
constantly at stake.*

In this case, rather than literal correspondences, we have similarities in subject, atmosphere, style and language. But what I find particularly revealing is that none of these prose poems from Rimbaud's *Illuminations* is included in Angel Flores' anthology! If Dylan was writing under the influence of these texts, it stands to reason that he had been reading more of Rimbaud's work in the intervening years since Suze Rotolo told him about the poet, or he had just absorbed the essence of Rimbaud so perfectly that he began to write things Rimbaud could have written.

After his definitive break-up with Suze Rotolo in New York, Dylan made a second road trip in 1964, this time in Europe, from England and Paris to Berlin and down to Greece, in the course of which he wrote most of the songs that would end up on *Another Side*. One would like to think that his stay in Paris offered him many occasions to think about Rimbaud and all the other French poets he had been reading, but there is no evidence to indicate this was the case. Hugues Aufray, his French friend, who has often recalled their time together in Paris in May 1964 has never mentioned anything in this respect.²⁰ Dylan's 'Some Other Kind of Songs', printed on *Another Side Of Bob Dylan* contain some lines about his Parisian impressions, but these are not too revealing, although a couple of lines might be said to be à la Rimbaud:

*'for françoise hardy
at the seine's edge
a giant shadow
of notre dame
seeks t' grab my foot
sorbonne students
whirl by on thin bicycles
swirlin' lifelike colors of leather spin
...
as the sun goes down
the doors of the river are open
...
from the walls of the water then
i look across t' what they call
the right bank
an' envy
your
trumpet
player'*

In their 'On the Heels of Rimbaud' article, Whithouse and Bauldie mention – not very convincingly in my opinion – a bunch of other Dylan songs with Rimbaud connections both on *Another Side of Bob Dylan* and on later albums.²¹ The only connections I can fully agree with are the ones with Rimbaud's 'Ma Bohème' they identify in 'Idiot Wind' ('Down the highway, down the tracks / Down the road to ecstasy...') and 'Tangled Up In Blue' ('I was standing on the side of the road / rain fallin' on my shoes...'). We should add 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues' more so because of the Bohemian lifestyle expressed in the song than the Tom Thumb quote in Rimbaud's poem ('*Thom Thumb in a daze, I sowed rhymes / As I went along. My inn was at the Big Dipper. / – My stars in the sky made a soft rustling*

sound.'). But once again the lines in question display a similar radical poetical stance, rather than a formal similitude; they all share an all-encompassing search for freedom in every respect.

Besides the purely literary parallels, there are of course other common points between the French poet and the Minnesota minstrel: their sympathy for the outlaws, the luckless, the 'abandoned and forsaken'; their rebellion against the 'Law and Order' types, attitudes and institutions; their occasional overindulgence in alcohol and other intoxicating substances. And above everything else, their attempt to create an artistic expression based on experience, but free of any ties, formal or conceptual: poetry as a radical way of life rather than a cultural artefact. Add to this, if you wish, that they both were brilliantly talented and precocious children. It is not so much their early poetical gift that makes them similar, as the way they responded to its call, and their strong and unflinching willpower to follow their destiny, against all odds. Rimbaud ran away from home several times since he was 16, whereas Dylan surely ran away from home only in his imagination, but the idea was there. They also disclosed the same inclination to caricature and satirise political matters, sometimes in a shocking and provocative way, Napoleon III's regime or the John Birch Society, even if neither of them ever had a clear political conscience at any time.

But there are also quite a lot of points in which they differ: Rimbaud wrote very little – a handful of poems – and only during a brief period in his short life:

roughly between 1869 and 1874. He only published one book, *A Season in Hell*, 1873, which he never bothered to distribute. In his lifetime, he never was popular or widely read whereas Dylan very soon enjoyed considerable success with his songs, and has created and released a huge body of work over 40 years, and he still hasn't come 'to the place that Rimbaud came to when he decided to stop writing and run guns in Africa', as he told in his revealing 1977 statement:

'I am interested in all aspects of life. Revelations and realizations. Lucid thought that can be translated into songs, analogies, new information. I am better at it now. Not really written yet anything to make me stop writing. Like, I haven't come to the place that Rimbaud came to when he decided to stop writing and run guns in Africa.'
(Bob Dylan, November 1977).²²

Last but not least, Dylan has always been more influenced by rebellious and bohemian lives than he has actually lived one himself: his touring may have been adventurous at times – and certainly daunting – yet it does not stand comparison to Rimbaud's adventurous life (even if of course, there are myths to discount, such as Rimbaud the slave trader, and he only once tried to sell guns, and the commercial expedition failed dismally).

All things considered, the lasting influence Rimbaud had on Dylan had more to do with an attitude to artistic creation: his stance of the poet as a seer who has to go to the very edge of existence in order to be able to create something true and original.

