

# from *Inside A Prune*

Hello again everyone and best wishes for 2004, may your Bob be with you. After an exciting 2003, with the continuing Never Ending Tour, the release of *Masked & Anonymous* and the 15 SACD titles, we look forward with anticipation to the new year.

You were going to get an extended editorial extolling the virtues of the Hammersmith show in November 2003, but Nick and Peter handle this more than adequately in their invigorating article that kicks off this, the eighth issue of *Judas!*

My own tour began in Sweden with the second and third shows of that leg, in Stockholm and Karlstad. The Stockholm show was preceded, the night before, by the 'Love & Theft: a tribute to Bob Dylan' convention. What a great occasion and success this was, full, like the days that followed, of the on-tour fun of meeting up with old acquaintances and forming new friendships. Keith will join me in saying 'well done' to all our Scandinavian friends: the intrepid Norwegians, doughty Danes, enthusiastic Swedes and friendly Finns (leaving aside the accuracy of the 'Scandinavian' tag for the moment) that cornered me pre-show.

Long will we remember the trip and, in particular, the 'Dylan Express' train from Stockholm to Karlstad the morning after the Stockholm show. Another highlight of the trip was meeting the legendary Izzy Young. I thought I'd take him a copy of my *Troubadour* book as a present and hopefully talk to him about the old days. To my double surprise he knew of me and was very pleased to see me. After he took the book he started showing us all manner of treasures. 'Have I caught up with the value of the book yet?' he asked. I told him the welcoming hug and first story he'd told had already done more than that.



I am delighted to say that Izzy will be appearing regularly in *Judas!* from issue nine onwards. Also next year we will have articles, some already in, from Peter Doggett, Robert Forryan, John Hinchey, Richard Jobs and John Perry amongst others. We also have an in-depth interview with Stephen Scobie and I have more than just hopes for Michael Gray, Clinton Heylin and Paul Williams all returning to these pages. We will of course continue to introduce new writers, and we look forward to seeing some of the many already introduced by *Judas!* flourish and become more established.

This issue also sees the beginning of a rather special tale - 'Red, White and Blue'. I have had this for a while, but did not publish it earlier as options to print it in its entirety were being explored. Also, I was a bit concerned; not at all at the quality of the writing, which I did and do find excellent, but at how it would fit into *Judas!*, especially as it needs to be spread across various issues. When it transpired that the separate printing idea was not viable, I was determined not to let it languish any longer. It may be about a past year of touring but it is clearly applicable to all NET legs, and, indeed, to many non-Dylan inspired but similarly mad trips, and so I am proud to unveil it here.

I am, in fact, proud of all the contributors' work in this issue, including a large number of first-time authors - showing that my on-site nagging during the tour worked wonders.

All in all it adds up to much more of a 'live Dylan' dominated issue than we have had before; then again perhaps it is high time we had one of those, and as I sit typing this editorial in post-'Durango' glow, *now* seems the best of times.

So full has the issue become that there is not room for my review of Mike Marqusee's '*Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art*'. This book came out around the time of Christopher Ricks's long-awaited book and therefore you may have overlooked it. That would be a pity for, although it is yet another book about the sixties, this is no easy cash-in. In fact it is a superbly constructed, researched and written book that captivates you from the opening pages and does not lose its grip until *John Wesley Harding*, when for the first time Marqusee seems to lose focus. Then again, given that the theme of the book is Dylan's art in relation to the Civil Rights and Peace movements and radical politics of the Sixties this is perhaps not surprising. Marqusee comes across endearingly as a fan, without jeopardising his role as a clear-eyed and objective historian and interpreter of Dylan's songs.

While I am on the recommendation kick, I should point out that there is a fine 'unofficial' *Masked & Anonymous* website to visit for all of you with an Internet connection. Not only does it already repay your attention in spades but the man behind it, Trevor Gibb, tells me he has a massive interview with Larry Charles that he'll be putting up as soon as he can. You can find the site at <http://www.peterstonebrown.com/M&A/Index.html>

Enough of my recommendations for now, other than to say you'll find all sorts of delights in these pages; enjoy.

*Andrew Muir*

# Contents

Number  
Eight

- 4**     **The Game Is The Same, It's Just Up Another Level**  
*by Nick Hawthorne and Peter Vincent*
- 18**    **Time To Keep Up With The Times**  
*by Björn Waller*
- 33**    **Beauty May Only Turn To Rust**  
*by Eyolf Østrem*
- 42**    **A Dark Hidden Gem**  
*by Michael O'Connell*
- 45**    **Triumphs In The Face Of Modern Adversity**  
*by Manuel Vardavas*
- 48**    **Letters**  
*to The Editor*
- 56**    **A Perfect Song**  
*by James Bishop*
- 58**    **It Then Must Be Time For You To Rest...**  
*by Jonathan Shimkin*
- 67**    **Affairs Of The Heart**  
*by Nick Hawthorne*
- 80**    **Philosophical Reflections**  
*by Martin van Hees*
- 82**    **Red, White And Blue Shoe Strings - Part 1**  
*by Andrew Davies*

## **Photo Credits:**

*Front cover John Hume, Utrecht 16th Feb. 1993*

*Back cover Ian Richards, Camden 21st July 1993*

*Inside back cover Duncan Hume, Sheffield 20th Nov. 2003*

*Text pictures Duncan Hume, Europe 2003*

# The Game Is The Same, It's Just Up On Another Level

by Nick Hawthorne and Peter Vincent

*Well, friends, Bob Dylan is back with us again. I don't know how long he intends to stay, but I didn't ask him. Didn't figure it was any of my business.*

– Rolling Stone

*[my] function is not to explain. If it's not too bold, I consider myself to be an innovator, one of very few around. And as such, it's certainly not for me to account for what I'm doing, I leave that to others. Hopefully there are one or two out there who have the knowledge and the insight to make fair comment. Beyond that, 'what can I say?'*

– Bob Dylan

Originally written as the opening paragraph of the *Rolling Stone* review of *New Morning*, the first quote above serves as a perfect comment on the three small concerts that Bob Dylan played in London at the end of his 2003 European tour. The second stands as Dylan's archetypal response. And perhaps those three shows, at Shepherds Bush Empire on Sunday 23rd November, the Carling Apollo at Hammersmith on 24th November and the Carling Academy at Brixton on the 25th, stand as Dylan's response to a crisis in his performing career, one that left many fans wondering whether the Never Ending Tour was indeed about to end, while others, as always, doughtily defended his every move.

Bob Dylan has had many peaks and troughs in his career, both before the Never Ending Tour and during it. The alarming deterioration in Dylan's voice evident in 2003 produced a very noticeable trough. It was the worst Dylan had ever sounded over a sustained period in his entire career. He sounded truly in pain when he sung, hoarse, rasping, gurgling. This voice, which became known as the 'wolfman' voice, was sweet relief when compared to the other voice Dylan had to offer in the upper part of his register, which was known as the 'sing-song' voice. This was equally painful to hear, and involved going UP with infuriating predictability at the end of every line.

Worst of all was when he decided to combine the two, which he did to ghastly effect in 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' in New Orleans on April 25th. Eventually he abandoned attempting to sing the song altogether, rapping out the last verse in a manner completely devoid of musicality, though undeniably dramatic. Bizarrely, this travesty of a performance immediately became one of the most celebrated versions of one of Dylan's earliest masterpieces. What became clear only later was that it was the precursor of a year littered with unlistenable, painful vocal performances.

There was nothing in the middle of Dylan's vocal range but a hole. His breath control, once his greatest skill, was entirely gone, which also explained the God-awful harmonica 'playing' that we were subjected to. This involved going up and down the scale while breathing in and out very rapidly. There was no control, no emotion. The vocal flair had been devastated by the disappearance of his mid-range, and the ludicrous affectations he had developed in the upper and lower ranges to try to cover this.

Following a lengthy summer tour of North America, part of which was in support of The Dead and involved him sitting in with the headliners for a few songs which if anything were worse than what was inflicted on the long-suffering audience in Dylan's own set, a substantial European tour was announced. This took Dylan through Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Germany again, Italy, Switzerland, Germany again, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, England,

the Republic of Ireland, and finally back to England, where both tour and touring year were scheduled to end at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre.

Thirty-one dates in 15 countries, all taking place in a period of just over six weeks; quite a challenge for a 62-year-old with evident vocal difficulties. This made it all the more of a surprise when additional shows were announced, in theatres rather than the arenas that were the majority of the tour venues; first the two at Hammersmith and Brixton, then the show at Shepherds Bush, the smallest venue Bob had played in London since his days as a complete unknown.

The tour began with intriguing rearrangements of songs, focusing on what are normally acoustic numbers. 'Desolation Row' worked well as a rocked-up anthem, 'Boots of Spanish Leather' worked excellently with a totally new arrangement, as did 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' and 'Girl from the North Country'. However, Dylan's voice was obviously struggling. The songs he had rearranged relied totally on the voice and it was barely there, with the gasping and gurgling from the rest of the year very much present, albeit amongst evidence that Dylan could still really sing. A line here, a line there; in 'Desolation Row' at Karlstad, Sweden on October 12th, just the third show of the tour, his voice soared gloriously on 'all except for Cain and Abel', 'Abel' acquiring a number of extra syllables and sounding very well for it, and again on 'his nurse, some local loser', 'loser' being thrillingly elongated and trilled.

Thirty-four gruelling days of travelling and performing later, at Wembley on 15th November, Dylan delivered what must be two of his worst performances in recent years; a really horrific 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue', and a not-much-better 'Mr. Tambourine Man'. Many a song with potential was ruined by the wheezing harp work. Likewise, many a song started with a very nice intro, some good playing from the band, only for Dylan to spoil it all by banging his fingers down on about a third of the keys on the keyboard, the clunking sound echoing painfully around the arena. There were good moments; 'Desolation Row' was again strong, with some good lines sung by Dylan with the old flair. 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' was the highlight of the night, the vocal and arrangement both beautifully effective. Most of the electric numbers were just a wall of noise, except 'Like a Rolling Stone' which was powerful. The show as a whole was so-so, not too bad.

Then came news of a cancelled show in Ireland. The reason given was 'severe viral laryngitis', which did not fill one with a great deal of hope. The rest of the shows were in doubt and the expectations of the tour fell another notch. The laryngitis turned out to be mere tiredness and feeling run down, and the tour continued, but fears were confirmed at the next two performances, in Sheffield and Birmingham, both depressing, tired affairs.

At the end of the show in Birmingham, Dylan gave one of his shortest-ever curtain calls, a few seconds and he was gone. He couldn't get off the stage quickly

enough. And that was the most engagement with the crowd he had. He never looked at them, never interacted, just seemed to be hanging on for grim death until the whole thing was over. Him and us both. Expectations for the three 'surprise' London shows were not all that high, with just cause. Maybe it would be better for Dylan to take a long break? To walk away for a while? And then Shepherds Bush happened.

Somewhere between Birmingham and Shepherds Bush, (or maybe before, who knows?), Dylan seems to have made a conscious decision to do something special at the final three shows of the tour and the year. They were all to be small shows, but each of a different nature. An ex-music hall venue with a flat narrow floor, Shepherds Bush is well-known for having a great atmosphere if you are up the front or in the balconies, but poor sight and sound elsewhere. It holds about 2,000 people. Hammersmith is a familiar venue for Dylan, one that holds a great deal of NET history. Stands there in 1990 (fabulous), 1991 (dire) and 1993 (dull) made the venue second only to the Warfield in San Francisco as the venue Dylan had played the most, with 20 shows preceding the one we will discuss later.

It is an ex-cinema, bigger than Shepherds Bush, holding some 3,800 people. The seats that formed the stalls at all Dylan's previous shows there had quite recently been removed to create an all-standing floor, sloping for better sightlines. The final show would be at the Brixton Academy, another venue familiar to Dylan, as he played three nights there

on the superb 1995 tour. The venue is another ex-cinema and also all-standing on a dramatically raked floor, in front of a grand proscenium-arched stage. It holds about 4,500.

Dylan is not often credited with a huge amount of regard for his serious fans, or 'hardcore' fans as they became known at the Rome Interview of 2001. Much was made of his comments in Rome that year, concerning his opinions of seeing the same faces at the front all the time, and of people that take his art too seriously. Speaking about the people at the front, Dylan responded:

*I'm playing for the people who are furthest away. I don't look at the people near me because it's usually the people who you see at every concert. They'll enjoy the concert in any case.*

Dylan also took the opportunity to round on what he called the 'connoisseurs':

*These so-called connoisseurs of Bob Dylan music, I don't feel they know a thing, or have any inkling of who I am and what I'm about. I know they think they do, and yet it's ludicrous, it's humorous, and sad. That such people have spent so much of their time thinking about who? Me? Get a life, please. It's not something any one person should do about another. You're not serving your own life well. You're wasting your life.*

Everyone tried to play the 'he doesn't mean me, it's the critics, the biographers' card, but of course he did, he exactly meant everyone reading this, and more so the people writing it. He also greatly contradicted himself on this point,

because when he wasn't knocking his serious fans, he was busy denying that he actually has any at all:

*'I don't think I've got a group of hardcore fans... I don't think there are many old fans'*

So the last thing Dylan would do is reward his devoted followers with a series of concerts especially for them? Well, with Dylan you always must expect the unexpected. A cliché, but true.

The only explanation for the concert at Shepherds Bush on 23rd November 2003 was that Dylan wanted to reward the serious fans, and play for the sort of people he well knew would be in the audience. The whole European tour of 2003 had seen a very rigid set list and a narrow pool of occasional alternative songs. Every night the same pattern was followed, through both arenas and smaller concerts such as those in Hamburg, but not at the final three London shows, which he played as if they were a mini-tour of their own, a stand.

He knew that the vast majority of people at Shepherds Bush that night would have seen him live countless times before. He also knew that they would have seen shows on this tour already. So the logical thing for Dylan to do would be to play the same old show that had been played every other night, using the same old voice, with the same old band. Mr anti-fans at it again. But not this time. Dylan knew all that, and decided to pull out a very special show indeed at the Shepherds Bush Empire.

The most special thing about it was the miraculous return of Dylan's voice. Gone was the 'sing-song' and mostly gone was

the dreaded 'wolfman', and in their place was Dylan with the perfect voice for this time of his career, full of range, power and flair. The mid-range, so vital to Dylan in his career, and so nearly fatal when it vanished, was back.

The next miraculous thing was the set list. Gone were all the staples of the tour. Gone were the reworkings, electric- or acoustic-style, of the likes of 'Boots of Spanish Leather', 'Girl from the North Country' and 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll'. In fact, there were no acoustic or even close to acoustic songs at all. Gone were 'Honest With Me' and 'Summer Days' and 'Every Grain of Sand' and 'Cat's in the Well' and 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue' and 'Mr. Tambourine Man' and 'It's Alright Ma' and 'Highway 61 Revisited' and 'Things Have Changed'. All had vanished, and in their place were songs plucked from 1965 onwards, a dazzling array of songs not played for a long time, or rare choices from recent years.

He unveiled 'Dear Landlord', 'Quinn the Eskimo', 'Million Miles', 'Down Along the Cove', 'It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry', 'Under the Red Sky', 'Tombstone Blues', 'Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues', 'Silvio' and 'Tough Mama'. Wonderful song after wonderful song (and 'Silvio' too), all sung with passion and conviction, and backed by a band reborn. The crowd reaction was tangibly thrilling and visibly moved and lifted Dylan, and he rewarded them with one golden gem no one could have expected. When the magisterial opening chords to 'Jokerman' echoed around the Empire, the reaction was amazing.

When was the last time he had played this? 1995? 1996? It turned out to be 1998, but 'Jokerman' had been away for what felt like a lifetime. The thought of Dylan not only *playing* it in 2003, but being *able* to play it, seemed absurd. The Dylan seen at Wembley or Birmingham would not have been capable of singing this song this well.

Neither the 'sing-song' nor the 'wolfman' could be adapted to carry this; it required the real Bob Dylan for that. And here he was, on stage at the Shepherds Bush Empire and singing 'Jokerman like' a God. It was a wonderful moment. 'Jokerman' got the best reaction of the night, and rightly so. It was not only played, a marvel in itself, but sung and played so magnificently. The band rose to the occasion, as did Dylan. The vocal on the song was a throwback from 20 years ago, and when it was done, the crowd thanked Dylan for finding this from somewhere and giving it to us.

The set list had almost been too much to take in, but the thing that made the night was that Dylan's voice was back. Lord alone knows where it had been, and why he had not been using it, but it was back in all its glory. He was singing every song. There was not one use of the 'sing-song' voice, and only the odd gasped, gurgled line. His mid-range had returned! And the band sounded glorious. Recile and Garnier were immense, and Koella and Campbell played together in true harmony, both taking fluid, skilful, emotional solos, confident and driving forward.

At the show's end, a triumphant Dylan came to the front of the stage to receive the

deserved ovation, and started reaching for hands in the front row. When he and the band disappeared the feeling was one of euphoria. People were hugging each other, wide smiles and wild laughter filled the air. It was a magical feeling, and the feelings of trepidation had been replaced with feelings of excitement. It was thrilling. And this was just two days after the pits of Birmingham!

When the euphoria had subsided just a little, the show had thrown up as many questions as it had answered. Yes, we now had indubitable proof that Dylan could still sing, that his voice had not gone completely, or been irreversibly damaged as many had feared. We also knew Dylan still had 'it', a level of performance sustained throughout an entire show for the first time since the autumn of 2002, maybe 2000, maybe even 1995. But why now?

Minds then turned to the next night at Hammersmith. A larger theatre and the fans now knew that a game was afoot. Dylan would be acutely aware of this, one would think. He planned that first night of this triumvir, a rip-up-the-set-list night of thrills, so what next? Would he continue to shake up the set list? Would the old tour return? Would he keep the same voice, and sing properly now we knew he could? Or had it all been a dream?

People were split between thinking it would be another night of complete shake-ups, or a complete return to the old set list, the night of treats a one-off. But it seems Dylan had something else in mind.

For the next night at Hammersmith, the excitement in the hall before the show

was electric. Dylan did not disappoint. He had decided to work on what had been achieved the night before by blending a mix of songs from that show with more usual staples from the tour, and throwing in one almighty gift for the audience. This added up to one of the finest shows on the Never Ending Tour in recent years. If the previous night was the hors d'oeuvres then this was the entrée, and the finest, most delicious meal you could imagine. The rarer songs that returned from the previous night, and all sounding a slight notch up, were 'Million Miles', 'Dear Landlord', 'Tough Mama' and a show-stealing 'Jokerman'. Or at least it would have been show-stealing at any Never Ending Tour show other than this one, because this show will be remembered by three magical words:

**Romance**

**In**

**Durango**

The magnitude of Dylan playing 'Romance in Durango', not only for the first time on the NET but the first time since the Rolling Thunder Revue ended in 1976, cannot be overstated. What did you think when you first heard about it? Or what did you think if you were lucky enough to be at the show? Whichever, it is probably a feeling you will always remember. At the show the song was played fifth, which was interesting for other reasons that we shall return to later.