Dylan has made the experience throughout the years in different ways, and he has had his share of seasons in hell. But he hasn't come to the point of no return, as perhaps Rimbaud did, and has thus been able to recreate himself artistically many times, so many in fact that we have the impression of dealing with an always changing person. I believe Dylan was Rimbaud at times, as he can be Shakespeare or Dante. That's what he sings about perhaps in all his songs, from 'The Times They Are A-Changin' to 'Things Have Changed', and through 'I and I':

*Someone else is speakin' with my
mouth, but I'm listening
only to my heart.
I've made shoes for everyone, even you,
while I still go barefoot.58*

Doesn't this great reflection of the poet's odd destiny recall the essence of Rimbaud's 'My Bohemian Life (Ma Bohème)', when the I of the poet sitting on the side of the road:

*'Where, rhyming in the midst of
fantastic shadows,
Like Lyres I plucked the elastics
Of my wounded shoes, one foot near
my heart!'*

Notes

1. Spin, December 1989: 'Bob Dylan Not Like A Rolling Stone Interview' by Scott Cohen, quoted from *Younger Than That Now*, Thunder's Mouth Press 2004, p. 230. Patti Smith, herself hailed as the 'Rimbaud of Rock' very often referred to Rimbaud in her songs and poems.

2 This article presupposes on the reader's part a relative knowledge of Arthur Rimbaud's life and work, and of its significance. Any encyclopaedia will offer extensive coverage of this subject; see for instance http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Rimbaud Other useful web sites include:

<http://www.levity.com/corduroy/rimbaud.htm> and <http://members.tripod.com/RoadSide6/frames.html>

3. Bob Dylan, *Chronicles, Volume One* (Simon & Schuster, New York City, 2004); p. 288.

4. See Esther Quinn, 'The Brecht of the Electric Guitar' in: *The Bridge* No. 18, Spring 2004, pp. 49-68.

5 Anthony Scaduto, *Bob Dylan. An Intimate Biography* (New American Library, Signet paperback, 1979); p. 99f.). There is a similar statement by Van Ronk in Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home*, (Ballantine Books, New York, 1987); p. 107, with the difference that Van Ronk here pushes even further his theory that Dylan had been secretly studying Rimbaud 'over a period of years'. And instead of dating his discovery of the translation around the time Dylan had just moved in his new apartment, here it is said to have been 'much later'. See also Van Ronk's memoir *The Mayor of MacDougal Street* 2005 where Van Ronk very briefly mentions Dylan's 'hayseed attitude'.

6. Angel Flores (ed.), *An Anthology of French Poetry from Nerval to Valéry in English Translation*, (Doubleday, New York City), 1958.

7. I wonder if Dylan knew Jack Kerouac's poem "Rimbaud". It would be interesting, but nothing permits us to confirm or deny this theory... Kerouac's poem is a very personal biography done in loose poetical flashes, published for the first time in the magazine Yugen No. 6 in 1960, reprinted in *Scattered Poems*, 1971 and in Ann Charter's *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, 1995 . The question would merit a closer analyse, for Kerouac's biographical flashes highlight Rimbaud as a forerunner to the Beat poets. It is likely that Dylan read Kerouac's piece 'some place along the line' and then was certainly thrilled and inspired by the adventurous life-style of

the bohemian poet. Just one quotation:

*'In October of 1869
Rimbaud is writing poetry
in Greek French –
Takes a runaway train
to Paris without a ticket
the miraculous Mexican Brakeman
throws him off the fast
train, to Heaven, which
he no longer travels because
Heaven is everywhere –'*

(Jack Kerouac, *Poèmes, traduits de l'anglais par P. Mikriammos, Seghers, Paris 2002*, p. 120). The end of Kerouac's poem could have been written by Dylan:

*'He dies in the arms
of Ste. Isabelle
his sister
& before rising to Heaven
sends his francs
to Djami, Djami
the Havari boy
his body servant
8 years in the African
Frenchman's Hell,
& it all adds up
to nothing, like
Dostoevsky, Beethoven
or Da Vinci –
So, poets, rest awhile
& shut up:
Nothing ever came
of nothing'* (ibid, p. 126)

8 Arthur Rimbaud: *Complete Works, Selected Letters*. Translation, Introduction and Notes by Wallace Fowlie. (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1966).

9. Ibid.

10. For a structural and post-structural analysis of the matter, I would recommend the first chapter of Scobie's brilliant *Alias Bob Dylan*, 'I and I: Bob Dylan as Text' (Red Deer Press, Calgary, 1991), now Chapter 2, 'Glossary', pp. 39-81 of the second, revised and extended edition, *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited* (Red Deer Press, Calgary, 2004).