The concert had enjoyed a similar start to the previous night. 'Drifter's Escape' opened, followed by another Basement Tapes song, 'You Ain't Going Nowhere'. This is further evidence that Dylan very

much had a plan for these London shows. Then two tour staples returned, 'Cry a While' (during which the line 'feel like a fighting rooster, feel better than I ever felt' had never seemed so apt), and 'Girl from the North Country'. Both were well played, the latter particularly so, twinkling and sparkling with wistful reminiscence. However, unbeknownst to the unsuspecting crowd, the show was about to take off into the stratosphere.

The intro to the fifth song began quietly, intriguing-sounding. The hall fell silent as people tried to identify the song. Larry Campbell led with a melodic, stately guitar part that sounded somewhat Spanish or Mexican. Few if any called it from the intro alone, but the opening line was a giveaway to those who had the good fortune to catch it:

*'Hot chilli peppers in the blistering sun'*

Can there have been a more unlikely and dramatic line? It was the equivalent of hearing Dylan sing another of his most dramatic and memorable opening lines back in 1992:

*'Someone's got it in for me...'*

Nobody could have predicted it. It would have been in anyone's list of the most unlikely songs ever to be played by Dylan in 2003 on the NET. Waves of cheers came as people recognised the song. And then the audience fell silent to savour every word. And, like 'Jokerman' the evening before, Dylan was not simply *playing* the song, he was performing it brilliantly. The version was more akin to the *Desire* original than the '75/'76 theatrical versions, slow and stately and sung word-perfect and with true conviction.

No up-singing, no rushing, no gasping, just real singing. And the vocal really led the song.

As with the *Desire* original and the Rolling Thunder Revue live version, the vocal is what the song is built on. Of course, the album version had more elaborate instrumentation, an accordion, trumpet, mandolin and violin. And the Rolling Thunder version had some of these, mixed with real drama and an up-tempo shift-gears chorus, but the vocal always led this song. Take away the lavish instrumentation from the *Desire* version, and you are left with something very akin to the version heard at Hammersmith. The band kept it simple, Campbell and Koella replicating the mandolin, trumpet and accordion parts, while Recile and Garnier kept time. The foundation was laid for Dylan to drive the song with his percussive keyboard playing and wonderful vocal.

This was no coincidence. Dylan knew he could rely on the band to play with both solidity and flair, but he could not expect them to master a complex arrangement in the time available after he decided to do something special for this show. So from his vast repertoire he chose a song that would leave him completely exposed, dependent on his own vocal and keyboard skills to drive it along while the band provided a simple framework. It was an act of stunning showmanship and great personal courage, risking falling flat on his face in front of his most devoted and loyal fans, and a complete and triumphant success. It is no word of a lie to say that many people had tears running down

their faces as the song unfolded. He even had the forethought and grace to repeat those famous opening lines at the song's end, realising that many would have missed them and not been able to savour them.

Dylan must have been aware that this song had not been played live for some 27 years. Indeed, it came from an album from which he had previously only ever played two songs in all the years of the NET, an occasional 'Joey' and an even more occasional 'One More Cup of Coffee'. He must have known what it would mean to the audience at

Hammersmith to hear this. And he chose to unveil it, not the night before, during the dream set list, but on that night in Hammersmith, in a concert that mixed the expected and the unexpected together. He knew the magnitude of what he was doing, and how it would be received. If he had played it at Birmingham, the impact would have been nowhere near the same, as half the audience would not have recognised it. Who says Dylan doesn't know his audience? The evidence of these shows was starting to show that he is acutely aware of them.

From there the show somehow maintained that level of intensity and performance. Dylan and the band were reborn through versions of 'Million Miles', 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll', 'Dear Landlord', 'High Water (For Charley Patton)' and 'Jokerman'. The atmosphere in the hall was one of triumph and euphoria. No one could quite believe what they were seeing and hearing.

This culminated during 'Honest With Me' of all songs, when Dylan left his keyboard and moved into the middle of the stage, arms in the air like a boxing champion at the end of a fight. He punched the air as the crowd rose to him as one. Amid the cheers, the waves upon waves of applause and the hands saluting Dylan, you could see him shaking his clenched fists in celebration and recognition. It was a wonderful moment that sent shivers up and down your spine, made all the more special because of the shared moment. Dylan and the audience were sharing the historic nature of what had gone before, and both knew it.

The show ended with the usual set of songs, but they were played with such intensity, 'Summer Days' reborn, 'Like a

Rolling Stone' taking the roof off the place in its final verse and chorus, inspired by Freddy Koella's genius guitar solo. The song, a highlight of most shows in 2003, had been limping along in this rendition, seeming to be stuck in the wrong gear. Before the last verse Koella moved to centre stage and played a solo like an Apollo rocket taking off for the Moon, playing of staggering power and invention and melodic fluidity. Inspired, Dylan howled out the final lines with equal power and conviction, producing a 'feelll' in the closing chorus that literally rocked people back on their heels.\*

Koella, disliked by some since he came into the band as lead guitarist to replace Billy Burnette (well, to replace Sexton really, since Burnette lasted no time at all, and appears to have been a very short term fill-in, playing only the early 2003 shows in Australia and New Zealand), had been superb at both Shepherds Bush and Hammersmith. For all Sexton's technical brilliance, and everything he brought to Dylan, which in terms of energy, vocals and stage presence was considerable, Koella is a better guitar player for Dylan. Koella is at the opposite

\* The next night at Brixton Koella proved what a sympathetic and unselfish musician he can be. He had been cheered to the echo for his wonderful solo at Hammersmith, and it would have been so easy and so tempting to try something similar. However, unlike the previous night the song needed no rescuing, it was already storming along magnificently, so he played a shorter, gentler and quite different solo which simply kept it on course, exactly the right thing to do.

In view of the more spectacular nature of Koella's playing it is easy to give him all the attention, but that would be a mistake. A very important feature of these shows was that Larry Campbell, who had been sidelined through much of the year, was taking his full share of solos and playing wonderfully well. Very different in their sound and approach, these two guitarists provide an ideal balance and diversity to the band when they are allowed to play together like this. The rhythm section responded too; Tony Garnier, who has been a rock of the NET for approaching 15 years, has rarely sounded more authoritative, while George Recile provided more evidence for those who believe he is one of the tour's finest drummers.

end to Sexton. A fine example of Sexton's guitar work was the beautiful solo he played in tribute to George Harrison on Dylan's cover of 'Something' at the end of 2002. It was very moving, and something Koella would have been incapable of. Similarly, Sexton frequently used to replicate guitar parts very accurately on various songs, night after night. Koella is also incapable of this.

If Koella played a solo, and then you asked him to play it again exactly the same afterwards, he probably could not do it. He is a feel player. He plays in an unusual style, one very much akin to Dylan's own approach on the electric guitar. In fact Koella plays as Dylan probably wishes he could, if only he could play the instrument properly. Koella affords Dylan space, and is unpredictably brilliant. He brings excitement to Dylan's music. No one who was at these shows could doubt his talent or worth. Indeed, most would probably go so far as to single him out as one of the finest guitarists of the NET.

At the final end of Hammersmith, Dylan again acknowledged the crowd, and put his fingers to his eyes and drew tears down his cheeks. It was another heart-stopping gesture that showed just what the concert had meant, for artist and fan alike. The master was back, Dylan had risen most unexpectedly. He was back to the very best of the NET. Back to '95.

The atmosphere after this show was breathtaking. Everyone knew, without speaking, what they had witnessed. The crowd were bound together by their mutual experience and more hugs and cheers and smiles were exchanged. The

enthusiasm was back, and there was still one last night to go. What would he pull out at Brixton? That was the question on everybody's lips. If he could play 'Romance in Durango' then he could really play anything, all bets were well and truly off. Would it be 'Idiot Wind', or 'Isis'? 'Black Diamond Bay' maybe, or even a new song from a forthcoming album? OK, let's not get too crazy here! The last time Dylan did that was 22 years ago. Then again, the last time he played 'Romance in Durango' was even longer ago than that. Imaginations ran riot, and one man had made it all possible. That same man had the answers to all these questions, but he wasn't telling, not until tomorrow night.

At Brixton the following evening, the excitement and expectation were at fever pitch. The crowd held its collective breath, waiting for the grand finale to all of this dizzying madness, whatever it might be.

At the start the show followed the same pattern as the previous two, proving that this had been carefully thought out by Dylan. For years he had played three songs in rotation, 'Cold Irons Bound', 'The Wicked Messenger' and 'Drifter's Escape'. The three songs were all hard rock numbers that appeared at almost every show, delighting the first time Dylan-goer and boring the hardcore fans. Yet 2003 had finally seen this rotation dropped for the first time in three years. Many fans were delighted. Now, at these remarkable shows, he decides to use each of these in turn for the opening song. You can't help but think this was a tease. He knew how tired we were of these songs

and how run-of-the-mill they were. And yet, he had never used them to open a show since they had been in rotation, and there had been three openers only for this tour.

So by playing these songs in turn as openers he was sending out a typically Dylanesque mixed message. 'It is a song I play almost every night, which you are bored to tears with, but you have never heard it in this slot before. So now you can listen to it.' A mind trick from the outset. And then at all three shows a song from the Basement Tapes sessions was played in the second slot, these having been 'Quinn The Eskimo' and 'You Ain't Going Nowhere' at the first two shows. This gave the shows, although they were each very different, a point of reference linking them together, and setting them apart from the rest of the tour.

So 'The Wicked Messenger' opened the show, followed by the third Basement song in three days. This time it was a major surprise, even bigger than only the second ever UK version of 'Quinn The Eskimo' (the first was the song's live debut, many years before at the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival), the exciting 'Yea! Heavy and a Bottle of Bread'. It had been played live only once before in history, as a request during the fall US tour of 2002, but it returned again here to the delight of the crowd. The version was not that strong, although the surprise factor carried it along nicely, but it again showed that all bets were off and anything was possible. Would Dylan leave his audience with one last epic surprise? Could he top 'Romance in Durango'?

The answer to these last two questions is, simply, no. Brixton would be something else again. If Shepherds Bush was the real curio, the set list shake-up club show, and Hammersmith a blending of the new and the old with one major shock, then Brixton seemed to be a genuine attempt to perform a standard show, using many regulars from the European tour ('Highway 61 Revisited', 'Honest With Me', 'Summer Days', 'Cat's in the Well', 'Like a Rolling Stone', 'All Along the Watchtower', 'Boots of Spanish Leather', 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll', 'Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum') along with other songs that had featured reasonably frequently during the rest of the year and the year before ('Love Sick', 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna-Fall', 'Blind Willie McTell', 'Tangled Up in Blue') and some of the newer rare songs he had developed over the previous two evenings ('Million Miles', 'Jokerman').

There was to be no final big surprise from Dylan. There was a little joke from him, though; at the second night at the same theatre in 1995, the fourth song finished and everyone prepared for 'Early one morning...'. Beloved as 'Tangled Up in Blue' was and is as a song, people were so sick of hearing it at every show, and in particular hearing it fifth at every show, that some were probably already drifting off to the bar or the loo. But he didn't play it, he played 'Every Grain of Sand' instead. 'Tangled Up in Blue' was gone, gone from the fifth slot it had occupied for all but two of the preceding 118 NET shows (at one of which, perhaps pertinently, it was replaced by 'Unbelievable'),

and better still gone from the shows altogether for a while. So, the fifth slot at Brixton in 2003. 'Romance in Durango' had been fifth the night before. Would it be 'Durango' again? Would it be some other awesome surprise? Actually, you've guessed already, it was 'Tangled Up in Blue'. Don't accuse Bob of not having a sense of humour, or of not knowing his performing history.

As far as big surprises go, the three nights had given us 'Yea! Heavy', 'Dear Landlord', 'Jokerman' and 'Romance in Durango' and that would have to do. But again, applying on-the-surface obvious logic, you would be forgiven for presuming that the last show of this mini-stand, and of the tour, and of the year, would be the one that would feature the biggest surprise of all. If Dylan was playing to the fans, for the fans, then this would be the most obvious thing to do, wouldn't it? So why didn't he do it?

Maybe Dylan was also searching for something for himself during these shows. Maybe it wasn't as simple as a gift for his devoted followers. The three shows very much stand alone from the rest of the tour. The European tour as was, we can think of as ending in Birmingham on the 21st November in many ways. But the three shows also had noticeable and significant differences from each other.

The Brixton show actually saw a level of performance akin to Hammersmith, especially on the more regular songs. The inspiration Dylan had found on the rarities was now applied to the regular songs, and they seemed to grow in front of our very eyes. 'Honest With Me' was up on another level

from previous performances. It had verve and energy and attitude. As did 'Summer Days' and the three encores, which built in intensity to the mighty conclusion, the greatest 'All Along the Watchtower' of the three shows, far removed from the garbled Birmingham version, which saw four riders approaching in the final verse and the song falling apart like a house of cards.

The encores at all three shows were a different kettle of fish when placed within the context of the shows that had preceded them. The power of the three main sets gave the encores their platform, and the energy Dylan had drawn from the crowd, and the euphoria that Dylan had instilled in the crowd, fused together for the finale of 'Like a Rolling Stone' and 'All Along the Watchtower'. It is easy to forget, amid our boredom at their frequent appearance in concert, that these are two of Dylan's greatest songs, and cornerstones of his work. What better than to hear them played as if his life depended upon it, at the end of a magnificent show?

Most people that attended all three of these concerts felt that Dylan had played them for the dedicated fans. Many also felt that he had taken a big risk with these concerts, and isn't that what made the Never Ending tour so thrilling from 1988 to 1995? In the first eight years of the NET, Dylan thrived on taking risks, walking a tightrope, sometimes falling off, but as often making it spectacularly to the other side. There was a feeling that no song was off-limits, and that no performance would be the same two nights running. It led to many of the greatest shows Dylan had ever given.

Since 1995, Dylan has become more predictable, has taken fewer risks, save for the remarkable tour of fall 2002. Of course this does not mean that there have not been good shows, great shows even, but some spark was missing. What Dylan achieved in the three concerts in London at the end of the European tour of 2003 was finding that spark again.

The first night was a huge risk. To play so many unusual songs together in one set, not at a rehearsal, or at a free show, but at a proper professional paying gig, took enormous courage for Dylan, as well as faith, in himself and his audience. He walked the tightrope again. Looking back at Shepherds Bush, it was such a radical departure that there must have been an element of chaos, and chaos has made the NET a very interesting place. Interesting and artistically alive. That is what makes Dylan such an essential performer of live music. He is constantly striving for something, and doing it in front of an audience. He is not interested in perfection, because when something is perfect there is then nothing to strive for. As Dylan himself said in 'Farewell Angelina':

*What cannot be imitated perfect must die*

Often in the earlier days of the Never Ending Tour, when he nailed something, when he got close to perfection, he would leave it aside and move on to something else. Perfection is not so much elusive as eluded; he reaches for it, and then looks for something else to challenge him. There has been less of this since '95, and it is this that re-emerged at Shepherds Bush, Hammersmith and Brixton.

Dylan lives in the moment on stage when he is at his best, his most vital. There is nothing worse than the sight of Bob Dylan going through the motions, or treading water:

*There is no success like failure  
And failure's no success at all*

These lines could stand as a watchword for the NET. That is why Freddy Koella is so important to the renaissance Dylan enjoyed in London. Koella, like Dylan, plays in the moment. He is guided by intuition and inspiration. Sometimes he falls flat, sometimes he might ruin what was a good song, sometimes everything comes to a shuddering halt when it reaches him. But sometimes he comes alive; sometimes he transforms a good song into a great song, a great song into a transcendental song. And herein lie the thrill and the art.

Sexton would never have given you such concerns, or caused you to bite your lip in nervous anticipation of what he might play. He gave you confidence, but art was never just about confidence and predictability, especially Dylan's art. Koella is ideal for Dylan, but if Dylan is not engaged, not 'there' for whatever reason, then Koella will not save the show the way Sexton might have done. He cannot cover up for Dylan's shortcomings. But combine him, and the space he affords, and the emotive style of his playing (which, like Tom Verlaine before him, is like the sound of the human voice through a guitar) with a Dylan who is prepared to take risks, and who is at the top of his game, and you have a combination worth all the tea in China.

The significance of the other two shows can be found in the way the set lists changed and developed. Dylan was back to not doing what was expected of him, but thinking about what he was doing, and adding a pinch of chaos. Hammersmith was the summit, Brixton another place, which he could only have reached by negotiating the previous two stops. All three shows supported each other, are linked to each other and achieved something very special that we had only heard in glimpses since 1995.

So where does Dylan go from Brixton? How does he take what he achieved in London and build on it? Is he even interested in doing so?

What does the future of the NET and Dylan's live performance hold? Only Dylan himself knows, and even then, how far in advance of it happening is anybody's guess. These shows have thrown everything in the air again, but you suspect it will be business as more or less usual the next time he sets foot on a stage.

The final words, as ever, should go to Dylan himself:

*It annoys me when I hear people talking about The Never Ending Tour. Obviously everything must finish. That which ties everyone together and which makes everyone equal is our mortality. Everything must come to an end.*

# *Time To Keep Up With The Times*

by Björn Waller

*'Anybody that expects anything from me is just a borderline case. Nobody with any kind of reality is going to expect anything from me. I've already given them enough you know... what do they want from me?'* (Bob Dylan, 1984)<sup>1</sup>

The eighties were a strange time for many seasoned artists, as a lot of things changed at the same time. There were technological advances - fancier studios, cheaper synthesizers, digital recording. The rise, and especially the incorporation into the mainstream, of New Wave, funk and hip-hop. The recording industry's tighter focus on the bottom line, with fewer and larger record companies. And, of course, MTV, which would change the way we perceive music forever.

The standard cliché is that the eighties were a decade of stagnation not broken until the late eighties/early nineties, coinciding with the triumphant 'return' of now nearing-50 'elder statesmen' (as opposed to 'old farts') such as Dylan, Young and Reed. The eighties were supposedly dominated entirely by slickly produced mass-market pop and rock music with pretty faces, flashy videos, and zero actual content. This perception may be understandable, but it's certainly not 100% correct; there was a lot of innovating going on in the eighties. Rock bands like Sonic Youth, The Jesus And Mary Chain, REM and others would later form the bedrock of the 'alternative rock' surge of the early nineties. Hip-hop was born and quickly developed from novelty songs to hard-hitting gangsta rap. The British pop scene was alive and well with bands like The Smiths, New Order and Prefab Sprout. Bands like the Pet Shop Boys and Depeche Mode made danceable synth pop without sacrificing brains and social commentary. True, not all of this happened on the top 10 charts, but it happened.

But for rock 'n' roll veterans the eighties presented new challenges. It wasn't necessarily a question of a generation gap - several 'older' artists were able to keep or improve their status; during the early eighties, artists like Bruce Springsteen, David Bowie and Tina Turner went from cult artists to tanned megastars. But while it didn't necessarily mean they made worse music (though that certainly happened too), it seems that in order to sell huge amounts in the eighties the music had to be streamlined, with fewer rough edges and less experimentation. There were no 10-minute rock operas on *Born In The USA*, no stories about gay bars on *Brothers In Arms*, no country hoedowns on *Eliminator*. Which spelled trouble for some of the more idiosyncratic artists who found it harder to find their footing in the glitzy eighties - artists who, it seemed, were either unwilling or unable to be assimilated, and suddenly found themselves lost between market segments, confined to doing stadium tours for their thirty-something fans. It's hardly a coincidence that many of them had spent the 70s making *albums* - then suddenly, here's MTV and the return of the 3-minute single as a major market force. Some older artists - Neil Young and Tom Waits spring to mind - chose to take the opportunity to duck under the radar and do whatever the hell they pleased. Others, though, seemed less willing to step out of the spotlight. The times they were, apparently, a-changin' too fast.

*Jesus, who's got time to keep up with the times?*<sup>2</sup>

Neil Young flitted from metal to synth pop to country & western like a drunk butterfly. Lou Reed declared himself 'the original rapper'. Paul McCartney duetted with cartoon frogs. But no one, or so general consensus seems to have it, sunk as low for as long as Bob Dylan. Where the 'religious' period had initially been an artistic (if not a commercial) success, the coming decade would come to be known as the shakiest in Dylan's career. Between all the different re-recordings, the attempts at a contemporary sound, the far too many uninspired performances of far too few great songs - not to mention the exclusion of some of his greatest songs ever - the impression seems to be that of an artist who had become lost somewhere, made a few bad turns and lost either confidence, interest, or both.

But unlike the previous period where he seemed to have other things than music on his mind (say, 1968-1973) he kept himself very busy with several albums, high-profile tours, movies, interviews, guest appearances etc. And to further confuse things, he often seemed undecided on whether he wanted to pander to the audience or damn it to hell. It seems to be the 'JUDAS!' situation all over again, only this time he sees an army of Keith Butlers everywhere he turns. As if he was trying to say 'I open my heart to you, I try to show you something important, and you repay me by booing and walking out? Fuck you. Here's a Kris Kristofferson cover with an adorable children's choir, bet ya yuppies like that better?'

I think it might be worthwhile to take a closer look at Dylan's output between

1981 and 1987, to see if we can figure out if it's as bad as its reputation, how it got that way, and how he got out of it. I can't promise you any answers, but it should be interesting nevertheless.

### **Musical Retrospective and *Shot Of Love***

After the autumn '79/spring '80 'gospel' tours, Dylan soon toned down his religious message - not just in his material, but in interviews as well. In 1979, when asked about his religious beliefs, he barely even lets the interviewer finish the question.

*Well, Christ is no religion. We're not talking about religion... Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life.*<sup>3</sup>

Another couple of years pass, and in 1984 he gets downright annoyed by the questions.

*I mean, nobody cares what Billy Joel's religious views are, right? What does it matter to people what Bob Dylan is? But it seems to, right? I'd honestly like to know why it's important to them.*<sup>4</sup>

Whether this change in attitude reflects a change in Dylan's opinions or just the realisation that people don't like being preached to is open to speculation. But it was mirrored by his tours during the time; the brief 'Musical Retrospective' tour in the autumn of 1980 certainly lived up to its name, as Dylan kept playing religious material, but mixed it up with reworkings of his old songs, unreleased originals and a fair number of covers. The tour resumed in 1981 with much the same format. At their best, these shows are extremely powerful, with Dylan's voice

still carrying much of the passion of the gospel material, soaring over the band playing hard and tight, and even the chorus girls adding to rather than obscuring Dylan's performance. (Ironically, not counting archive releases, no periods in Dylan's life as a live performer have been as well-documented officially as the eighties: *Real Live*, *Hard To Handle*, and *Dylan And The Dead*. Even more ironically, the official documents completely overlook his two most interesting tours during the time - the 1980-81 tours and the 1987 'Temples In Flames' tour. Go figure.)

*Shot Of Love* is usually lumped in with the 'religious' albums *Slow Train Coming* and *Saved*. And several of the songs do deal with issues of faith, most notably the album's only real masterpiece, 'Every Grain of Sand'. However, the 'inspirational' material may well be in the minority here; several songs are ambiguous - they could just as easily be about Dylan's relationship with a woman as his relationship with Jesus. Also, the album is musically very different from the soul-tinged *Slow Train Coming* and the gospel on *Saved* - Dylan is moving back towards a more basic rock 'n' roll/rhythm and blues approach. With its bare-bones production, it sounds a lot more like, say, *Down In The Groove* or *under the red sky* than *Slow Train Coming*.

But what really strikes me about the album is the attitude in Dylan's lyrics. On the two previous albums and tours he may have done his share of condemning and threatening, but on *Shot Of Love* he doesn't preach to convert. He is BITTER.

Dylan's lyrics have always been self-righteous, and never more so than during 1979-80, but in those songs this was usually tempered with what is supposed to be a gospel - literally 'good news'. He has a purpose, he is trying to get something across, and he'll do it with carrots or sticks, whatever it takes. But from *Shot Of Love* onwards it often seems that Dylan has given up trying to win anyone over; as if he was washing his hands of the whole deal.

*Go ahead and talk about him because  
he makes you doubt,  
Because he has denied himself the  
things that you can't live without  
Laugh at him behind his back just like  
the others do,  
Remind him of what he used to be when  
he comes walkin' through*

*He's the property of Jesus  
Resent him to the bone  
You got something better  
You've got a heart of stone*

If the lyrics are any indication of what he was feeling at the time, it seems that Dylan was feeling let down, even betrayed. By critics, fans, friends, women... quite possibly by himself as well. However, the album is definitely better than its reputation, not to mention its sales figures. The primitive production, which was a very deliberate move on Dylan's part (when asked if he didn't want it to sound more like *Slow Train Coming*, he replied that he didn't like the sound of that album!<sup>5</sup>) fits the music remarkably well and when Dylan gets his anger to work FOR him, the results are excellent; 'Trouble' stomps like

Tom Waits gone to Memphis, and while the title track and 'Dead Man, Dead Man' might not be among the greatest songs Dylan has written, they burn with conviction and, well, rock.

'Every Grain of Sand', the track that closes the album, is an astounding achievement. Coming after an album full of accusations and put-downs, it's a remarkably humble song, which for all its religious themes is not even explicitly Christian. It is more closely related in language and tone to songs like 'Lay Down Your Weary Tune' than, say, 'Precious Angel' or 'Gonna Change My Way of Thinking', a declaration of love and wonder that, in my opinion, ranks right up there with his best songs ever. It does give the album a somewhat lopsided feel, though. Had he matched it with a song like 'Caribbean Wind' or 'Angelina' it probably wouldn't have done much for the album sales-wise, but it certainly would have made 'Every Grain' less of an oddity. It seems that he could have taken two very different directions - like he wrote two separate albums; one lyrical, humble (well, -ish) and contemplative, and one bitter and resentful. But this would also be the start of Dylan's now long-standing tradition of second-guessing himself and ending up using inferior takes and inferior songs on albums, throwing out potential masterpieces because he feels they don't work. The addition of the excellent 'The Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar' to the CD issue helps, but *Shot Of Love* still remains more of a potentially great album than the actual article.

Dylan himself knew where to put the blame for the limited success (or well, complete failure) market-wise of *Shot Of Love*:

*I think it was a great record. In a lot of ways better than Infidels. But Shot Of Love doesn't have this SOUND, that's why it wasn't accepted and it wasn't a 28 million platinum record... There's no history to it, you know 'Wow, where did this come from? Why is he doing this?' You can't hang it on anything... People can't relate to it because they can't THINK of it in that kind of way.*<sup>6</sup>

It appears he had learnt a lesson; in the eighties, you needed that SOUND in order to sell. Whether this was the correct lesson or not is, of course, a different matter.

### ***Infidels***

The year 1983 was hailed as a creative rebirth for Dylan (especially by those who had written him off during the '79-'81 period). He wrote songs which upon first inspection were no longer explicitly religious. He hung out with younger musicians and listened to his sons' Clash records. He was trying to find new ways of making music; he famously asked Frank Zappa, Elvis Costello and Sting to produce what would become *Infidels* (the album was eventually produced by Mark Knopfler). The album was recorded with a small group featuring a couple of Dire Straits, a Rolling Stone and the hardest-working rhythm section in popular music: da riddim twins, Sly & Robbie.

*Infidels* has gone down in history as an album that could have been fantastic but

came up short because of some disastrous song selections. But still, even if Dylan occasionally ('Neighbourhood Bully', 'Union Sundown') lets his good intentions get in the way of his songwriting -

*If I try to write ABOUT something - 'I want to write about horses' or 'I want to write about Central Park' or 'I want to write about the cocaine industry' - I can't get anywhere with that.*<sup>7</sup>

- it's far from a bad album. Bob Dylan the writer and Bob Dylan the performer are both inspired, something which would not always be the case on following albums. 'Jokerman' is one of the densest, most lyrically developed songs Dylan had written since 1978, using images to paint a portrait of - well, whoever the Jokerman is, which of course can be debated; but an important factor is that once again, Dylan isn't being literal, preferring to leave the conclusions up to the listener. 'I and I' likewise is a brilliant song, with the narrator walking the streets, watching with pity the people who expect 'spring to come smoking down the tracks' even though he has told them exactly what kind of train is coming. Yet the song isn't as self-righteous as some of the *Shot Of Love* tracks, and the exasperation in Dylan's voice when he concludes

*I made shoes for everyone, even you,  
while I still go barefoot.*

is almost heartbreaking. Also, 'Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight' might be one of Dylan's strongest 'pure pop' songs ever, combining romantic pleas with statements like '*it's not even safe no more in the palace of the Pope*' - a prayer for shelter from a stormy decade, if you will.

OK, there are some fairly iffy lyrics; the advice to women in ‘Sweetheart Like You’ (which is a quite lovely, though bitter, ballad otherwise) for instance. The economics lesson in ‘Union Sundown’ may rock, but Dylan definitely lets his intentions run away with his imagination here (*‘They used to grow food in Kansas, now they want to grow it on the moon and eat it raw’*). Also, personally I have a problem with the hints that people who claim to want peace are actually sent by Beelzebub. The bitter tone that was present on many of the songs on *Shot Of Love* is still here, though Dylan by now seems more resigned than vindictive:

*Got to be an important person to be in here, honey*

*Got to have done some evil deed*

*Got to have your own harem when you come in the door*

*Got to play your harp until your lips bleed*

*You’re a man of the mountains, you can walk on the clouds*

*Manipulator of crowds, you’re a dream twister*

*You’re going to Sodom and Gomorrah, but what do you care?*

But on a whole and despite some of the best songs (‘Blind Willie McTell’, ‘Foot of Pride’) being left off, the album still seems a conscious effort to put together a selection of strong, hummable yet ambitious songs. The sound is perhaps one of the most off-putting things about it 20 years later; after Knopfler and Dylan got through with it, it does sound very much like the time it was recorded in, but at least

it sounds more like Dire Straits than Phil Collins. (Unfortunately, Sly & Robbie are criminally underused on the album. You just don’t get the best rhythm section in reggae and tell them to play a straight blues shuffle any 18-year-old kids could play.) Now all he needed to do was follow through on this.

### ***Real Live***

Dylan’s first major live performance of 1984 was probably the best, and definitely the oddest; backed by punk band The Plugz, Dylan performed three songs on David Letterman’s TV show. The performance was ragged, unrehearsed, loose - certainly not *pretty*, but it was in your face. Dylan seemed hungry and ready to kick some posterior. Of course, no one can tell what would have happened if he had taken The Plugz on a South American tour, as was apparently in the works. Instead he ditched the youngsters, put together a band of Reliable, Professional (not to mention Dull) musicians and made a big stadium tour of Europe.

As with most of Dylan’s regular live releases, the official *Real Live* does not necessarily reflect the BEST performances of the tour. There were certainly more exciting songs played on the ’84 tour than, say, ‘Tombstone Blues’ or ‘Maggie’s Farm’! It’s also noteworthy that the only new tunes included are ‘I and I’ and ‘License to Kill’ - the supposed hit single ‘Jokerman’ was played throughout the tour, but isn’t on the album. And apart from a heavily rewritten ‘Tangled Up in Blue’, the rest of the material is old sixties warhorses in stadium rock versions.

Fans have discussed the merits of the 1984 'Tangled' ever since; I personally don't feel it's an improvement over the original (the fact that Dylan himself has since gone back to more or less the original lyric seems to suggest what his own opinion is), but it certainly is a fascinating example of Dylan's ability to rewrite a lyric completely without sacrificing the feel and integrity of the original lyric. If the original was, as he says in the *Biograph* liner notes, an attempt to write a song like a painting where you could choose which bit you wanted to look at, then this version would seem to be a song *about* that painting, and about the man who was too busy painting his masterpiece and lost the model for it. A song that wants to defy time looked at in the rear-view mirror. Meta-songwriting at its finest.

But while the tour was not necessarily bad, it was certainly non-confrontational. Note the almost total lack of religious material and cover songs. Note that the only unreleased Dylan song played during the tour (sadly, the last time this would happen), 'Enough is Enough', is a fun, but slight blues rocker guaranteed to get people to their feet and not much more. On the 1980-81 tours, Dylan had seemed to rediscover the old songs and the joy of performing them; the arrangements weren't necessarily all that different, but Dylan's vocals were still strong - he could still pull out that kind of powerful, wailing, soulful voice he'd been using to some extent on the '78 tour and above all on some gospel songs. On the 1984 tour, though, it was once more the new songs - particularly 'I and I', 'Every Grain of Sand'

and 'License to Kill' - that seemed to interest him the most, while many of the older songs were done as crowd-pleasing by-the-numbers Chuck Berry pastiches. Add to this the appearance of Santana, Joan Baez, Van Morrison and Eric Clapton during the tour, and you've got a Classic Rock FM wet dream guaranteed not to upset the thousands of aging fans who attended.

When he got back to the States, Dylan once again headed into the studio. But this time he had rethought his whole approach to recording.

### *Empire Burlesque*

Dylan has, it seems, always disliked the modern way of making records. He doesn't like doing overdubs. He doesn't like modern studios. He doesn't like working with producers.

*Most of these records, you know they have synthesizers on them and the SOUND... you don't have to think! There's all that sound that's already there, the space is gone. And I personally like records... I like to hear the space.*<sup>8</sup>

*Even if you go in and record it live, it's not gonna sound like it used to sound, because the studios now are so modern, and overly developed, that you can take anything good and you can press it and squeeze it and squash it, and constipate it and suffocate it... I mean, you know, there's a million people go into recording just an acoustic song on your guitar... it takes four days to get a drum sound!*<sup>9</sup>

So how do we explain that between 1985 and 1988, he released three records which were over-produced, rescheduled, resequenced and re-recorded again and again and again? Whereas his previous albums had mostly been cut in a matter of days, suddenly he was now spending weeks and months piecing together records from different recording sessions, letting the producers add effects and overdubs and drum machines in the quest for the SOUND. If this made him so unhappy, why didn't he just say 'the hell with it, I'm producing the next one myself'? After all, he'd had success with that approach before?

Well, one explanation might be the commercial aspect. Dylan lost a lot of fans with the religious albums, and as much as we may like to think he's above such things, Dylan isn't immune to poor sales.

*I'm fortunate that I'm in the position to release an album like Saved with a major record company, so it would be available to people who would like to buy it.*<sup>10</sup>

'...all 37 of them', you hear the marketing division at Columbia mutter. Is it possible that the pop sound of *Infidels*, the slickness of the '84 and '86 tours, as well as the production and endless fiddling with overdubs and re-recordings on *Empire Burlesque* and *Knocked Out Loaded*, were a result of Dylan trying to water down his usual quirkiness and make something people would like to buy? After all, what worked for Springsteen must work for Dylan, right?

*Who buys Michael Jackson's records? 12 year olds... I don't know who buys 50*

*million records of somebody. You know you can't compete with a market that's geared for a market for 12 year olds.*<sup>11</sup>

Consider this: after *Infidels*, which did have the contemporary SOUND that *Shot Of Love* lacked but was still fairly ambitious lyric- and topic-wise, here's *Empire Burlesque*: covered in deep layers of synthesizers and drum machines, recorded at more than half a dozen sessions over 10 months, mixed by Arthur Baker, whose credits included Springsteen's 'Dancing In The Dark', and who obviously saw it as his job to remove as much 'space' as possible. Those who witnessed the proceedings tell of a Dylan who seemed insecure, unwilling to trust his own judgement.

*When we'd go in at ... Delta for a playback, every time he'd have the same attitude. The weak side of him would come out. They'd say 'Hey Bob, we don't need this,' and he'd say, 'Oh, okay.' And they'd make a mix to their ears, and he'd just stand outside and let them do it. (Ronnie Wood)*<sup>12</sup>

The lyrics are often fairly simple - simplistic, even - and deal almost exclusively with the ol' boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl theme. For better or worse, there's no 'Neighbourhood Bully' or 'Union Sundown' here. The most ambitious song he wrote for the album, 'New Danville Girl', was left off. Also, despite Dylan's well-documented aversion to music videos - he hated the one he did for 'Jokerman' and never released the video for 'Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight' - he made no less than three of them for *Empire Burlesque*.

Dylan has said<sup>13</sup> that the purpose of having Baker remix the album was *not* commercial, but just an attempt to capture the live sound he was hearing on tape. Which of course is putting the cart before the horse, even *if* Baker had been the man for the job. Dylan's claims notwithstanding, if this is *not* an attempt to... well, not necessarily sell out, but at least make his music a little more palatable for the MTV generation, it certainly looks a lot like one. Dylan's comment on the album a year later is interesting:

*[For] what it was I thought it was really good. I think the next record is going to sound even better. I'm not too experienced at having records sound good.*<sup>14</sup>

'For what it was'? So what was it, Bob? The idea that the problem might lie with the material and performance apparently still hadn't occurred to him. If he can just get his records to *sound* modern, the kids will eat them up. After all, that was the problem with *Shot Of Love*, right?