11. J. R. Godard interview, *Village Voice*, March 22, 1965; quoted from *Younger Than That Now... op. cit.*, p. 31.

12. This is what Joel Bernstein, interviewed by John Bauldie, reported on the matter: 'Bob called that

guitar 'Rimbaud'. He had us put 'Rimbaud' on it – we got a book of Rimbaud and cut out the name and attached it to the guitar. When he wanted the guitar, Bob would ask for Rimbaud.' Originally published in *The Telegraph*, No. 35, Spring 1990, pp. 10-31; quoted from John Bauldie (ed.), *Wanted Man. In Search of Bob Dylan*, Black Spring Press, London, 1990; see p. 97.

13. Neil Hickey interview, *TV Guide*, September 11, 1976; quoted from *Younger Than That Now... op. cit.* p. 104.

14. Chris Whithouse and John Bauldie, 'On the Heels of Rimbaud', in *The Telegraph*, no. 24, Summer 1986, pp. 47-64.

15. Although Michael Gray has authored one of the more detailed and thoroughly researched studies on the manifold influences on Dylan ever to be published, the monumental *Song & Dance Man III. The Art of Bob Dylan* (Cassell, London, 2000), he must have been well aware of the dangers inherent to searching for literal traces of Rimbaud in Dylan's songs, as he very studiously avoids establishing 'literal parallels' and hardly touches upon the matter. Rimbaud is mentioned but three or four times in the book, and none of these mentions is included in the chapter which discusses the literary tradition in Dylan's songs. One must also consider the differences between the languages of song and poetry, and the difficulty of interpreting the 'meaning' of hermetic poetry. All things considered, it is clear that we can only give a few examples of Rimbaud's influence on Dylan's song-writing, those that will stand up to scrutiny.

16. Whithouse and Bauldie, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

17. Arthur Rimbaud, *op. cit.* (W. Fowlie translation).

18. Scaduto, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

19. This and subsequent quotations, from Arthur Rimbaud, *op. cit.* (W. Fowlie translation). I have also used the original French text: Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres Complètes, Correspondance*, ed. Louis Forestier, Robert Laffont; Paris, 2004.

20. See for instance the very interesting Hugues Aufray interview by Robert Schollockoff in *The Telegraph* no. 39, Summer 1991, pp. 7-28.

21. Whithouse and Bauldie, *op. cit.*, see particularly pp. 59-63.

22. In an interview by Ron Rosenbaum originally published in *Playboy*, March 1978 issue, quoted from *Younger Than That Now. The Collected Interviews with Bob Dylan* (Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, 2004); p. 150.

Songs from, but not out of, History

A bridging section between two parts

by Andrew Muir

Part one of this article, in *Judas 14*, detailed the many connections between Scottish traditional music and the work of Bob Dylan up until 1966. Part two continues in the same vein, beginning with the period immediately after Mr. Dylan's motorcycle 'crash' afforded him the possibility of escaping from the crazy world of pop superstardom and effecting a retreat to the countryside of Woodstock, where he could, in his own words, 'take care of business' and spend time 'evening things up'.

The first official album after this was 1967's *John Wesley Harding*, a stripped down acoustic masterpiece that could not imaginably have been further from the overwhelming majority of sounds in that 'summer of love'. Dylan biographer Clinton Heylin is of the belief that, once Dylan had stepped off the touring treadmill, he was horrified by what had become of popular music after his own mid '60s output had begun that very revolution in some style. Certainly this would accord with the much quoted reaction by an angry and scornful Dylan to the playing of the Beatles icon-of-the-era album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, when he's reported to have snapped that it should be turned off. What Dylan objected to was later made crystal clear. In *Behind The Shades* Clinton Heylin quotes Dylan in 1978 saying that 'I thought it was very indulgent album, though the songs on it were real good. I didn't think all that

productions was necessary, 'cause the Beatles had never done that before.'

Todd Harvey points out that the *John Wesley Harding* album boasts at least two direct influences from Scottish traditional music. The first – aptly for this section of my article – is a melody already used by Dylan. As Mr Harvey explains, while discussing the influence of the old folk song 'Peter Amberley' on Dylan's 'Ballad of Donald White'

She [*Bonnie Dobson*] sang fairly typical lyrics, although lacking some of the formal language found in Calhoun's broadside. Her melody, as acknowledged in a spoken introduction, was the common 'Come All Ye Tramps and Hawkers,' which was brought to the Maritime provinces by emigrating Scots and which extols the virtues of the open road. It is best known to folk revivalists through the singing of Jimmy MacBeath and 'often attributed to Besom Jimmy, an Angus hawker of the last century'...By all accounts, Dylan was in the audience during one of Dobson's February 1962 Gerde's performances. Gil Turner writes, I remember the first night he heard the tune he used for the 'Ballad of Donald White.' It was in Bonnie Dobson's version of the 'Ballad of Peter Amberley.' He heard the tune, liked it, made a mental record of it and a few days later 'Donald White' was complete. (Note that Dylan used the melody again for 'I Pity the Poor Immigrant')