To be fair, *Empire Burlesque* is not completely awful. There are a couple of pretty good songs on it; 'When the Night Comes Falling from the Sky', in style and theme a distant cousin of 'Where Are You Tonight? (Journey Through Dark Heat)', may have a horrible dance arrangement but the lyrics are full of rich imagery which in a way echoes many of the 'religious' songs - 'you better be right, sinner.' But what gives the song added power is the way it addresses a specific 'you', adding ambiguity - is the song about THE apocalypse or the end of a relationship? Also, songs like 'Seeing the Real You at Last' and 'I'll Remember You' are not embarrassing

either - 'for what they are'; lightweight pop songs, but unlike 'Emotionally Yours' or 'Clean-Cut Kid' they do not pretend to be otherwise. Then of course there's 'Dark Eyes', where Dylan deliberately returns to the solo format - guitar, harp rack, and voice. While not a fantastic performance, there's a feeling of intimacy in his vocals here which is completely absent from every other song on the album. Cut in one take without overdubs, it's by far the most interesting *performance* on the album, and one of the better songs as well.

That's the good news. The bad news is that Dylan's singing is mostly on autopilot, and the arrangements are at times horrible - check out the cheap synths on 'Tight Connection' or the fake strings on 'Emotionally Yours'! The bitterness from the previous two albums is toned down a lot, but is still there.

*Well, didn't I risk my neck for you,  
Didn't I take chances?  
Didn't I rise above it all for you,  
The most unfortunate circumstances?*

*A million faces at my feet, but all I see  
are dark eyes...*

On 'Something's Burning, Baby', Dylan even seems to be suggesting that the burning hellfires not only await those who reject Jesus Christ, but those who criticize Bob Dylan as well!

Ultimately, despite some potential, *Empire Burlesque* is a failure - whether Dylan was deliberately aiming for a wider audience and airplay on MTV, or simply trying to make another Dylan album amid the confusion of modern studio methods. Even if you strip away the most horrendous

of Baker's contributions, you are still stuck with an album where half of the songs seem like exercises in tired clichés and where Dylan himself mostly sounds like he wants to get it over with and get back home in time for *Miami Vice*. But he hadn't even started yet.

### ***Knocked Out Loaded* and True Confessions**

*Knocked Out Loaded* was a chance to make up for the lukewarm *Empire Burlesque*. And apparently the initial sessions showed some promise. But the album as it turned out doesn't have much to recommend it. Though the synthesizers are not quite as overused, it's even more a victim of modern production techniques; a hopelessly flat and lifeless sound, which they then try to repair by adding lots of echo and heavy drums. True, this wasn't a problem exclusive to Dylan - the infinite possibilities created by digital studios led to an infinite number of horribly sounding records in the eighties.

*Nobody realized digital wasn't as good - because it wasn't an obvious problem... The first time, 'Hey - no hiss, wow, great!' You didn't realize there was no sound until a little while later... It's like gettin' hit with something instead of havin' it flow over ya.* (Neil Young)<sup>15</sup>

The main problem seems to be that once again, in the search for the SOUND, Dylan either overlooks or ignores the weak material and half-assed performances. Out of eight songs, three are covers, and three were co-written with someone else. Musically, it's all over the place. 'They Killed Him' may be a well-meaning song,

but seriously... if Dylan's vocals (which were never whinier) don't annoy you, try the children's choir that comes in out of nowhere and, thankfully, disappears again. It sounds like they did a take with the kids, then decided not to use that one, but accidentally punched them in for one verse. 'Driftin' Too Far from Shore', hardly a masterpiece to begin with, again suffers from the synthesizers that ruined *Empire Burlesque*. On 'You Wanna Ramble', 'Under Your Spell' and 'Maybe Someday' (which reiterates the 'You're Judas to my Jesus' bitterness of 'Something's Burning') Dylan tries and fails to play the non-pretentious r&b he would return to (with somewhat better results) on *Down In The Groove*.

There is one song here which obviously stands out. Not just because it's the longest song Dylan would record between 1976 and 1997, but because 'Brownsville Girl' is actually a pretty impressive song. Written together with Sam Shepard, it was originally conceived as an answer to Lou Reed's 'Doin' The Things That We Want To', which in its turn was inspired by a Sam Shepard play. But where Reed's song (not one of his major works) mostly settles for tipping its hat to Shepard and Martin Scorsese, Dylan takes that angle and runs with it, turning it into a song which may be very personal and autobiographical. A friend of mine called this 'the best movie Dylan ever made', which is fitting since it's a very cinematic song. On more than one level, the song is a travelogue, the narrator riding in a car with his new lover, thinking back on his life and travels with an earlier love affair. He keeps

seeing this image from *The Gunfighter*: the dying gunfighter in the dirt, the young kid being restrained by a mob, and the marshal about to arrest the kid, but he 'can't remember who I was with or what part I was supposed to play... who I was or where I was bound'. Is he the young kid breaking all the rules, is he the wise Marshal who lays down the law, or is he the old man who's served his purpose and been overtaken by a younger generation?

Then, there's the performance. Suddenly Dylan seems to find something in the song that gives him a kick, and the way he sings/recites this really quite unsingable song is just staggering. True, the production doesn't exactly lift the song - lots of chorus girls, horns, and an off-beat mandolin have been tacked onto the original 'New Danville Girl' backing track and they aren't necessarily an improvement. But if you can look beyond that, it's still a quite remarkable song. When it ends with Dylan yelling out 'Seems like a long time ago, looong before the stars were torn down!' you get the feeling he's finally gotten something off his chest, something he's been lugging around for years - possibly since 1977 - and that he has found a way to move on. (Of course, this idea is severely undermined if we know that 'Danville/Brownsville Girl' was already two years old by the time *Knocked Out Loaded* came out. But still.)

Apart from that one song though, Dylan was obviously scraping the bottom of the barrel material-wise. One clear indication that Dylan was not satisfied with the result was the treatment the new

album got on the following tour. Namely, none. During the 1986 world tour, Dylan would play a grand total of ONE of the songs from *Knocked Out Loaded* ('Got My Mind Made Up'). Once. At the first show. After that, he wisely stuck to older material, apart from a brief flirtation with 'Brownsville Girl', or its chorus anyway, at the very last show of the tour .

The 1986 'True Confessions' tour with Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers was Dylan's biggest tour in eight years (65 shows). It was also probably the most professional in the sense of musicianship; for the first time since 1974, he was working with a band that hadn't been put together exclusively for the tour but had been playing together as a unit for years. Unfortunately, as well-oiled a rock 'n' roll machine as they were, The Heartbreakers had their shortcomings. There was no room for improvisation, something which became painfully clear for instance when John Lee Hooker joined them on stage on August 5th, or when Dylan attempted a live debut the following day, the aforementioned 'Brownsville Girl':

*And they were all really fed up because he kept getting them to play these songs that nobody knew - some of them hadn't been recorded, some of them hadn't even been written yet... so we play 'Brownsville Girl' and it falls apart. And afterwards Dylan goes to the bass player 'Hey, how come you don't know 'Brownsville Girl'?' and the guy says, 'Well, you know, we haven't rehearsed it,' and Dylan says, 'Hmm, man, you've ruined the whole thing.'* (Dave Stewart)<sup>16</sup>

Sticking Dylan in front of the Heartbreakers often led to what one might have expected: Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers featuring guest singer Bob Dylan. The band stick to the album arrangements, playing the songs the same way every night, and Dylan's singing is often mannered, making him sound at times like a Dylan impersonator. That said, the tour did have its highlights - check out the amazing 'In The Garden' which opens *Hard To Handle*, for instance - and his voice is still strong. Stronger, arguably, than it would ever be again, just not always with the commitment and presence to match that strength. It's saying something that they seemed to reserve their best performances for the many covers that were played on the tour - mostly old rock 'n' roll favourites. On his own songs, Dylan often seems to just be going through the motions. 10 years later, he'd comment:

*I'd kind of reached the end of the line. Whatever I'd started out to do, it wasn't that. I was going to pack it in... I-I can't remember what it means, does it mean - is it just a bunch of words? Maybe it's like what all these people say, just a bunch of surrealistic nonsense... And I had to go through a lot of red tape in my mind to get back there.<sup>17</sup>*

### ***Down In The Groove* and 1987 tours**

1987 would see more low points for Dylan, as he recorded two of his worst albums yet. But it would also prove a turning point, as he regained a sense of purpose in his live performances.

In early 1987, Dylan went into the studio to record what was apparently intended to be a covers album - a belated follow-up to *Self Portrait*. At the time, given the creative drought he still seemed to be suffering from, that was probably one of the best ideas he could have had. Get a few friends together, record a bunch of old favourites, try and get back to the joy of performing others' material like he had on the previous tour. Just call on that young kid who wanted to join Little Richard's band, turn up the amps and kick out the jams.

What was released one year later as *Down In The Groove*, though, isn't quite that. Added to a few more or less successful covers are two songs co-written with Robert Hunter of the Grateful Dead, one new Dylan original and, for no discernible reason, an *Infidels* outtake. The album follows pretty much the same formula - or rather, complete and utter lack of a formula - as its predecessors. It's patchy and unfocused, pulling tracks from a number of different sessions with a number of different musicians, including some old friends (Clapton, Wood, the Dead) and some younger musicians who must have been pretty baffled that Bob Dylan wanted to record with them (Steve Jones? Paul Simonon? Full Force? KIP WINGER, for God's sake?).

Again, the album isn't *quite* as useless as its reputation. The material may be the most light-weight of his career, but the production tricks are mostly kept in check, and it contains some of Dylan's most relaxed and loose vocals in years. Robert Hunter's 'Silvio' (Dylan is credited

with music, which considering that it's just a one-riff song is sort of like being credited for lyrics to 'All the Tired Horses') is perhaps the best 'new' song on the album. Hunter's lyrics may not be up there with Dylan's best, but they're nowhere near as lame as some of what Bob himself had written in the last few years; so it's no 'Gates of Eden', but it rocks. And that goes for a couple of other songs on here as well - the opener 'Let's Stick Together', for instance, despite Dylan's harmonica playing (which makes Bryan Ferry's harp on Roxy Music's version sound like Charlie Musselwhite in comparison). The other Robert Hunter collaboration, 'Ugliest Girl in the World' is also something of a Big Dumb Fun song, even if the silly lyrics really demand more of the singer than Dylan delivers. 'Ninety Miles an (Hour Down A Dead End Street)' and 'Rank Strangers to Me' also coax pretty good performances out of Dylan.

But once again, the song selection is completely messed up; if Dylan had settled on doing either a rock 'n' roll album or an album of torch songs, that would certainly have helped. The guest players add nothing either - what's the point of getting Steve Jones (10 years after his heyday) if you just want an extra rhythm guitar on 'Sally Sue Brown'? Apparently, Ron Wood and Eric Clapton guest on 'Had a Dream About You Baby' (the only new Dylan original on the album, and hardly a match for 'Living the Blues'), but unless you look at the liner notes you'd never know it. 'Death Is Not the End' is not the most inspired song Dylan wrote in 1983, and that he would include it on an album four

years later is incomprehensible to say the least. What, Willie wouldn't license 'Angel Flying Too Close to the Ground'?

Having finished/given up on the album he headed on tour, first a half-dozen dates with the Grateful Dead and then a European tour with the Heartbreakers. Judging from the official *Dylan And The Dead* release, Dylan was still fairly puzzled about what to do with himself - but at least he was starting to work on it. That's not to say it's a good record; most of what is on it is fairly dull. Dylan mostly sounds bored, straining to hit notes and blurring out entire verses of songs. The Dead don't add much; at best they're competent, and at worst they can't even agree on which tempo to play the song in - nothing even Joey Gallo himself did in life can be deserving of the punishment 'Joey' gets here. You'd think that with two drummers, at least ONE of them would be able to keep time occasionally. The most important aspect of the tour seems to have been that Dylan (at Garcia's suggestion) started playing a bunch of songs he hadn't played in ages (or ever). Dylan rediscovering his song book and really starting to get through that red tape would be a recurring theme a few weeks later.

The 'Temples In Flames' tour with the Heartbreakers couldn't have been more different from the previous year's tour. (It must have been something of a shock for the Heartbreakers to have the muscular, sleeveless-shirted Springsteen wannabe they'd played with earlier replaced by a chubby, bearded apparent victim of a wardrobe explosion!) Where the 1986

tour was a stadium-rock extravaganza with Dylan yelling out familiar hits against a backdrop of classic rock, the 1987 tour was far less predictable. The set lists changed more than ever before, and Dylan's voice was no longer the nasal roar it had been. His singing is more erratic, but there's a sense of danger and almost punkish commitment in his voice - the songs seem to *mean* something to him again. While the Heartbreakers are still no great improvisers, the arrangements themselves were more ambitious this time around - built more around Benmont Tench's keyboards than the band as a whole. Instead of sounding like a Dylan cover band, they now sound like an inventive band fronted by (an admittedly weird) Bob Dylan. Also, unlike the '86 tour, Dylan is the sole headliner this time around. Once Dylan comes on stage, the Heartbreakers step back and become a pure backing band - no Petty duets or intermissions.

The set lists deserve special mention. Not only were they apparently completely random, with songs appearing in the encores one night and as opener the next, but the wild song selections of the Dead tour continued, with long-forgotten songs like 'The Wicked Messenger', 'Desolation Row', 'Tomorrow Is a Long Time', 'The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest' and 'Pledging My Time' sitting nicely alongside old favourites and newer songs. 'Chimes of Freedom', done as a duet with Roger McGuinn, seemed a declaration of intent; Dylan trying to free himself from his own legend and change not just the way the audience viewed him, but the way

he saw himself. He attributes it to an epiphany-like revelation at the show in Locarno:

*It's almost like I heard it as a voice. It wasn't like it was even me thinking it. 'I'm determined to stand, whether God will deliver me or not.' And all of a sudden everything just exploded. It exploded every which way. And I noticed that all the people out there - I was used to them looking at the girl singers, they were good-looking girls, you know? And like I say, I had them up there so I wouldn't feel so bad. But when that happened, nobody was looking at the girls anymore. They were looking at the main mike. After that is when I sort of knew: I've got to go out and play these songs. That's just what I must do.*<sup>18</sup>

Seeing as how the Locarno show came fairly late in the tour, it's quite possible that Dylan has got his dates mixed up and actually was thinking of the 10 September Basel show. But that's beside the point; much like the religious conversion almost 10 years earlier seems to have been the result of a much longer process than Dylan himself wants to admit, this sudden determination appears to have been born out of several years of trying to find a way back into the music that had left him behind. As if Dylan couldn't look forward with confidence until he had reconciled himself to all aspects of his career to date.

And so 1987 drew to a close with Dylan contemplating some changes. The next year would bring the surprise release of *Traveling Wilburys, Vol 1*, with Dylan contributing at least three songs - none of

them a masterpiece, but nevertheless fresh-sounding and *fun* in every way *Down In The Groove* wasn't. The same year saw the beginning of the (ahem) Never Ending Tour, with Dylan stripping his music down to a small garage-band format, attacking the microphone in a way he hadn't done for a long time, frantically trying to resuscitate what was left of his career. There would still be years of hard work ahead of him before it would really start to pay off, but at least he seemed to have broken out of the rut he had been stuck in for several years; after spending much of the eighties on the defensive, blaming others for his misfortune and trusting in producers and other musicians to improve his music, he was once again looking forward with confidence in his *own* ability.

Which brings us back to another interesting aspect I'd like to point out before I stop; in *Judas!* vol 3 Paul Williams points out how compassion is a recurring theme on 1989's *Oh Mercy*. I don't personally feel this holds true for all songs on *Oh Mercy*, but he does have a point: from 1989 onwards, Dylan again often seems to be speaking to a WE rather than a ME vs THEM. The lyrics may not be decidedly positive, but they're no longer as condemning and cynical as they were a few years earlier. I like to think of it as a nice touch that the same man who in 1979 told his fans that there were only two kinds of people - 'saved people and lost people' - 11 years later chooses to finish *under the red sky* by yelling 'Good night my love, may the Lord have mercy on *us all!*'

- 1 Bert Kleinman interview, 30 July 1984
- 2 Mick Brown interview, *Sunday Times*, 1 July 1984
- 3 Bruce Heiman interview, KMEX, 7 December 1979
- 4 Mick Brown interview
- 5 Howard Sounes, *Down The Highway*, p. 347 (Swedish edition)
- 6 Martha Quinn interview, MTV, 7 July 1984
- 7 Bill Flanagan interview, March 1985
- 8 Martha Quinn interview
- 9 Bono Vox interview, 8 July 1984
- 10 Dave Herman interview, 2 July 1981
- 11 Bert Kleinman interview
- 12 Clinton Heylin, *Behind The Shades Take Two*, p. 572
- 13 David Fricke interview, *Rolling Stone*, December 1985
- 14 *Rolling Stone*, 16 January 1986
- 15 Jimmy McDonough, *Shakey*, p. 568
- 16 'Jill Furmanovsky's Bobquest', 3AM Magazine, 6 November 2001
- 17 David Gates interview, *Newsweek*, 10 June 1997
- 18 David Gates interview

# 'Beauty May Only Turn To Rust'

by Eyolf Østrem

*'Dylan can't sing.'*

90% of the Western population

*'That boy's got a voice.*

*Maybe he won't make it with his writing,  
but he can sing it. He can really sing it.'*

Woody Guthrie

It's a pleasure to be able to begin an article about Bob Dylan with one of the most widespread clichés about him: that he can't sing. No matter what standard response one has whenever the topic arises ('Well, then Picasso can't paint either', 'Since so many people like him, there must be *something* there to like', 'To each his own; if you don't like him, it's your problem', etc.) there is something about the question that goes beyond the urge to defend. That is what this article is about: where the question stems from and in what it consists, and it will bring us back to classical Antiquity, through medieval and Renaissance aesthetics, and up to a modern interpretation of Dylan's song-making, against this background.

What does it mean, 'Dylan can't sing'? What does it mean to sing? Not *just* to utter sounds; singing belongs to the sphere of *music*, and although we all 'know' what music is, it is still useful to remind ourselves of what we mean by it. A fairly wide definition, which covers everything from Gregorian Chant to John Cage, goes: *Music is organised sound*, or slightly more precise: *Music is sound organised according to some generally accepted system of criteria for production and reception of such sounds*, or shorter: *Music is aestheticised sound*. There are books to be written about this; at the moment it may suffice to say that to most people aesthetics has something to do with *beauty*, and to most people who disapprove of Dylan's vocal capacities, this is the reason: he can't sing beautifully, and no matter how many other criteria for singing he fulfills - a certain vocal dexterity, a sense of rhythm and harmony, etc. - all this doesn't help: Dylan can't sing.