The other tune that Mr. Harvey finds on the album is 'The Road and the Miles to Bonnie Dundee'. However, prior to *John Wesley Harding* Dylan had recorded a vast array of songs in his country retreat with his old backing band, The Band. Long to be unreleased, these so-called 'Basement Tapes' began to leak out in the late 1960s and eventually, years later, the rich fecundity of this astonishing period became fully known and appreciated. All kinds of music are present, not least traditional folk music. There are too many highlights to claim a favoured position for any one song, but surely the spine tingling rendition of 'Young But Daily Growing' (aforementioned in part one of the article in an early 1960s incarnation) would be one of those most mentioned.

When Greil Marcus toured the United Kingdom to promote his book on the Basement Tapes, (which was then called *Invisible Republic*), I was present at a few of his talks and posed the question as to why the mythic towns in his imagined Republic were not joined by one, a wagon ride away perhaps, of British ballads. Mr. Marcus graciously conceded that such a town should have been there but firmly declined the suggestion that a second edition could address this omission.

John Wesley Harding had ended with two country songs. As the rest of the rock world went recklessly into the realms of psychedelia, Dylan plunged further into the, at that time, generally derided and despised world of country music, or 'redneck music' as it was dismissively termed.

The pleasant *Nashville Skyline* album was one thing, but Dylan's return to a UK stage for his first show since the 'battling' 1966 tour brought an unthinkable shock to the audience. As is customary, Mr.

Dylan, when he embraces something, embraces it 100%. Gone was the gaunt, wry, edgy figure in a hound's tooth suit blasting ferocious shards of electric mayhem. Present on stage instead was a relaxed, chubby, white-suited country gentleman crooning comforting old tunes.

Or so the story seemed from audio and pictorial evidence only. However, in a wholly remarkable discovery of a video of part of the event, some 35 years after it took place, a different story emerges.

It is normal to find that a video of a musical event is, generally speaking, inferior to audio alone (very generally speaking in the light of *Hard Rain*, and actually hard to print in the giant shadow of *No Direction Home*). The mind can conjure up endless images and emotions while listening, but is more curtailed when the eye is watching; moreover, on repeat viewings, these objectively imposed pictures never vary. This, however, is a case to counter such a generalisation. In this instance the visuals portray a Dylan who was far more engaged in his performance than the audio leads one to suppose. Just as in 1966, he is challenging his audience; countering their expectations in an extreme and pointedly defiant manner.

It should also be remembered that at the time this was a 'big show'; a 'mega event' to use a more modern tag. And right at the epicentre Dylan chose to sing a traditional Scottish favourite, 'Wild Mountain Thyme', which unfortunately is not captured for posterity on the video .

Nonetheless that Dylan turned to – and turned in the performance of the night with – a traditional Scottish tune at such a challenging point in his career is key to the concluding part of my article, which you can read in *Judas 16*.

YOU CAME DOWN ON ME LIKE ROLLING THUNDER

A RETROSPECTIVE OF THIRTY YEARS AGO

by Jim LaClair

This is an amazing time to be a fan – especially an older fan – of Bob Dylan. The Never Ending Tour rambles through its 17th year. Want tickets to a show? Point and click. Want a ‘field recording’ of last night’s performance? Point and click. Still not satisfied because ‘Bob just ain’t what he used to be’? Relax – your ship has come in. As I write this, no less than four commercial products conceived to celebrate Bob as ‘he used to be’ are scheduled for release over a stretch of just three weeks. For starters we have *The Gaslight Tape* to be released on August 30 through the Starbucks coffee chain. (These are US release dates.) Yes, I’m aware of the controversy that this project has generated within the Dylan community, but that issue is beyond the scope of this article. The fact of the matter is that this show, long coveted by bootleg collectors, is about to become available (albeit in a condensed format), presumably in superb sound quality, to anyone willing to head for the local Starbucks. On the same day, we have the soundtrack from the long anticipated Martin Scorsese *No Direction Home* documentary to be packaged as *The Bootleg Series Volume Seven*. September 13 will see the arrival of the *Bob Dylan Scrapbook* with still another CD containing interviews pertaining to the 1961-’66 time frame as a bonus offering. And finally, on September 20, the grand finale: the Scorsese *No Direction Home* documentary hits the shelf as a two disc DVD package. The teasing trailers for this project suggest that it will be one of the most important Dylan products ever. In addition to all this over-the-counter merchandise, there is the amazing two disc bootleg DVD set of outtakes from *Dont Look Back* which offers a feast of performance footage from Bob’s final solo acoustic tour in May of 1965 and the Carnegie Hall 1963 show now too! All too much...

Although I don't recall any official announcement to confirm it, one assumes that all of this is happening at this point in time to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of two of the most significant events in Dylan's career: the release of 'Like a Rolling Stone' in July of 1965 followed almost immediately by the 25 July performance at the Newport Folk Festival when our hero plugged in and tuned out the 'folk establishment.' Whatever the case may be, between this avalanche of high quality product and his constant touring, Bob Dylan has never been more accessible to his legion of fans than he is right now. And this brings us to a major point of this article: it hasn't always been this easy, and at no time in Bob's career was it more challenging than during the legendary Rolling Thunder Revue tour in the fall of 1975.

Dylan, Baez May Play in Burlington – The headline exploded from the entertainment page of the Thursday, 30 October edition of the *Free Press*. Reliable sources indicated that the Memorial Auditorium in Burlington had been booked for a concert featuring Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Jack Elliott, and other folk luminaries. While logistics had not been finalized, indications were that the concert was planned for early November. Stay tuned for further developments. I must have read the article at least five times before I looked up in disbelief. It had been more than ten years since Dylan and Baez had last performed together. Their joint appearances in the mid-'60s were legendary, and any reunion in the wake of their ugly parting of the ways seemed unlikely at best. Now it appeared

that the impossible would be happening right in my own backyard. But where were the specifics? The entire story seemed to be rooted in conjecture. Although Saturday, 8 November was suggested as the likely date for the show, ticket procurement details were nowhere to be found. Whatever pleasure I could realize from the news was greatly diminished by my need to get the facts.

For anyone born since the 1970s, the entire process of acquiring tickets to a concert of this significance – especially for someone living in a remote outpost of northern Vermont – would seem to be from outer space. When Dylan toured North America in 1974 after a hiatus of nearly eight years, tickets to all but two of the venues were sold by lottery! I remember reading that only about one in every twenty persons who sent in a cheque with a self-addressed, stamped envelope actually managed to see one of the '74 shows. I was one of the fortunate ones; the two performances at the Montreal Forum were sold the old fashioned way. Get in line at the box office and hope that seats would still be available by the time you reached the window. I had great seats both nights. This Rolling Thunder tour presented a whole new set of obstacles. The earliest news leaks indicated that Dylan and his caravan were barnstorming through the Northeast with an itinerary that was created on the fly. Posters and fliers would suddenly appear in random locations throughout the region only a day or two before the show would arrive in town. The same man who just a year and a half earlier had been selling out huge sports arenas in

a matter of hours (remember, this was pre-internet!) was now playing movie theatres within a 250 mile radius of my home! I was frantic; I considered myself unconditionally to be the biggest Bob Dylan fan in the universe, and the possibility of missing an event of this magnitude was driving me to distraction. I called radio stations, I called newspapers, I called the record company with little or no success.

Finally a crack appeared in the wall of secrecy. I'm not sure now whether it was a radio announcement or a little blurb in the newspaper, but on Monday, 3 November, word circulated that an announcement concerning the time and place for ticket sales to this most highly anticipated event would appear in the next morning's edition of the *Burlington Free Press*. Speculation suggested that the tickets would, in fact, be sold the next day. This was all that I needed. Along with two friends, I left for Burlington that evening, determined to fetch a copy of the *Free Press* as soon as it appeared on the streets and then to head for whatever site might be announced for the ticket distribution.

By one o'clock AM we were on the streets of downtown Burlington. As a youngster, I had delivered the *Free Press* in Montpelier, my hometown, and I knew that bundles containing stacks of the paper would be appearing in front of news-stands by around 1:30. My intention was to extricate a copy of the paper from one of these bundles, get the information, return the paper to the bundle, and head for the designated site – the Memorial Auditorium box office, I presumed. Sure enough, within minutes of our arrival on

the street, a bundle of papers was dropped right in front of a small Church Street bookstore. With little difficulty, I managed to maneuver a copy of the paper out of the bound stack. There at the bottom of page two was 'the Word'. Tickets to a concert on Saturday, 8 November, featuring music legends Bob Dylan and Joan Baez would go on sale that morning, not as expected at the Memorial Auditorium, but at the Roy L. Patrick Gymnasium on the campus of the University of Vermont.