Thus, it would seem that for a broader appreciation of Dylan, a more thorough-going study of beauty would be useful - his concept of beauty, and ours, we who judge him. This is at the heart of the question of what it means to be able to sing, and the reason why the verdict may differ is that there is no *one* concept of beauty.

### **The beautiful world of Bob Dylan**

Dylan touches upon beauty in a number of songs, but in two songs only is it a genuinely good thing: in the exuberant, I'm-such-a-happy-family-man-who-loves-my-beautiful-wife anthem 'Never Say Goodbye' (*'You're beautiful beyond words, You're beautiful to me'*), where it becomes such a huge word that it almost tears the song apart; and in the endearing 'Tomorrow is a Long Time', where the beauty of it actually works: *'There's beauty in the silver, singin' river/There's beauty in the sunrise in the sky/But none of these and nothing else can touch the beauty/That I remember in my true love's eyes.'*

But in the majority of cases it is rather the negative aspects of beauty that are emphasised. Either its deceptiveness - most explicitly expressed in 'Long Time Gone': *'So you can have your beauty, It's skin deep and it only lies,'* and in 'Trust Yourself': *'Don't trust me to show you beauty/When beauty may only turn to rust./If you need somebody you can trust,/Trust yourself'* - or its fickleness: the saddening inevitability of its decay in 'Cold Irons Bound' (*'It's such a sad thing to see beauty decay'*); the despairing inaccessibility of its fading away in 'Where Are You Tonight?'

(*'As her beauty fades and I watch her undrape [...] Oh, if I could just find you tonight!'*); the ridiculed vanity of it, when the beauty parlours on 'Desolation Row' are filled up with unshaven, unwashed and generally rude, filthy, smelly, abusive, and *ugly* sailors. And the world-weary realisation that *'behind every beautiful thing there's been some kind of pain'* ('Not Dark Yet').<sup>1</sup>

Then there is a group of songs which treat the subject in a more ambiguous, ambivalent way. In 'Dark Eyes', beauty becomes an expression for the *real*, which is left unrecognised in a (sadly human) world hanging between discretion and lust for revenge, where life is a game and nothing is taken seriously (*'I feel nothing for their game where beauty goes unrecognised'*). We find the same utopian view on beauty in 'Shelter from the Storm' (*'Beauty walks a razor's edge, someday I'll make it mine'*). This is clearly a different kind of beauty than in the other group of songs: a more intimate concept, not directed at (or emanating from) *things*, but a way of taking in the world, be it good or bad, pretty or foul; closer to 'Song to Woody' (*'I'm seeing your world of places and things/of paupers and peasants and princes and kings'*) than to 'Sugar Baby' (*'I can see what everybody in the world is up against'*).

Finally, there is the beauty of divine justice in 'I and I' (*'Took a stranger to teach me to look into justice's beautiful face'*), which is not at all concerned with the appearances of the world, but with moral ideals in the widest sense - far removed, perhaps, from the other examples, but nevertheless important.

In an interview from 1981, the question of beauty came up during a discussion of the value of art:

**Herman:** *Well, if it expresses truth and beauty then it's leading you to God?*

**Dylan:** *Yeah? (laughs)*

**Herman:** *Well, wouldn't you say?*

**Dylan:** *If it's expressing truth I'd say it's leading you to God and beauty also.*

**Herman:** *I've always thought that those were the only two absolutes that there were.*

**Dylan:** *Well, beauty can be very, very deceiving. It's not always of God.*

**Herman:** *The beauty of a sunset?*

**Dylan:** *Now, that's a very special kind of beauty.*

**Herman:** *Well, how about the beauty of the natural world?*

**Dylan:** *Like the flowers?*

**Herman:** *Yes, and the beasts ... and the rain...*

**Dylan:** *All that is beautiful, That's God-given. I've spent a lot of time dealing with the man-made beauty, so that sometimes the beauty of God's world has evaded me.*

Here, all the different categories that I've pointed to in the songs are gathered: the vain beauty, the god-given, natural beauty, and beauty as a general concept, almost equated with God.

Before I go on with the exegesis of relating Dylan's concept of beauty, as expressed in this handful of songs, with 'our' concept - that is: with the various concepts that we find in the traditions of thinking around these things, and that are still relevant, directly or indirectly, for how each one of us forms our perception

of the world around us (for no less a perspective than this is at stake here) - I must bring up the most important text of them all from Dylan's hand concerning beauty: the liner notes to *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2*.<sup>2</sup>

## Beauty and the Beast

The historical background of the text sets an interesting frame for the interpretation of it: the Beast's story about his journey to appreciating the Beauty. On the surface level it can be read as a story about how Dylan overcame his resistance towards this voice of hers, that to him represented an untrue beauty - untrue because it was unreal. The voyeuristically inclined might see it as the closest we will ever get to an account of Dylan's feelings about her. But it is not *only* a story about Joan Baez - it is in fact a manifesto about beauty, reality, ugliness, buffoonery, kingship. It begins:

*In my youngest years I used t' kneel  
By my aunt's house on a railroad field  
An' yank the grass outa the ground  
An' rip savagely at its roots  
An' pass the hours countin' strands  
An' stains a green grew on my hands  
As I waited till I heard the sound  
A the iron ore cars rollin' down  
The tracks'd hum an' I'd bite my lip  
An' hold my grip as the whistle whined  
Crouchin' low as the engine growled  
I'd shyly wave t' the throttle man  
An' count the cars as they rolled past  
But when the echo faded in the day  
An' I understood the train was gone  
It's then that my eyes'd turn  
Back t' my hands with stains a green*

*That lined my palms like blood that  
tells  
I'd taken an' not given in return  
But glancin' back t' the empty patch  
Where the ground was turned upside  
down  
An' the roots lay dead beside the tree  
I'd say 'how can this bother me'  
...  
An' I asked myself t' be my friend  
An' I walked my road like a frightened  
fox  
An' I sung my song like a demon child  
With a kick an' a curse  
From inside my mother's womb -*

To be slightly pompous about it, one might say that these lines introduce the theme of the individual between physical reality (represented by the grass on the railroad field) and surrounding humanity (the train and the throttle man). They both leave him, one way or another, and the only option is isolation. The realisation of a something beyond the I sparks a desire to reach this other, and to leave the vegetative level behind.

The end of the quotation is the first of a series of 'An' I walked my road...' phrases which are the backbone of the poem and which map the development of the I-character. The first stage is that of the 'frightened fox': the savage, the beast, the complete egoistic innocence, innocent because it is lawless, but only to a point – is a kicking child innocent of the pain it inflicts at birth? Is a frightened fox innocent just because it doesn't *mean* any harm?

This is followed by a rejection of words and symbols ('An' I locked myself an' lost the key/An let the symbols take their shape

An' form a foe for me t' fight/.../An' my first symbol was the word 'beautiful'). Just why beauty should be the first target is explained in the following lines:

*For the railroad lines were not beautiful  
They were smoky black an' gutter-  
colored  
An' filled with stink an' soot an' dust  
An' I'd judge beauty with these rules  
An' accept it only 'f it was ugly  
An' 'f I could touch it with my hand  
For it's only then I'd understand  
An' say 'yeah this's real'*

The ugly and the tangible as all that is of value, opposed with beauty. It is not the ugliness itself that matters, though. Rather, ugliness is a representative of reality, or more precisely that part of reality which has not (*had* not, in the early '60s) traditionally been allowed into the beautiful world of high-flying ideas about the world: art. The lines are a rebellion against that branch of the late-Romanticist concept of art which overflows with elves and the superhuman, hyper-real part of reality, be it expressed as beauty, power, or any other fascist ideal.

This is not the only way to react, but the Dylan in the poem doesn't know that yet. For him, the reaction was to conflate the real with the ugly, the opposite of the only version he knew of the first symbol in his crusade against (and quest towards) the outside world: beauty.

The next few 'An' I walked my road' lines are a merciless series of steps into the deep isolation that the fundamental questioning of concepts must lead to. First he is 'Like a saddened clown/In the circus a my own world', the clown being the ridiculous character who doesn't know the

appropriate way to react and act in a given situation, who like the child hasn't yet learned the ways of life (or, as Graham Greene so exquisitely put it: the clown is the one who doesn't learn from his mistakes).

Then he is '*Like an arch criminal who'd done no wrong ... screamin' through the bars/a someone else's prison*', and still 'isolation' is the key word: the confinement of having to live in a world where the concepts through which the world becomes meaningful are not your own. This may be the most concise image ever carved of the terrors of adolescence on the verge (but not yet there) of growing up. At the climax of this series, he is '*Like a lonesome king ... Starin' into/A shallow grave*'. He is now the supreme ruler of his own world, but it's a lonely world, and when he tries to look beyond it the step forward also seems to lead six feet down: to give up his isolated kingdom is also the ultimate liminality of death.

The last step in this journey of the sensitive mind towards the world is the '*scared poet/Walkin' on the shore ... Afraid a the sea*'. The poet is a madman, but a madman who *communicates*, who transcends the limits of his own world, despite the fear, either of the open grave in front, or of the infinity of the ocean of people and words and voices out there. The image of the poet on the shore, frightened of the sea, wonderfully captures the notion of the sublime: the awe before the frightening immensity of the infinite, which during the age of Romanticism became the most important correlative to beauty. The sublime is terrifying, but

necessary for the poet (and, by extension, the human being), because in a wider sense it represents the awakening to the world outside. And, significantly, unlike the previous 'walked my road' lines, this is not only a metaphor: the person in the poem is physically placed somewhere in the real world (perhaps on the same beach to which the Tambourine man led him and where he danced with one hand waving free a few years later?).

This not only brings us full circle back from symbols to reality again, but also to the topic of the text: Joan Baez and her voice. The next section of the poem brings the peripeteia, the transformation of the protagonist after the preceding crisis. During a car drive he hears Baez tell the story of how, during a childhood spent in an Arab country,<sup>3</sup> she watched dogs being beaten to death in the street, to the general amusement of the onlookers, and how she tried to save one of these dogs, but failed. This becomes the realisation that that voice, which to him so far has only represented vanity, may be founded in the ugly reality after all - even more so since, at the same time as he was killing grass in Minnesota, she was actually trying to save life.

*An' that guilty feelin' sprang again  
Not over the roots I'd pulled  
But over she who saw the dogs get killed  
An' I said it softly underneath my  
breath*

*'Yuh oughta listen t' her voice...  
Maybe somethin's in the sound...'*

...

*An' at the time I had no song t' sing.*

Silence replaces the struggle. The song he has so painstakingly won for himself is

no more real than hers. And if that which at first glance appears as vain beauty proves to hide within it the most brutal reality, the whole system of oppositions that he has constructed for himself must fall. His tired nerves succumb to her singing, in something which may not be a wholehearted acceptance of it and its beauty (but rather a surrender to its force), but the immediate consequence is liberation, both from the rationality of concept formation, and from these very concepts.

This is again madness, of course, ‘*An’ I laughed almost an insane laugh*’. The laughter is directed both at himself and at the foolishness of his previous creed, that ‘*beauty was/Only ugliness an’ muck*’. And after finding his new truth in ‘*the breeze I heard in a young girl’s breath*’ which ‘*proved true as sex an’ womanhood*’, he finds himself, at the end of the poem, going back to the railroad track in his mind. Again he is suspended between raw reality and society, but this time it contains no threat, no danger, but also no desire:

*An’ I’ll walk my road somewhere  
between  
The unseen green an’ the jet-black train  
An’ I’ll sing my song like a rebel wild  
For it’s that I am an’ can’t deny  
But at least I’ll know not t’ hurt  
Not t’ push  
Not t’ ache  
An’ God knows ... not t’ try -*

This is not really resignation, but a realisation that neither beauty nor ugliness nor any other symbols need to be opposed; they are not more dangerous to the ‘frightened fox’ than the poet is to the ocean (or vice versa?).

The consequence that runs parallel to this freedom is a reshaping of the concept of beauty which has been so central to the development up to this point. The journey to the appreciation of the beauty in Joan Baez’s voice is also about personal maturation and growth. What started out as the assimilation of reality and the ugly, and the opposition of this to beauty, has given way to the insight that there are several concepts of beauty, and that at least in some of them there is a place for reality.

This can be taken yet another step: ultimately, it may not be reality itself that matters, but the ability to perceive this reality and to express that perception to someone else. Thus, the initial opposition can be rephrased as that between beauty and expression, and the insight gained is that this does not necessarily have to be an opposition: even the beautiful can contain the expressive.

And with that, we are ready to step back into the history of aesthetics.

### **Proportion and expression**

The two stances in *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2* can easily be followed through the entire history of art. One is the idea that beauty lies in an orderly and proportionate relationship between parts of a whole and between the parts and the whole. This idea forms the backbone of any concept of beauty up until the eighteenth century. Pythagoras discovered that the sounds that we find pleasing are based on simple proportions, while ugly sounds have more complex proportions. Plato considered this kind of mathematical harmony to be the fundamental property

of the world. In his [referring back to Plato] creation myth Timaios, the creator-god shapes the world beginning with unity, then extending it with 'the other' and 'the intermediary', and along the corresponding number series 1, 2, 4, 8 and 1, 3, 9, 27. This specifically Greek idea found its way into the Bible through the *Wisdom of Solomon* 11: 21: 'thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight'.

This is not to say that beauty was perceived as a purely intellectual, rational matter of weights and measures. Behind the dry façade of beauty as numbers lies the notion that numbers and numerical relations are reflections of the divine principles governing the universe; that we find the same relations in the universe as a whole, in human beings, in musical sounds, and in visible beauty.

The belief that the harmonious is a reflection of the divine may (together with the neatness of the system) explain why such a concept could rule supreme for two millennia. But it was never entirely unchallenged, and all the other perspectives on beauty that we have encountered above are recognisable in the history of aesthetics: the sublime, the beauty of the law, natural beauty, and the ethics of beauty. These could all be seen as extensions of the basic concept of beauty, as concessions to the assaults from reality (or truth) on the neatness of mental constructions.

But the most persistent opponent has been the character that shows up at the turning point of *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2*: the madly laughing poet. Plato writes in the *Phaedrus* that one of the

frenzies to which people are subject comes from the Muses. When these pour inspiration upon a man, it 'inspires [the soul] to songs and other poetry... But he who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen'. The relationship between *art* and *beauty* is a long and complex one, but we may condense it here to the opposition, in Plato's account, between the craft which rests on knowledge of the divine principles, expressed as rules, and the expression - of an experience of reality, and *for the benefit* of the rest of us - which defies such rules.

This conflict between rule-based beauty and inspired expression pops up now and again through history. Josquin des Prez (d. 1521), whose music to modern ears is the epitome of soothing, Renaissance beauty, was chided by his greatest fan for occasionally not having 'repressed the violent impulses of his unbridled temperament'.

The most famous occasion of such a conflict is probably the debate between the composer Monteverdi (d. 1643) and Artusi in the early seventeenth century. Artusi took it upon himself to represent the true art of music, and he had found a number of 'errors' in Monteverdi's works. Monteverdi's reply was that, yes, he had broken the rules, but he had done so for the benefit of expression. The words demanded it; in his practice, the words were no longer to be the *servant* of harmony, but its mistress.

Even though Monteverdi's new style was in one sense a radical breach with the

prevalence of beauty-as-harmony, the theoretical legitimisation that he gives of his new approach plays on the same field as the old. He can place words above harmony because 'the words conform to the disposition of the soul; and the rhythm and the harmony follow the words'. It becomes another path to the divine principles: what appears as raw, ugly expression, nevertheless has something of beauty in it, because it, too, goes back to 'the disposition of the soul'.

Sounds familiar? With some modification, this could have been incorporated into the discussion of *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2* - the apparent conflict between rational beauty and expressivity, and the tearing down of the boundaries between them.

### Expression and style

One point appears more clearly in the Monteverdi controversy than in Dylan's poem, but that at the same time is such a central point in Dylan's whole work, that it can easily be added to the discussion: the influence of the word.

Have a look at the Guthrie quotation at the top again:

*He can really sing it.*

*It.* Not just 'sing', but 'sing *it*'. That little extra word turns this short statement from the dying hobo-poet into the most precise description of Dylan's art. Because to sing is not *only* about music, but, as Plato knew, and Josquin, and Monteverdi, and Dylan, it's about words too. It's about *what* you sing, what you project, what you express.

It is a commonplace among musicians to claim to be influenced by Dylan, but

apart from a general desire to write meaningful lyrics, it is often difficult to see more precisely how this influence really comes through. And by taking only the style of writing, they miss half of the equation - perhaps the most important part, for a singer, anyway. What makes Dylan so special, I believe, is not only his ability to shape words according to the 'disposition of the soul', but also to let this disposition come to expression, through the words, in a style which is shaped precisely to fit this expression. As with Monteverdi, this style will go beyond the requirements of the beautiful, of criteria of melodiousness, because Dylan's art is founded in a perfect symbiosis between lyrics and singing style.

And the style is just as personal and individual as the perception that is expressed: the symbiosis between lyrics and style includes the singer himself, in an identification between singer and song, so that when Dylan sings, we not only hear the song, we hear Dylan. This is most immediately evident in songs like 'Sara', where the singer is almost physically present in the song, but fundamentally it is just as true about 'Blowin' in the Wind', and just as irrelevant a perspective on a song like 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand'.<sup>4</sup> What we hear is one individual's perspective on the world, and since it presumably is the same world we ourselves relate to, as we tear up grass somewhere else along the same train line, this perspective is potentially of vital importance - far more so than some divine principle, long forgotten and well hidden in the kind of beauty that will, inevitably, only turn to rust.

1 I'm not quite sure what to make of 'Sweetheart Like You' ('You can be known as the most beautiful woman who ever crawled across cut glass to make a deal'), but the slight sarcastic tinge to it makes it impossible to place it in the positive category.

2 The full text can be found in *Lyrics*, and at the address [http://www.slopbucket.com/bob/tbob/writtenword/joanb\\_li.html](http://www.slopbucket.com/bob/tbob/writtenword/joanb_li.html).

3 Iraq, actually, where the family lived for a year in 1951, when Baez's father was working there.

4 This is precisely the point that Toby Richards-Carpenter made in his article in the previous issue of *Judas!*, where he compared Dylan with Paul McCartney: 'Bob Dylan owns his songs. [...] The songs are his tools and he will use them as he likes. Paul McCartney, on the other hand, is the tool that 'Hey Jude' uses in order to get heard.'



# *A Dark Hidden Gem*

by Michael O'Connell

*'From too much love of living*

*From hope and fear set free*

*We thank with brief thanksgiving*

*Whatever gods may be*

*That no life lives forever*

*That dead men rise up never*

*That even the weariest river*

*Winds somewhere safe to sea'*

from *The Garden of Proserpine*,  
Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1866

Quite by chance, I came across the quote above while listening to Dylan's *World Gone Wrong* for the hundredth or thousandth time. It seemed like a semi-reclusive son-of-an-English-admiral poet/critic and a semi-reclusive cowboy poet/singer had chosen remarkably similar themes: the burden of regret, the pain in love and separation and a clinging to life mingling with a longing for eternity.

Dylan certainly was weighed down by these hefty themes if some of his careworn, lugubrious singing is anything to go by - though it must not be forgotten that this was probably the lowest point of his career. The combination of those themes and *that* singing should have had crushing effects on even the most ardent listener. Instead, we have one of the most uplifting albums in the canon. How did this happen?

At the outset, I would direct people to Dylan's stupendous liner notes which are hugely important, almost a work of art on their own. They are a ferocious fusillade of high-intellect, zero-tolerance fact-threshing, obfuscation and orneriness - an exuberant exercise in cynicism. He presents these slabs of blues-Civil War-gospel myth as spooked parables for the modern world, and talks about 'learning to go forward by turning back the clock'. But the journey back through these songs is nothing like straightforward - *and* the liner notes are even in the wrong order. No map references, no co-ordinates. The instrument panel isn't broken - it wasn't there in the first place. To get to the heart of the songs, you've got to use Dylan's dead reckoning.

Cursory navigation of the album reveals a subtle shifting of moods that suggests he contributed a great deal more to the sequencing and arrangement of this album than to *Good As I Been To You*, which is a pretty unfocused collection of songs. The lackadaisical *World Gone Wrong*, with sudden, semi-accurate picking and a forlorn vocal, is a fittingly sombre opener - making the exquisite

presentation of 'Love Henry' all the more magical. It is the most evenly-paced and lightly-played of all the songs on the album and Dylan's detached, sardonic delivery is perfect for describing the ruthless, methodical, murderess, while the gentle, trilling notes not only suggest the little bird who is an eyewitness to the killing, but give a true sense of the macabre.

Then, the nervous energy of 'Ragged and Dirty' is followed by the lust-hazed duckwalk of 'Blood In My Eyes': the tensions of both these songs seem to be poured into the frenetics of 'Broke Down Engine', featuring perhaps the most emotive guitar-playing that Dylan has ever produced. All three songs are rather slight, inconclusive, slices of life where the fortunes of the protagonists might go either way. But the next two each have an element of finality: the sprawling, meditative 'Delia' with the chilling refrain 'All the friends I ever had are gone', followed with a kind of absurd aplomb by 'Stack A Lee', a ragged piece of hokum, ending in death and imprisonment.

And it's possible to see this farcical folk tale as a rickety footbridge into what follows. 'Two Soldiers', 'Jack-A-Roe' and 'Lone Pilgrim' are giant songs, performed so intuitively and with such grasp that they reverberate in a mythic way, seeming to stand in cones of history. The variable voice we have heard thus far - sometimes, hair-raisingly so - suddenly becomes authoritative, a looming presence beside the music. A closing triad that takes in war, family, love, cross-dressing, plague, supernatural experience and religious

faith is no mean feat - even if you aren't the author of the songs. When 'Lone Pilgrim' closes it's impossible not to admire the way that Dylan has manipulated the trajectory of his themes.

This is best illustrated by the way the gallery of characters populating the album becomes more crowded as it goes on, and proceeds from a series of personal and intimate events till we're over that rickety footbridge and plunged into a maelstrom of war where events threaten to dwarf the cast. 'Lone Pilgrim' signals an aftermath to all these experiences, a solitary epiphany and a brush with the afterlife. It seems to me that rather than record a load of old songs, Dylan wanted to convey a vision of life and the world where all that's personal will expand into the universal; where extremes are met, but fear is contagious; where beliefs are mislaid, but hope is part of the human condition. A vision of the past world and the present which has its coda in those last, incredibly moving lines:

*'Go tell my companion and children  
most dear*

*To weep not for me now I'm gone.*

*'The same hand that led me through  
seas most severe*

*Has kindly assisted me home.'*

Which, in turn, has some kinship with the quote at the beginning of this piece.

However it was intended, it was presented to this world ten years ago this month with little fanfare\* – and received with indifference, perhaps even by a lot of the Dylan fraternity, who yearned for new songs. To my mind, *World Gone Wrong*, liner notes and all, is a magnificent declaration of war on indifference, acquiescence and hopelessness - from a deserted battlefield. It is a classic Dylan album, a dark hidden gem, with the melancholy afterglow of a miracle.

\*This article was submitted on and for the tenth anniversary of the album's release after *Judas!* issue 7 had already gone to the printers.

# Triumphs In The Face Of Modern Adversity

by Manuel Vardavas

*Free Trade Hall 1965* [Rattlesnake RS 133]

All tracks recorded at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester 7th May 1965.

*Renaldo Gets The Repossession Blues* [White Bear WB 19/20/21/22/23/24]

Complete shows recorded at the Budokan Hall in Tokyo on 28th February 1978, Paris's Pavilion De Paris on 5th July 1978 and the Hec Edmundson Pavilion in Seattle on 10th November 1978, complete with 27 bonus tracks from the tour.

The trouble with irregular columns such as this is that you depend on the material being available in the first place. Fortunately, and much to his credit, our revered editor has never asked for reviews of every single release that has emerged since the start of this publication. Some bootlegs really aren't worth the effort. The problem is that the publication of *Judas!* has coincided with the death throes of the bootleg phenomenon that has existed since the early nineties.

Two years ago I wrote an article, not for these pages unfortunately, bemoaning the fact that the market could no longer support any worthwhile back catalogue, so that important shows in Dylan's past such as the Manchester Free Trade Hall gig of May 7th 1965 were no longer available for enjoyment by fans who were not buying bootlegs when it was first released on CD. Amazingly, at a time when such archival releases are seen as simply not viable sales-wise, this gig has recently been released once again by the Rattlesnake label, entitled simply *Free Trade Hall 1965* [RS 133].

In an ideal world, this disc would sell itself. The performance is a crucial document of a tour which we now know to be the first major crossroads of Dylan's career. It is at this point that he truly emerged as more than just another folkie. The juxtaposition of old and new songs may have been enforced on Dylan simply to keep the audiences happy, but it clearly highlights the evolution of the greatest songwriter of the 'rock' era. Although Dylan had been playing the 'new' songs for six months, by the time of the Manchester gig 'Gates of Eden', 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit' and 'She Belongs to Me' had attained such a level of emotional intensity that the older songs seem almost simplistic by comparison. The transition from songs whose lyrics are superimposed over a preset musical structure to compositions where vocal and instrumental components fuse into a single organic entity is by now an inevitable process.

Even Dylan himself seems to know this. During 'The Times They Are A-Changin'' and 'With God on Our Side' it's like Dylan is using the time to compose himself once again before the next onslaught, while 'All I Really Want to Do' reeks of contempt for the older fans whose rigid sensibilities he would offend to even greater effect at Newport. The majestic 'It's All Over Now, Baby Blue' that closes the shows is the signpost for the new direction, for those who were paying attention. Almost exactly a year later, when Dylan returned to the city, the evolution would be complete.

No doubt *Free Trade Hall 1965* will sell in far less quantities than its content

should merit, in spite of it obviously being a major upgrade on previous versions of the show. It is a vast improvement on Swingin' Pig's *Now Ain't The Time For Your Tears* (TSP-CD-057), and even the later Wanted Man release *Now's The Time For Your Tears* (WMM 61). The reality in 2003 is that yesterday's show generates far more interest than last month's or, even more so, last year's. So what price a show almost two generations ago?

Moreover, given the ease with which shows can now be downloaded and/or copied, it is inevitable that bootleg sales will struggle to reach levels which make their existence cost-effective. This decade will no doubt be seen as the period when people really started to believe that all music should be free. Sadly, the response of most bootleggers, though not all, has been predictably inevitable, and of course shortsighted in the extreme. Faced with the constraints now imposed by the indifference of the public, two very different approaches have become apparent. In the red corner, the high-quality, well-conceived, multi-disc anthology with lavish artwork that makes other offerings seem redundant by comparison. In the blue corner, product; no attempt to achieve anything but to relieve fans of £15 per disc, or the equivalent in the country where you reside, and exactly the kind of release that can be copied shoddily by any individual with a rudimentary knowledge of Nero software.

Of course 'market forces' will triumph. At a recent European event, the spread of badly reproduced CD-R and DVD copies showed no signs of abating. Dealers were

falling over themselves to sell you insultingly basic packages, at contemptuous prices, of recent shows whose shelf life is less than one month. Given this environment we should heartily applaud the efforts of labels such as Scorpio, whose *Genuine Bootleg Series* remains quite simply essential, and White Bear, who recently bestowed on the world *Renaldo Gets The Repossession Blues* (WB 19/20/21/22/23/24), six discs covering the grueling 1978 tour.



Since this was the tour that spawned one of the early candidates for Dylan's worst live album ever, the 1978 shows have been ripe for reappraisal for some time. Sandwiched between the glorious peaks of the Rolling Thunder and Born Again tours, the 1978 trek has always been somewhat overshadowed. Listening to the official album, one could be forgiven for thinking Dylan had descended into some MOR-influenced abyss. It was of course assembled out of the wrong songs, from the wrong gigs, and with some of the most ill-suited production values to be found on an album bearing Dylan's name.

However, much like *Temples In Flames*, the label's 1987 tour equivalent, the listener is here forced to re-evaluate the tour as a whole, and not just as a show in isolation. The sheer length of the shows, coupled with the quantity of recordings in circulation from this period compared with previous tours, has meant that they have sometimes seemed to lack stature. *Renaldo Gets The Repossession Blues* selects a core show from each of the three legs of the tour and emphasises how the performances changed for the better as time passed. Play 'One More Cup of Coffee' or 'Masters of War' from Tokyo (28/2) alongside Paris (5/7) and then Seattle (10/11) and feel the temperature rise. By November, Dylan and his band injected the songs with an urgency that was entirely missing in February. With a vocal that is now as committed as it used to be perfunctory, even 'Blowin' in the Wind' sounds relevant again.

As is now customary for such releases of this nature, the discs are fleshed out with the alternate and oft-forgotten songs as appropriate: 'Lonesome Bedroom Blues', 'Steady Rolling Man', 'Something There Is About You', 'Watching the River Flow', 'Am I Your Stepchild?', 'Do Right to Me Baby', 'Love You Too Much', 'Fourth Time Around'. They are all here.

You should be listening.



I do agree with Michael Gray in issue seven, that *Judas!* is where the good stuff is found. I particularly enjoyed John Doran and Nick Hawthorne (again!) in that issue - so I am sorry to start the New Year with a moan, but I really miss the letters page.

I admit a personal reason here: you published a letter of mine in issue five (how happy you made me) and I was told a second letter would be in issue six but its arrival found me weeping with disappointment. The magazine was full and for the first time ever the letters were on the website only. Now, I know this may be hard to believe, but not everyone is on the internet, and so I wasn't able to read my own letter.

In issue seven, letters were not mentioned at all - are we to assume it's website only from now on and, if so, am I the only one who thinks it's not quite the same?

With every issue containing a plea for more writers, don't underestimate how encouraging it is to see yourself in print, especially in such illustrious company. Most will probably never aspire to an article but some may just have a half-decent letter in them and "Today a letter, Tomorrow who knows?"

Often memorably entertaining in their own right, the letters should surely be back in the magazine where they can be enjoyed by everyone. It doesn't have to be ten or twelve pages, but perhaps a judiciously selected half-dozen.

*Judas!* continues to be an excellent read and it would be a pity if elitism crept in during the pursuit of ever higher standards. After all the thing that unites us - all of us - is our enthusiasm for the stupendous achievement that is Bob Dylan's work.

Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

Sheila Clarke

Chester

*Hello Sheila, you can see that your fears are groundless. The letters page is back and will stay as long as we get letters. The magazine being full was not the only reason that there were none in issue six itself, instead appearing only on the website. The fact is that there were not enough letters to justify knocking out an article. For issue seven there were even fewer.*

*Actually this is not strictly true, I am receiving as many letters as ever but the majority specify 'not for publication'. Including ones that have complained about there being no letters page! I think it may be because people dash off e-mails without the same thought that goes into a physical letter and therefore don't want it published, or partly due to that anyway. Some of the letters here started as quick e-mails that the writer then revised for publication. There may be other reasons too; whatever the cause(s) it brings me even more frustration than yourself - especially as so many of them are excellent and thought-provoking.*

*In both **Homer**, the slut and here I have always maintained the importance of the letters section. I think it should be at the heart of a magazine. I do, however, need the letters to come. I would rather continue to get letters marked 'not for publication' than none at all, but ideally I would like the majority to be seen in print.*

*I can also allay any fear of elitism creeping in, negative elitism I mean. There will always be the elitism of wanting only the best to appear in these pages (but then all editors would presumably feel the same about their magazines) but both the articles and the letters will be written by new writers as well as professionals and well-known names - as long as I keep getting them that is!*

*You will find this issue totally written by new or relatively new writers; my on-the-spot nagging while in Sweden and post the Hammersmith show bore fruit. Most issues have been and will be a healthy mixture of the two, as specified in this issue's editorial. Thanks for writing and, as you will have gathered, I totally agree with you.*

*As an example of letters sent in that could well fit your implied hope of a full article tomorrow, here are two successive e-mails from Paul Sutcliffe, that suggest to me that an article is bursting to get out.*

#### Masking and Unmasking in "Love and Theft"

1(i) Masking: 'Persona' both as a means of generalizing masculine experience and characterising individual traits/its advantages as a 'distancing' medium/its use inside poetic convention and other narrative devices such as interior monologue(stream of consciousness) and dramatic monologue/poetic language and the 'language of men' (the 'borrowing' of different voices).

(ii) Unmasking: Link to 'masking'/Revealing contradictions and anomalies in the individual psyche/ irony and sensibility/'dualities' of existence as a precondition of failure (futility of passion)/parody and the minstrel tradition ('black' and 'masculine' some analogies)

Dear Andrew,

Enjoyed your book *Troubadour*, but why does everybody seem so intent on interpreting 'Sugar Baby' as true-biographical-straight-from-the-heart-Dylan?

It seems to me more likely to be one of his several attempts, using various male voices and character traits, to deal with the nature of masculine experience, sometimes with ideas which are at differing times both attractive and repulsive to us. Why treat the speaker in 'Floater' differently from the one in 'Sugar Baby'? Neither would be in real life particularly attractive, but in their monologic(?) forms as an art experience they offer us insights into our own behaviour and (male) talent for rationalizing our feelings. Often our only answers are kicking people out, bravado and braggadocio and ultimately violence. "*Love and Theft*" is full of such examples but also kindness, real grief, regret and very occasionally 'the murmur of a prayer' are not denied their presence even in the most seemingly uncomplicated consciousness. I offer above a possible outline of an approach to viewing the various male subject positions in "*Love and Theft*". I think in every song Dylan has some control over his subject matter and audience by his ironic distancing use of the 'lexicon' and general borrowing from other writings so that 'true' Dylan is only a construct in the minds of many disappointed fans, who still basically look for the unified voice/ subject positions of his earlier work and not being able to find this, seize on his lack of respect for women as a biographical constant. Respect the mask not the teller!

I really enjoyed your book, though!

Paul Sutcliffe

Bochum, Germany

*Thanks Paul, see above hint about writing an article on this, I think I explained why I took the approach I did to 'Sugar Baby' in Troubadour. I talked of it as standing apart from the other tracks because, for me, I heard and still hear it like this:*

*'The rest of the album may be spoken via the mouths of a cast of characters (notwithstanding that they reveal to us Dylan's view of life) but here I feel there is absolutely no authorial distance, this is Dylan speaking to himself; to thoughts of his loves, his past, his twin, "that enemy within".'*

*So my answer to your question: Why treat the speaker in 'Floater' differently from the one in 'Sugar Baby'? is that that is how it feels to me when I listen. Your prospective article (see, I get more pushy by the minute) may change my mind though.*

Dear Judas,

Still rather disappointed by the number of articles which base their arguments (consciously or otherwise?) around this true-to-himself-Dylan approach, which as I possibly inadequately, explained in my last e-mail, is basically a biographical (totally subjective) approach, I believe I called it the search for a 'biographical constant'. How else can one write: '...Dylan (and the listener) is reminded that "everybody must give something back for something they get..." It is a fundamental belief that is grained deep into Dylan's psyche.' Any article which has to involve the all-pervading presence of 'Dylan' in every almost sentence, mainly as the subject of verbs which imply a degree of

intimacy concerning the subject himself such as 'wants', 'promises', 'feels', or suggest insights into his own motivation for writing a song ('In "Honest With Me", Dylan requests the person the song is directed at to be honest with him; then and only then, will Dylan be honest with them in return'.)

To take up the point of my last e-mail and to apply it to 'Honest With Me', surely the singer/speaker is a mask (Persona) - certain parts may be autobiographical, but who cares? - the effect of the whole on me is, however, that the subject is 'unmasked' by the end of the song. The MALE strategies and responses of the subject/singer/speaker may convince himself inside his own limited consciousness but for the intelligent listener these responses are filtered through the medium of ironic distancing and are judged to be a bunch of rather poor rationalisations. In short, the subject/singer is not honest at all - his threats, anger and frustration can only really be tolerated in this art form in which the comic and the personally tragic can co-exist. The blues?

Paul Sutcliffe  
Bochum, Germany

Dear Andy,

I'm pleased that Michael Gray enjoyed my article in *Judas!* issue 6. But at the risk of disappointing him, I am entirely unrepentant about being 'a bit wide-eyed'. The day I cease to be so will be the day I truly *am* old, and long may it be delayed.

Alan Davis  
Lancaster

Hi Andy,

It has just occurred to me that perhaps *Judas!* readers should be grateful to me for mentioning 'Mighty Quinn' and 'Romance in Durango' in my article which clearly prompted Bob to sing them!!!! Don't worry, Mike has already sent for the men in white coats!

Love,  
Elaine  
Birmingham

Dear Andy and Keith

I was prepared for M&A to be a for-Dylan-fans-only kinda thing, but it was nothing like that. At least that's not how it hit me. And, believe me, no one could be more surprised about that than me. But I knew something was up when, the first time Dylan sang - when he was introduced to his band in the bar - my reaction was, 'Hey, hold on a minute, let's get back to the movie!'