This was all we had to know. I returned the borrowed *Free Press* to the stack and even thought to slip in a quarter, just in case there might be any impropriety in what I had done. This was probably my smartest decision of the day, because just as we started for my car, I saw a flashlight in the hands of a Burlington police officer, and he was headed our way! 'Oh my Lord,' I thought. 'I can see the headlines now: Highgate English Teacher Arrested for Stealing a Newspaper! I could lose my job! I **could lose my chance to get the tickets!** When he asked what we thought we were doing, I tried to explain the whole scenario to him, but he didn't seem to be convinced. "Look," I said, "we only borrowed the paper; we didn't steal it. We needed the information now. I put the paper back in the bundle; I even left a quarter here as payment for using it." Reaching into the bundle, I produced the quarter, and apparently this convinced him of my good faith. He dismissed us with a perfunctory, "I'll let it go this time, but see that it doesn't happen again. You could have been in serious trouble."

The crisis averted, we headed for the Patrick Gym at the south end of town. This seemed to be a wiser choice for a venue. It held nearly twice as many people as the Auditorium and the sightlines would be better. Dylan had played there with the Hawks almost exactly ten years earlier, 23 October 1965, and I had been in the front row. Sure enough, when we arrived, the line had already formed. There were probably 150 people ahead of us. To this day, I don't know how they were able to get the information before I did, but that didn't matter. We were in line, and we'd definitely get our tickets.

And we did – nine hours later. I actually had to ask my friends to hold my place in line while I drove to a pay phone to call the school and ask for an emergency leave day. I remember clearly that a camera crew arrived at about nine o'clock to film the queue. I thought they were from one of the local TV stations, but of course I was wrong. These were Dylan's people, shooting footage for *Renaldo and Clara*,

but we knew nothing about that at the time. I don't recall that any specific time was designated for the ticket windows to open, but I do know that delay followed delay until the line finally began to move at around eleven o'clock.

Two hours later, the treasured cardboard in hand, I was home in Highgate with an ice pack pressed to my skull in an effort to alleviate a screaming migraine headache. Relief would come in the form of a wonderful surprise. Just as the pain was starting to subside, the phone rang. It was my fiancée, Jackie, and she had received a call from her sister in Manchester, Connecticut. Would we be interested in seeing a Bob Dylan show on Thursday in Springfield, Massachusetts? She had just heard the announcement on the radio, and she would be willing to drive to Springfield to get tickets if we could make it on such short notice. Of course Jackie gave her the go-ahead. In less than 24 hours I had gone from wondering whether I would see any of the shows to having tickets to two of them!

The Springfield concert would be a late afternoon affair, added when the performance scheduled for that evening had sold out immediately after it was announced. I remember that our seats that day in the Springfield Civic Center were well to the side of the stage and that I was concerned that we would have a restricted view of the show from this angle. Consequently, when the lights went down, we moved to a position in the back of the arena which offered a direct view of the stage.



Recently, while updating my CD-R trading list, I realized that my collection of Rolling Thunder shows was very slim. Why, I wondered would this be the case, given the fact that these shows were among the most dynamic of Dylan's career. The answer is really quite simple. It's the fact that of all the tours Dylan has undertaken, Rolling Thunder is the most visual. This was the tour that you had to see to fully appreciate it. Surely anyone who has watched the concert segments from *Renaldo and Clara* knows exactly what I mean. I'm assuming that almost everyone taking the time to read this article has heard recordings of the music. Consequently, I will restrict my commentary on this Springfield concert and the subsequent performances that I saw in Burlington and Montreal to random moments which have left indelible impressions on my memory.

First is Dylan's intensity. I'll never forget the moment he first appeared on that stage in Springfield. After a prelude of about fifteen songs from the supporting cast, suddenly he was there, barreling through 'When I Paint My Masterpiece,' the perfect choice for an opener. Nothing subtle here – this was a man on a mission. His renditions of each song made his performances on the 1974 trek seem like mere recitations by comparison. If the charisma was diminished – even slightly – on that earlier tour, it was fully restored on this autumn day in 1975. Prowling and stalking the stage in a wide-brimmed hat bedecked with feathers and flowers and with a long scarf looped around his neck, his phrasing was impeccable – singing

every note as if his life depended on it. He was more than a singer; he was an actor in a series of dramatic vignettes, each of which was punctuated by his seemingly random choreography. Even while hearing them for the first time, I remember thinking that songs like 'Romance in Durango' and 'Isis' were great theatre, each having the potential to be re-invented as a motion picture. 'Sara' was a revelation: 'Stayin' up for days in the Chelsea Hotel, writing "Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" for you.' Amazing stuff – I had always assumed that Joan Baez was the inspiration for 'Sad Eyed Lady.' I also recall the frustration of knowing that none of these wonderful new songs were yet available on any commercial recording; it would be another two months before *Desire* would be released.