My own feeling is that everyone is being misled by the pre-apocalyptic political setting of the movie. It's a complete red herring. I mean, yes, the good ole' USA is sure heading in that direction, and there is an uncomfortable prophetic resonance in it, but there's also something cheaply cynical about it, and a viewer fairly quickly stops thinking much

## Judas!

---

about it. It just becomes the particular weather of this story. More importantly, after establishing it as the *mise en scène*, the film loses interest in it as well. It's not the point. It's used basically to induce a despair of politics so that that you won't be tempted - in watching the story that unfolds - to imagine that the solution to the problems with these people might lie in politics or in altered social conditions.

And what is the point of the story? To me it comes down to a sort of good news/bad news report:

Dylan: I've got some good news, and some bad news.

The rest of us: What's the good news?

Dylan: You're a human being.

The rest of us: Oh. What's the bad news?

Dylan: You're a human being.

The absolute heart & center of the movie is the scene with the animal wrangler, which reaches its climax with the way the tone of his voice alters from anger when he says 'Man doesn't know his place' to anguish when he says, in the next breath, 'How could he? He doesn't have a place!' Then he looks up with an expression that seems to be asking, 'God! What were you thinking? Is this your idea of a joke?' (Did you notice that the only real expression that shows up on Dylan's face is the wince when he thinks this guy has just slaughtered the rabbit?)

And that change in tone is prefigured by a moment that has got to be the absolute peak of Dylan's acting career: when Uncle Sweetheart excuses himself with 'I'm only human' and Jack Fate retorts, 'Yeah, its hard being human.' The sarcasm disappears from his voice somewhere halfway through this, morphing somehow into actual sympathy, fellow-feeling. Dylan, who does this sort of thing when singing all the time, may be the only actor alive who could have pulled that off without making it sound false, without telegraphing it.

Anyway, I realized I was watching a great movie when I recognized how I felt after Jessica Lange's producer character framed Fate: I forgave her. Not excuse her, & not sympathize with her, though I did quickly feel bad for her - and new she was going to have to deal with feeling bad about it herself. But I did forgive her, instantly. I couldn't believe it myself. And then I realized that when you watch a movie, you play this constant game, unconsciously, because movies train you to do it: who's the good guy, who's the bad guy. 'Oh, he's the bad guy - no, he's really the good guy, the other guy is the bad guy - no no, wait a minute' - and so on. When Lange betrayed Fate, I felt that thinking rise up in me - and I went, oh, so she's the real louse! But I watched it rise up in me and quickly fall to the floor and then disappear. And then I saw everything differently - not just everyone in the movie, but everyone. It was like an epiphany: we're all the good guys - and we're all the bad guys. Or, to put it another way, while there is right and wrong, good deeds

and bad deeds - and Lange's betrayal was a bad one - there are no good people or bad people. You never know because you never know what we'll do. It's both a comforting and a disconcerting thought.

I started to realize how the movie had conspired, at one point or another, to make us, in some measure, both like and dislike, admire and loathe, each character. And they all seemed to know this themselves, in a murky way & more or less useless way. All except two: Bobby Cupid, who thinks Fate is God and the rest are Satan - and who finds out the truth - about himself - just about the same time it dawns on us. (I see him as a kind of Billy Budd, whose story he in a way re-enacts.)

And except Fate - who knows it - but not murkily. He knows it bone deep and with clear sight. He knows it about them and he knows it about himself. That's why, I'm guessing, he doesn't tell his old flame what she can do for him, let alone let her do it: He loves her & doesn't trust himself completely with her and has accumulated enough about himself over the course of his life that he wishes he didn't have to live with to go ahead anyway. So it's not even heroic that he spares her: it's just where he is now.

The audience has caught up with Fate for the first time as he's riding back to jail, and that's what that faint smile of recognition he is wearing on his face is saying: 'See what I mean? Welcome to the human race, my friend.'

So I think it's a great movie - and it wouldn't surprise me at all if it turned out to be Dylan's valedictory.

'Everything's gonna be different  
When I paint my masterpiece.'

Well, that's how it hit me. And it sure did hit me.

Take care,  
John Hinchey  
Ann Arbor, USA

Hello Andrew and Keith,

Of the distinguished cast of writers that Dylan is placed amongst during Christopher Ricks's *Visions Of Sin*, Michael Gray writes, 'This rigor, this assemblage of great minds, does Dylan more favours than he usually gets within the narrow walls of rock writing, where perspective on his work rarely roam further than from Woody Guthrie and the Rolling Stones.' These words come without snobbery; simply an awareness of the wider context into which Dylan deserves to be placed. As we wade through yet another list compiled by the popular music press - 'The 100 Greatest Guitar Riffs' 'The 25 Most-Memorable Beatle B-Sides' - it quickly becomes apparent just how narrow the restraints of rock culture actually are. The tired pages of the *NME*, *Rolling Stone* or *Q* (to name but a few) appear to suggest that culture started in 1954 and that the greatest literary feat

achieved by mankind is Johnny Cash's autobiography. It was always clear that Dylan was somehow above such limited viewpoints.

Yet, if Bob Dylan's work never seemed to fit comfortably into such a context, neither has it ever found another different categorical niche. While there have been notable exceptions, academia has never been fully accepting of his salty efforts. Poet? Not quite. The manner in which Dylan's work should be discussed - not simply a discussion of the work itself - has become a fascinating area during the first two-years of *Judas!*

It is so unfortunate that everything it seems must be categorised and defined. Why can't these things be appreciated without boundaries, against the full tapestry of human achievements? But to play the pure-hearted simpleton will never do, as when we engage within anything, on no matter what level, our own assumptions and prejudices come into play. Nobody experiences anything utterly mindlessly, and our own understanding undoubtedly is an important part of our response. The judgements cast against these very human endeavours can be occasionally mean-spirited, but we can't rely upon our instinctive initial attraction forever, so questions get asked and then debate inevitably ensues...

What seems important now is the company into which Dylan is placed. Drawing thin connections between his lyrics and great poetry will never pull it into greatness, but wild and creative juxtapositions have always appealed. There is perhaps no finer example of this than Alan Davis's 'Nature Of Gothic' essay in issue seven. Part of what is so wonderful about the piece is that Alan himself seemed uncertain of the ground he is treading. Just how real the connections are between the works of John Ruskin and Dylan is difficult to tell, but that isn't what matters; what is important are the possibilities that are presented to us when they are brought together. Good criticism should be a creative process unto itself, so there is no reason why these leaps should not be made. Surely it makes for a more enlivening comparison than yet another look at Dylan's links with John Lennon.

What makes this all the more interesting is Dylan's recent tendency to take his music towards the thin confines of the primal din of rock n roll. As he twitched away behind his keyboards recently at Shepherds Bush, and the band remained tied to their electric instruments, I became convinced that he really did see his art stretching no further than the borders of his love for Little Richard 45s. I realise this isn't the general consensus, but I found it difficult, amongst the metallic clatter, to gain access to any of the songs (though, didn't the line from Tough Mama, 'Ain't a-haulin' any of my lambs through the marketplace anymore, ring-out across the hall?). It was only the following night at Hammersmith, and to a lesser extent at Brixton, once the pallet was enriched with greater colour and texture that I found the experience wholly engaging.

Still, as he pounded his way through one final version of All Along the Watchtower at Brixton, I couldn't help but look at him and think, 'What right do I have to say anything about the deeply individual body of work you have put into the world?' As he says

himself in his own, wildly over-priced, souvenir programme, 'If the media was commenting on every article you wrote, imagine what it would do to you.' But, we do have a right to comment, as long as that debate remains whole-hearted, intelligent and engaging; it should serve the work.

Now all I want is someone to tell me why I'm wrong about Shepherds Bush....

Richard Jobs  
London

Dear Homer Slut head,

If I were not the mature, sophisticated educator that I am I would've been forced to say that your most recent issue of *JUDAS!* is one mother-fuckin' kick-fuckin'-ass publication.

Yes-Sir-Ree

The writing is so good. Man, oh Man oh man.  
How come these great writers choose to write for you, really?

Love  
Bobby Levinson  
New York, USA

Dear Judas

To quote a phrase, what happened? Specifically, what happened on the Saturday between Birmingham and Shepherds Bush? My theory is clone replacement by aliens, who were waiting until the old model was completely exhausted before they introduced the new one. Their cover was blown when they forgot to pre-rust the replacement.

As I'm sure every other subscriber has already noted, the final London shows were quite staggering. Sure, the piano is an erratic percussion instrument rather than a melodic aid, but it seems to have freed Dylan to concentrate on his voice, and his words, and his unique path between the two.

Hammersmith was my pick, like everyone else - never thought I'd hear 'Dear Landlord', let alone 'Durango'. But I can't ever remember hearing Dylan sing better - in person - than on the final verse of 'Hard Rain' at Brixton.

Just as well you didn't plan your 'Why do we still see Dylan?' symposium for 2004, as the answers would have been deadly dull and curt: 'Hammersmith'.

Peter Doggett,  
London

*Ah but what a fine answer it would have been, Peter.*

*Thanks to all that wrote - please don't let Sheila down by not sending any in for issue nine.*

## A PERFECT SONG?

by James Bishop

In his book *Dylan's Visions Of Sin*, Christopher Ricks proposes that 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll' is 'A perfect song perfectly rendered, once and for all.' What is gained in Dylan re-performing the song today, he says, is outweighed by what is lost. In short, he feels that both Dylan and we are misguided in our searches for fresh meaning in this particular song. Dylan, he tells us 'can't command a new vantage-point from which to see the senseless killing of Hattie Carroll,' and therefore, presumably is doomed to 'fail' when attempting to render current versions of the song.

Whilst I share Ricks's enthusiasm for the original recorded version - and I certainly believe his book to be a masterful study - I find this particular argument unsatisfying.

Firstly - and this may sound obvious - the song is not merely about Hattie Carroll or the specific events its story relates. Rather Hattie Carroll's unfortunate plight and Dylan's commentary upon the public's reaction to it are symbols of a much wider political point. I do not believe that the issues raised in the song are exclusive to its time; rather they remain unresolved to this very day, although the sad fate of Hattie Carroll herself is a matter for the history books. To say, therefore, that Dylan 'can't

command a new vantage-point' from which to see Hattie Carroll's 'senseless killing' is to miss the point of what Dylan was - and is - looking at when he performs the song: injustice, alive and well and coming to a courtroom near YOU today, tomorrow, next year.

Ricks might imagine that the song in its original form still addresses current injustices, but does it? Do insects trapped in amber, frozen, their every detail intact, have the ability still to pollinate flowers? How many times should you tell your wife that you love her before you stop: just the once, perfectly?

I would suggest that the repetition of the message of 'Hattie Carroll' down the years has been invaluable. As Dylan stood before me at Wembley in November 2003 and sung it tenderly I saw young people listening very carefully, not to a wax recording but to a living, breathing man offering an eternal truth from his lips and from his heart. There was immense beauty in that, irrespective of the particular version's closeness to the original. The Lord's Prayer, perfect in its original form, is repeated every Sunday up and down the land despite the (temporary) absence of its author. Its message is worth repeating.

Another problem with Ricks's argument concerns the very concept of 'A perfect song perfectly rendered, once and for all.' To stand like a musical traffic cop, as Ricks does here, with his hand raised saying, 'Stop! I have the perfect version!' is arrant nonsense and folly. It smacks of King Knut with his deckchair and damp feet.

Ricks does generously allow that his 'imagination is immensely smaller' than

Dylan's, but his mistake is to imagine that Dylan is searching for an 'improvement' on the original when he attempts to sing this song. It might be, for example, that Dylan is searching for something else entirely: a sound in his head, a guitar figure or a rolling keyboard pattern. His art may have turned musical for a moment, rather than literary, and Hattie Carroll (the song not the person) may simply be the vehicle at hand. How shockingly unfaithful to the original *that* would be, but how delicious.

Or perhaps by allowing us to hear his older, frailer, more ravaged self attempting the song Dylan is permitting us to feel how far we, and he, have come from the youthful idealism of the times in which the song was penned: a new vantage-point indeed. There is a frisson to be had in hearing Dylan's wistful tone at such moments. 'I saw these things,' he seems to be saying, 'I saw them and I could not change them, so let's cry a while.'

The answer to the problem I have with Ricks's idea of 'A perfect song perfectly rendered, once and for all' comes in a mysterious form. This is Dylan we are talking about, after all; mystery is bound to make an appearance. Dylan's art and powers are protean. They change location and form at will and as necessary. This can be bewildering. One minute his art could be in the words themselves, or in a simple twist of a phrase, the next in the way he leans into his piano or strides across the stage and hides a smile. The art could be in his liner notes for an album more than the album itself, or it could be in an interview

before or after a concert. Ultimately, I suggest, it is Dylan himself who is the art. The songs - 'Hattie Carroll' included - are, as often as not, props, as are his guitar, harmonica, piano, clothes, make-up, name and his mighty array of voices.

'Hattie Carroll' may be sung - when Dylan is feeling particularly introspective - to illuminate an aspect of himself: his attitude, his mood. It may be sung about a current injustice, it may even, on occasion, still be sung about poor Hattie Carroll herself. The purpose of the song and its singing may change mid-song. It could, for instance, turn on an annoying audience member, '...And YOU who philosophise disgrace and criticise all fears...' Dylan's eyes flash and the song's intent shifts to a specific focus of attack.

So to suggest that the song has been sung and can be no more is to make a flawed assumption about what Dylan songs are, where his art resides, and the purpose, or purposes, behind any given rendition.

One other thought: since writing 'Hattie Carroll' the cells in Dylan's body have replaced themselves many times over. He, quite literally, is not the same person who wrote the song. He is, in fact, younger than that now. We are different too, so are the times in which we live. There are other Hattie Carrolls being born as we speak, in Baltimore and maybe in your town too.

*So how many times should Dylan sing 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll'? A million would not be too many for this world. May his song always be sung.*

*‘it then must be time  
for you to rest & learn  
new songs:’*

Bob Dylan’s ‘Mr. Tambourine Man’

by Jonathan Shimkin

*‘All truly profound art requires its creator to  
abandon himself to certain powers which he  
invokes but cannot altogether control.’*

- André Malraux

### 1) ‘Hey!’

That first ‘Hey!’ is clarion. It rings out from the opening of side two of *Bringing It All Back Home* with a superb poise and confidence, and the song is an extended circling round the occasion for that confidence.

The words tell one story; the voice they are sung in tells another. The opening chorus proposes a contract: *you play; I’ll follow*, and the song’s yearning is to set the seal on this agreement. From the sound of the voice, though, one would assume that the agreement is already sealed and secure and has borne fruit in the shape of the very song being sung. The singer’s voice sounds in joyful possession of that for which it’s asking; the song invokes a muse whose mysterious intervention has already shaped it.

The words could be sung differently, of course, as they were before this particular performance, and as they would be after. But on this day, January 15, 1965, the song marked the culmination of a year-long transition during which Dylan, driven by the imperatives of his imagination, had reinvented himself, evolved from one to another *type* of artist, a process that ran on parallel tracks to the writing and composing of ‘Mr. Tambourine Man’ and culminated in the assured and joyful noise of that inaugural ‘Hey!’

## 2) Daemons And Muses

'Drift, wait, and obey...' - one poet's prescription for successful negotiations with the Muse.

Kipling uses the word Daemon rather than Muse, but the import is the same: 'When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait, and obey...' It is this program, the traditional prerogative of poets, that Dylan subscribes to, and prescribes for himself, in 'Mr. Tambourine Man.'

Another poet, Louise Glück, was essentially elaborating Kipling's prescription when she wrote: 'The fundamental experience of the writer is helplessness... The dream of art is not to assert what is already known but to illuminate what has been hidden, and the path of the hidden world is not inscribed by will.'

Dylan was no stranger to 'helplessness.' Prolific and fallow creative phases had established strong alternating rhythms in him from the start and he would later coin his own term for Glück's 'helplessness.' He'd call it - *amnesia*.

By 1964 he had come to share Kipling's and Glück's dream of art: it is precisely an abdication of will that 'Mr. Tambourine Man' insists upon, so that the poet, sprung from the limitation of asserting what is already known, can access the hidden.

'From now on,' Dylan said in a 1964 interview, 'I want to write from inside me, and to do that I'm going to have to get back to writing like I used to when I was ten - having everything come out naturally...' As his invocation of the perennial Romantic categories of 'childhood' and

'the natural' indicate, it was the Romantic model of subjective quest, of inner exploration across the contours of consciousness, that proved so alluring to Bob during that year. That archetypal Romantic quest hero - The Poet - was the model explorer. If 'the hidden' was the province of The Poet, to be tracked under the tutelage of a Muse, then a Poet Dylan would be, and a Muse he would invoke.

## 3) 'The Ancient Empty Streets'

The first two verses of 'Mr. Tambourine Man' enact the first two elements of Kipling's dictum; they are about 'drift and wait.'

There's a strong sense of termination about these verses - all that *numbness* and *blindness* and *weariness* situate the singer at a place where his personal effort, coming to naught, has reached its limits. Alone in the city streets at dawn, disburdened of the night's delusions, but also adrift, without direction, the singer can do little more than stand still. An old way of being has come to an end; the singer awaits the new. Weary, he's also paradoxically *awake* in a way that his previous condition, as citizen of an empire that vanishes at first light, didn't allow. He's in a state of passive receptivity, the ideal state, according to Kipling, to attend to one's Daemon.

The chorus repeats its plea: '*you play; I'll follow,*' and the second verse elaborates the terms of the contract: 'I'm ready to go anywhere... I promise to go under it' in exchange for the promise to 'take me on a trip... cast your dancing spell my way...'

Having exhausted his personal reserves, the singer offers himself to an energy that transcends the personal, the same energy that appears in the dream of fire from 'Tarantula:' '... i could not feel any guilt about just standing there singing for as i said i was picked up & moved there not by my own free will but rather by some unbelievable force -' (p. 107). Rilke called this energy 'angels;' the Greeks divinized it, named it a Goddess, a supernatural faculty that transports the poet and his audience.

It's the 'magic swirlin' ship' of verse two that promises to extricate the singer from the grid-like city streets, 'too dead for dreaming,' and relocate him to a foreign land, or at least the open sea. The imagery of urban bondage (played off against the sky and sea of the third and fourth verses) addresses constraints that afflict the singer and keep him from 'dancing,' from following the liberated swell of the motions of his own consciousness.