And I remember Scarlet Rivera. A gypsy Madonna, her raven hair cascading over and around her shoulders and dropping all the way to her waist, she moved with dignity and grace as her instrument wove its spell. Whether she was attired in a shirt and jeans or a long flowing skirt, she was riveting. Her presence gave this music its signature sound, distinguishing it from anything Dylan had performed in the past. Insofar as the new material was concerned, my two favorite songs were 'Oh Sister' and 'One More Cup of Coffee,' and it was certainly the intricate tapestry woven by her violin that accounted for their almost hypnotic attraction. The high tension of 'Hurricane' was almost magically alleviated by the seductive interludes she created with this miraculous instrument. One had to see their chemistry on stage to believe it.

The intermission following Dylan's first set was ended as the unmistakable blending of two voices that had helped to define the musical signature of a decade rose from behind the vaudeville style curtain which dropped from the rafters above the stage.

'The water is wide, and I cannot cross over...' The lyrics to the traditional lament soared through the arena, but tantalizingly, the curtain stayed in place until the beginning of the second verse of the song. Then, slowly it rose revealing these two icons of the 60s popular culture together again, leaning



into a single microphone. The crowd went wild, with more than a few literally weeping with joy. Yes, this was a scene which many believed would never be repeated, and had it been possible, I would have frozen the moment in time. Could it possibly live up to the hype which had defined this as the tour's defining moment? I had last seen them together in March of 1965 at the ancient New Haven Arena in Connecticut. At that time, of course, the perception was that they were much more than an exotic musical duo. For a year or

more the media had linked them romantically, and although the parting of their ways documented in *Dont Look Back* was only weeks away, nothing on that night suggested that a breakup could be imminent. Now with the evidence of their

reunion right before our eyes, the true believers were prepared for a ride to musical nirvana. We weren't disappointed: throughout the mini-set, Dylan acted as Joan's foil, creating a dynamic tension, challenging her with his unpredictable phrasing and even with his body language as he backed away from the microphone only to attack it seconds later. They

did four songs together, ending with a rendition of 'I Shall Be Released' that brought chills.

Following their duets, Joan sang five or six songs on her own before Dylan reclaimed the stage. The energy seemed to intensify from one song to the next until, suddenly, it was over, with the whole cast assembled for the requisite festival style sing-along of 'This Land is Your Land.' For a few minutes, we searched for scalpers, hoping to score tickets for the evening performance. Our efforts met with no

success though, so we hit the road in a state of euphoria, knowing that in just 48 hours we'd do it all over again, and this time it would be a 'home game!'

Saturday's performance in Burlington presented still another problem. This show would be general admission; the best seats would go to those who were at the front of the queue. Obviously, we wanted to be among those who would grab the prime seats, but this would require another five-hour ordeal while we waited for the doors to open. By the time we arrived at the Patrick Gym, the line had formed, but we were close enough to the front to know that we would be among the first to enter the building. Having already seen the show we became minor celebrities, sharing our memories from two days earlier with others while we waited.

There's an interesting anecdote relating to that long afternoon. Several weeks after the concert a friend gave me this account of an incident which occurred at the Harbor Hide-A-Way, an upscale dining establishment located in nearby Shelburne. Early that afternoon, several patrons were asked to re-locate themselves to another section of the restaurant to allow space for a large and apparently unexpected group of VIPs. While some were less than pleased with the request, they eventually agreed to the move. Soon the main dining hall was filled with Dylan, his entourage, and the ever-present film crew, shooting footage for *Renaldo and Clara*. When the diners who had suffered the inconvenience requested their checks, they were informed that the gentleman who had interrupted their

meals was most grateful for their kindness and that he had picked up all of the tabs.

In the smaller Burlington venue, our seats were much better than the ones in Springfield. My recollection is that the lights went down at around 8:15. With the Springfield concert under our belts, we had a better idea of what to expect. Once again Bob Neuwirth and the 'house band' (which would eventually be identified as Guam) opened the program with Ramblin' Jack, Ronee Blakely, Mick Ronson et.al. waiting in the wings. Sometime around nine o'clock, Dylan hit the stage to paint his masterpiece. This time he was in whiteface, and I remember that I felt a twinge of disappointment. Not to worry though, for as the show progressed at a torrid rate, the paint dissolved in the rivulets of perspiration that ran down his cheeks. Besides the suffocating heat in the jam-packed gymnasium, the detail from this show that I recall most vividly is the ecstatic response of the crowd to Bob's first harmonica solo of the night. It came during his second song, 'It Ain't Me Babe,' and when he pulled out the harp, pandemonium erupted in the hall. One sensed that these were people savoring a moment which they believed could never happen, certainly not in Burlington, Vermont.

The joy I felt in leaving the Patrick Gym was mitigated at least slightly by anxiety over whether I'd have another chance to experience this incredible dynamic that was Rolling Thunder. Strangely enough, I don't recall the exact circumstances of my learning about the concert at the Montreal Forum on

Thursday, 4 December. Certainly I expected Dylan to perform there on this tour, so the information may have been obtained by something as simple as a phone call to the Forum box office. Whatever the case, that Thursday evening found me high up in the nosebleed section of Canada's most hallowed hockey shrine. This was the one and only time that I've had the experience of being 'the taper' at a Dylan show. Before leaving for Montreal that afternoon, I borrowed a portable cassette recorder from my classroom. I persuaded Jackie to carry the largest handbag she owned into the arena with the recorder safely stowed therein. I knew that a security detail would be working the show, but I assumed (correctly) that the idea of searching a woman's purse would be unthinkable. Unfortunately, in my haste to get on the road, I brought only one blank cassette with me so there was no way that I could get the whole show. While I managed to record most of Dylan's songs, I remember my frustration when I realized that I would be unable to include Joan Baez's set. To this day, the result of our endeavor is called 'The Pocketbook Tape.' As audience recordings from the mid 70s go, I'd give it a B- grade. Because it's incomplete, I've never circulated it for trading purposes, but I was basically pleased with my efforts.

That performance in Montreal has enjoyed legendary acclaim. In *Behind the Shades Revisited*, Clinton Heylin refers to it as 'the best of the tour,' and on at least three occasions I have seen it referenced as possibly Dylan's greatest concert ever. I have no desire to agree or disagree with

these claims. Certainly all seven of the Gospel shows that I was able to attend in the spring of 1980 were amazing on a completely different level. Suffice it to say that this concert in Montreal was a tour de force. By now Joni Mitchell had joined the cast, and she was given a wonderful reception here in her native land. Much of Dylan's performance was included in *Renaldo and Clara*. Unfortunately, I have never been able to obtain a decent copy of the movie, but much of the concert footage is available in the *Scorpio Genuine Telecasts 1961-2002* DVD set.

Once again, a solitary moment defined this evening for me. It came early in Dylan's set when he surprised everyone in the building with a very rare rendition of 'Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You.' 'Throw my ticket in the wind!' he began, and he seemed to be in a frenzy as he barked out the completely re-worked lyrics. 'Get ready!' he shouted, 'cause tonight I'll be staying here with you!' In no way was this the delicate love ballad from *Nashville Skyline*. 'You cast your spell and I went under' had evolved into 'You came down on me like rolling thunder,' and the huge crowd of over 20,000 roared its approval. I remember being at once pleased and disappointed when I discovered that this very song had been chosen to lead off the *Live 1975 Bootleg Series Volume 5* release in 2002. Pleased, obviously, to see that it, along with three other songs from the Montreal show, had been included, but disappointed that 'When I Paint My Masterpiece,' which had opened all of the shows, was nowhere to be found on this long anticipated collection. Nick

Hawthorne gave me a different perspective in his excellent review of the *Live 1975* set in issue Four (January 2003) of this magazine. Nick suggests that while 'Masterpiece' was an ideal choice to set the tone of the live shows, 'Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You' captures the essence of the recording and defined its purpose. As we listen to this wonderful music in intimacy of our own homes, Bob indeed is 'staying here' for the evening.

At 23 songs, this was the longest of Dylan's RTR performances, and it was a spellbinder. While I could never get too much Rolling Thunder, I left the building exhausted, satisfied, and resigned to the idea that if this incredible ride had to end, now would be as good a time as any.

Postscript: On Saturday, 6 December, two days after the concert, I returned to Montreal to shop for a Christmas gift for Jackie and to check for any recent Dylan

vinyl bootlegs in a subterranean music store that I patronized occasionally. Eventually my travels brought me to the vicinity of the Chateau Champlain, and as I passed the entrance to the hotel, I saw a young man emerging from the building with an instrument case in hand. He looked slightly familiar, and as I was trying to identify him, I was simultaneously startled by the brim of a hat, trimmed with flowers and a large feather, passing directly in front of me. In complete astonishment, I turned to see Bob Dylan climbing into a limousine parked right beside the curb! I was caught so completely off guard that he was in the limo before I could blink. I had no idea that he would still be in town two days after the performance at the Forum; I would learn years later that he had stayed for another day of shooting film sequences for *Renaldo and Clara*. The young man whom I had noticed at first was a member of the band, probably Rob Stoner. About

three weeks later, when we were opening our Christmas gifts, Jackie handed me a large round box. I ripped off the wrapping paper and opened it to discover a beautiful new wide brimmed hat bedecked with flowers and a peacock feather, virtually identical to Dylan's. I treasure it to this day.