Those constraints, identified and slowly cast off by Dylan over the course of 1964, pertained to ideals of art and politics, enshrined as tenets of the folk revival, that may have once inspired him, but had come to have a dampening effect on his linguistic and musical imagination. In a sense, he was being constrained by his own songs, the terms of his own art, up to and including his third album. To re-imagine himself as something other than a song-writer working under the auspices of The Traditional, laboring in fields that had been well-tilled by countless hands before his own, he needed a different model of the artist, one he could use as a springboard to a new conception of self.

#### 4) Down On Sandburg's Farm

'I am a poet. My name is Robert Dylan and I would like to see Mr. Sandburg.'

According to Pete Karman, his traveling companion on the cross-country trip Dylan made early in 1964, these were the words with which he introduced himself at Carl Sandburg's home, in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

That this was one of the first stops on a journey that was already laden with a certain mythic freight before even leaving New York suggests that it had a symbolic importance for Bob, beyond the literal encounter. This was how the whole cross-country trip was conceived. It was to be a 'song of the open road' along trails blazed by Whitman, Guthrie, Kerouac - a distinctively American quest. Bob's imagination had already been at work on such a trip as early as the liner notes for *Freewheelin'*, which tell us the plot of one of his three novels-in-progress: it's 'about New York and a trip from New York to New Orleans,' the route taken, made literal, in February 1964.

The itinerary that February included such Guthrie-esque pit stops as Harlan County, Kentucky and Ludlow, Colorado, as well as a more recent site of national disaster: Dealey Plaza in Dallas - a symbolic geography. The stop at Carl Sandburg's door suggests conscious pilgrimage, and echoes an earlier pilgrimage undertaken by Dylan, the one that brought him to Woody Guthrie's bedside in 1961. We know what Woody was to Dylan, but what was Sandburg? The question has been left curiously unexamined.

A possible answer: Sandburg was a type of ‘The Poet’ and provided a model to Dylan’s imagination, just as Woody had earlier provided a model as the inheritor and refiner of traditions that Dylan would inherit and refine in turn. But by 1964 Dylan needed to get beyond the traditionalist mantle that was proving stifling, and Sandburg, a modern poet, provided Dylan with a species of modernism that was uniquely accessible to his imagination.

One can only conjecture how much of Sandburg Dylan was familiar with at the time of his visit (I suspect more than has been recognized), but that there were temperamental and aesthetic affinities between them is fairly obvious. They had much in common: a mid-western background; an interest in folk song; an ardent espousal of the authenticity of the culture, language and regional accents that gave rise to folk song; a streak of social activism.

On the other hand, there were the elements that made Sandburg stand out in Dylan’s universe: he was above all an established literary man, a ‘master,’ a Pulitzer Prize winning poet, among the ranks (if in the lower tiers) of the recognized modernist poets. But he was also a more immediately accessible figure than the high modernists, Eliot or Pound or even Frost – figures of a more rarefied air. One can’t imagine Dylan knocking on *their* doors and announcing himself in quite the same ingenuous way. Sandburg was approachable, yet of incontestable stature.

His language, too, was approachable, in the mode of the Grand Demotic, with a vernacular rhetorical sweep, humorous,

and full of cadences that Bob would have resonated to, from sources they shared: the King James Bible, Whitman, the tall tales and accents of folklore that shaped ‘The People, Yes’. Sandburg’s poetry favored an extended and flexible style of lineation that was well-suited to Dylan’s proclivities as a song-writer. I suspect that Bob had actually read Sandburg - i.e., read him *well* - and felt the kinship.

There are lines in Sandburg’s work that sound compositional notes Bob had been exploring:

*The red ball of the sun in an evening mist  
Of the slow fall of rain on planted fields  
Or the pink sheath of a newborn child  
Or the path of a child’s mouth to a nipple  
Or the snuggle of a bear cub in mother’s  
paws  
Or the structural weave of the universe...*

(from ‘The People, Yes’ of 1936)

Such cascades of imagery, like those of ‘A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,’ are one of the structural principles of ‘The People, Yes’. Then there are the more direct echoes of:

*Let me be your baby, south wind.  
Rock me, let me rock, rock me now.  
Rock me low, rock me warm.  
Let me be your baby.*

*Comb my hair, west wind.  
Comb me with a cowlick.  
Or let me go with a pompadour.  
Come on, west wind, make me your  
baby...*

That’s from ‘Good Morning, America’ of 1928. The same volume contains Sandburg’s ‘Nine Tentative Definitions of Poetry,’ among which are:

*Poetry is a projection across silence of cadences arranged to break that silence with definite intentions of echoes, syllables, wave lengths.*

*Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and the unknowable.*

These definitions would have been congenial to one who was searching for a way to write more from 'inside me' and who was about to embark on the composition of a song that would celebrate 'the unknown and the unknowable' as the touchstone and guarantor of personal and aesthetic authenticity.

\*\*\*

They talked for about 20 minutes that day. Dylan gave the elder poet a copy of his latest album and, again according to Karman, 'Sandburg looked at the rest of us, but he just wasn't as interested as he was in Dylan. There was an immediate, unspoken communication between them.' This may be a retrospective gloss, but even if it is, it speaks to one of the motives that impelled Dylan to seek out Sandburg - an inner drive for some kind of vocational validation, a laying on of hands, as it were, from an artist who was sanctioned, recognized, awarded and now, three years before his death, venerable. Dylan was looking for a sign of acceptance into the magical fraternity of those imaginatively endowed to 'illuminate what has been hidden,' just as earlier he had sought validation from Woody for his folk-singer persona.

Woody gave Dylan a way to act and to be - a vocabulary, a repertoire of songs and

gestures, a moral stance. His affectation of Woody became an education and a means to growth, an illustration of Auden's astute and generous point that 'in literature, as in life, affectation passionately adopted and loyally persevered in, is one of the chief forms of self discipline by which mankind has raised itself by its own bootstraps.' Now, as Dylan outgrew the pedagogic model provided by Woody, he sought a different measure, a more wide-ranging model, and, above all, a *language* commensurate with his need for inner exploration. Sandburg stood for all that, symbolically, whether he actually took Dylan at Dylan's own valuation or not (the accounts are not reliably clear on this point).

Stephen Spender has said: 'It is evident that a faith in their vocation, mystical in intensity, sustains poets.' I believe it was this order of faith that Dylan sought to kindle with the visit to Sandburg.

Whether he felt personally disappointed or elated with his reception, it seems to have stirred something up. As the drive cross-country continued, Dylan sat in the back of the car, typing away at new songs. 'Chimes of Freedom' was written during this trip, and another new song got its start: 'I wrote some of "Mr. Tambourine Man" in New Orleans, too...'

### 5) Changin' Times

In a 1964 interview, Dylan said: 'It's hard being free in a song - getting it all in. Songs are so confining. Woody Guthrie told me once that songs don't have to do anything like that. But it's not true. A song has to have some kind of form to fit into

the music. You can bend the words and meter, but it still has to fit somehow. I've been getting freer in the songs I write, but I still feel confined. That's why I write a lot of poetry, if that's the word. Poetry can make its own form...'

One can imagine the city streets of the opening of 'Mr. Tambourine Man' to be composed of Dylan's own earlier songs, each song a cobblestone, and Dylan bound by the constraints they imposed. This sense of aesthetic constraint was strong upon him in 1964, as was the sense of political constraint, what we would now call the orthodoxy of 'political correctness.' *Broadside* magazine, predictably, offered as criticism of the songs of 1964 that Dylan had 'defected from political songs into higher forms of art' and deemed 'Mr. Tambourine Man' a failure. Yes - 'defected!' It was no small thing for Dylan to change gears in the fractious air of 1964 - less dramatic, perhaps, than 1965, or 1966, but no less crucial a step in the direction of artistic growth.

Dylan was stuck 'asserting what was already known' and he simply couldn't do it anymore. The sense of confinement led to what Clinton Heylin calls his 'yearlong flirtation with a form of rambling poetry (sic)...' - that is, *written* poetry, not songs and not meant for performance. The 'rambling' included the liner notes for *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, ('Some Other Kinds of Songs...'), 'Advice for Geraldine on Her Miscellaneous Birthday,' the letters to Tami Dean, the 'Macmillan' book that would eventually become 'Tarantula,' the 'two plays' he told Max Jones he was working on. This lure of the

literary to some degree pulled against his commitment to song-writing, at least the kind of song-writing with which he was so strongly identified as the year began. He was looking for ways to break down boundaries and find the freedom to explore parts of his nature that were being left out of account in the songs. As 'Tarantula' says: '...it then must be time for you to rest & learn new songs...'

\*\*\*

January 15, 1964 saw the release of *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, the culminating moment of Bob's career as the self-conscious inheritor of received traditions, employing a deliberately spare language to tell stories that were part broadside and part variations on traditional balladry, crafted out of traditional melodies and verse structures. January 15, 1965 saw Bob in the studio recording *Bringing It All Back Home*. The two dates in themselves tell a tale, one well illustrated by the covers of those two albums.

Even by Bob's mercurial standards the sense of transformation is acute: from the austere earnest black-and-white countenance that looks out from 'Times,' carrying the burden of spokespersonship that had congealed around his public persona and that sounded from most of the album's tracks - from *that*, to the dandified young man who sits at the center of a colorful fish-eye swirl of personal votive objects, like strewn clues to an inner landscape, components of the consciousness of the singer at their center... A radical re-imagining of self has taken place between these two photos, and

'Mr. Tambourine Man' is one of the doorways through which Dylan walked to get from the one to the other.

It meant relinquishing his role as custodian of Woody's legacy - one who worked with the distinctive cut and grain and measure of the traditional, embellishing it with enough of a distinctive style and cadence to delight both the adherents of that tradition and the seekers after new voices.

Woody had been his 'idol' - but an idol remains an exterior measure, as Dylan wrote in the sixth of his '11 Outlined Epitaphs:'

*Woody Guthrie was my last idol  
he was my last idol  
because he was the first idol  
I'd ever met  
that taught me  
face 't face  
that men are men  
shatterin' even himself  
as an idol...*

He was ready to replace the exterior measure of the idol with the interior measure of a Muse. Idols can be outgrown; they eventually succumb to an iconoclasm to which Muses are not susceptible. Dylan had tried to install Aretha Franklin as the Muse of 'Tarantula' ('aretha/crystal jukebox queen of hymn & him...' - the opening line of the book), but it didn't really take; she remained a conceit rather than an animating presence. A Muse is both a facet of the poet's imagination and a force that possesses and dictates through those faculties that are surrendered to it. A Muse, finally, is nothing more or less than the inherent capacities of one's own

consciousness and, once awakened, cannot be abandoned or left behind - only surrendered to. And the terms of that 'surrender' comprise the contract that is sealed in 'Mr. Tambourine Man.'

## 6) 'Escaping On The Run'

With verse three of 'Mr. Tambourine Man' we leave the bounded city streets behind and move into a sphere of boundlessness and motion. It is the most dynamic of the verses, a vaulting into liberty that gives the poet his intimation of newly discovered freedom. The imagery is celestial - the sky, unbound by fences; the sun, crossed by mad motion. The motion leaves behind the shed skin of the singer's previous persona - vague, shadowy, ragged, not part of the parade into which the singer is now fading.

This sense of motion is reflected in all the restlessness of 1964 - the cross-country trip, the literary experiments, the toying with the notion of abandoning songwriting. But most of all, it's reflected in the one sphere where poets have the most immediate need for unconstrained motion and suppleness: the sphere of language.

In the new songs that appear on *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, and that begin to find their way into performance during 1964, one can hear a new type of language in Dylan's work. There is a palpable thickening of figuration and a growing wild freedom of association that, while often awkward in the songs of *Another Side* ('Ballad in Plain D,' 'My Back Pages') also yield up the new, and newly exciting, language of 'Mr. Tambourine Man,' 'Chimes of Freedom,' 'It's Alright, Ma,'

'Gates of Eden.' Leaving demotic accents behind, Dylan's language begins to occupy more of the foreground, becoming a subject in itself, because it has been assigned a new task: not to chronicle the poet's observations about the world, in meters and melodies derived from traditional repertoires, but to chronicle a unique subjective reality, a task that was the particular province of the High Romantic lyric.

Dylan, as an heir to the tradition of Romantic lyric, reaches after a language capacious enough to contain a new consciousness of self, limber enough to measure the movements of that consciousness as it registers the intensity of its encounters with both inner and outer worlds. The ship that he asks to board in verse one of 'Mr. Tambourine Man' is, among other things, a vessel of words. The lines of the song are the contours of that ship, and they propel him inwards, with rhythms traced by its rippling rhyme-scheme.

The song is dense with the music of language. Each verse is a compound of immediate and deferred rhyme - three short rhymed lines (sand/hand/stand) followed by a longer line whose rhyme word, 'sleeping,' is resolved by the final line's 'dreaming' only after the intervention of a second triplet (feet/meet/street). Within this rippling structure there are inter-linear rhymes and plays with assonance and alliteration that make of rhyme itself the grand figure of the dance within which the singer is seeking to lose himself. The rhyme doubles, triples in the last verse: 'mind/time/leaves/trees/beach/ reach' - all before 'sorrow' - then again 'free/sea/

sands/ fate/waves' (a particularly felicitous progression of vowel sounds in the last three of that sequence, with each 'a' slightly longer and more open than the previous), until we get the clinch of the final 'tomorrow.' Here rhyme becomes formal counterpart to the sea the singer seeks to sink in.

### 7) 'Deep Beneath The Waves'

Verse four clarifies what surrender to the Muse means: a complete loss of the personal coordinates inscribed by the city streets, now replaced by a 'trackless' ocean. The very foundations of what we conceive of as personal identity: Time, Memory, Fate, Sorrow, Fear (a combination of Kantian categories of consciousness and powerful psychological dispositions) disappear beneath the waves of that ocean. The coordinates of past, present, future are erased, leaving only a perpetual, celebratory present, from the perspective of which one's previous concerns appear like 'smoke rings' issuing from the mind. This evokes Blake's 'mind-forg'd manacles' - metal or smoke, it doesn't matter what they *appear* to be made of, as they are each equally insubstantial.

The ship that set out from verse one has reached its destination: the 'person' has 'disappeared,' a desideratum that was declared in another Dylan song of the same year, 'Love Is Just A Four-Letter Word': 'Searching for my double, looking for/Complete evaporation to the core...' It is this transcendence of the personal that is behind his statement, years later, that 'I don't think of myself as Bob Dylan. It's like Rimbaud said, "I is another".'

That the sea the singer sinks in is also his art, his songs, is suggested by the eighth of the '11 Outlined Epitaphs:'

*(... for all songs lead back t' the sea  
an' at one time, there was  
no singin' tongue t' imitate it)  
t' make new sounds out of old sounds  
an' new words out of old words  
an' not to worry about the new rules  
for they ain't been made yet...*

'Drift, wait, and obey...'

Verse four delivers the fruit of that obedience - the dance beneath the sky with one hand waving free is danced to the air of 'Mr. Tambourine Man' itself. The figure of the Tambourine Man joins the ranks of traditional Muses - Homer's goddess, Wordsworth's correspondent breeze, Lawrence's wind and angels, Lorca's duende - who never fail to fulfill their part of the bargain as long as we fulfill ours; they are 'us' as sure as 'I is another,' potentialities latent in consciousness, waiting to be awakened. The surrender we make is always and only to ourselves. Through there appear to be two characters in the story of 'Mr. Tambourine Man,' finally, there is only one.

### 8) 'I'll Come Following'

The song ends, of course, with a final reprise of the chorus: *you play, I'll follow.*

Dylan has continued to play the song over the course of the near-40 years since its inception in New Orleans in 1964. It has the capacity to speak in many voices and assume many attitudes: it sounds hesitant and a little dubious in its first incarnations in 1964, with Jack Elliott, or

at Philharmonic Hall on Halloween, then grows assured and poised in 1965. It seems to well up from somewhere beneath the very waves in 1966, with extended harmonica solos that lap against the shores of the song until one drowns in the sound and time does indeed stand still.

In the delirious 1981 versions, the upper registers of Dylan's vocal range spin the words like jugglers' pins and give the song perhaps the most ecstatically happy cast it ever assumed. The slow, seductive versions of 1995 seem to draw out the Muse through sheer sensuality of enunciation and breath. The Towson version of 2000 reinvents itself as it goes along, finding new depths of possibility in a mine one might be excused for thinking was long since exhausted.

The song's longevity and adaptability suggests its continued importance to Dylan, its talismanic power. He returns to the song again and again not only out of a sense of debt ('I must play these songs'), but because the original contract still holds good - it is too close to his creative source *not* to be sung. It draws power from its engagement with themes that form the foundational axes of Dylan's career: autonomy versus surrender; inspiration versus amnesia; mastery versus helplessness - universal themes, as well as deeply personal ones.

Behind the broad sweep of that career, and the specific rhythms of the individual songs that have poured forth from it, sounds the jingle-jangle of the tambourine in time. That trace of rhyme may be vague or loud and clear, a receding echo or a torrid rhythm; it is the essential term of Bob's art, and pulses like the beat of a heart that keeps all song in motion.

by Nick Hawthorne

# Affairs of the Heart

What a beautiful song 'Boots of Spanish Leather' is. I fell under its spell the very first time I heard the tender, mournful album version, and my love for the song has grown and grown with each passing year. I have enjoyed many live versions of the song, but none more so than the version unveiled by Dylan on the autumn 2003 European tour, and specifically the performance in Hamburg on 18th October.

Helsinki was the first European city to be exposed to this dramatic new arrangement, on the very first night of that European tour. The audience that night were given the merest hint that something special was happening. By the time Bob performed two nights at the famous Hamburg Docks the song was the topic of conversation among Dylan diehards. But that is where this story ends for now; I want to go back for a moment to where it all started.

The debate surrounding Dylan and poetry has always struck me as being singularly odd. The desperate need among some to classify Dylan's work seems to miss the point. It also seems to escape some people that Dylan could be something of a poet without writing poetry. Dylan famously once said:

*I consider myself a poet first and a musician second. I live like a poet and I'll die like a poet.*

But this declaration from Dylan explaining how he perceived his soul did nothing to quell the arguments that raged about how to classify his work. To me it is clear. Dylan no more writes poetry than John Donne writes songs. Bob Dylan does write songs. He has penned prose of a kind, and a few genuine poems, i.e. work to be read aloud or read to oneself from the page, 'Last Thoughts on Woody Guthrie' being an obvious example of the latter, and 'Tarantula' of the former. Works with no music written for them, they forever exist in their written form only, and as spoken word in the case of 'Last Thoughts'.

There is no shame in Dylan being remembered as a songwriter, and yet that is what some people, Dylan aside, seem afraid of. Poets and poetry are artistically credible, songs and songwriters are not, at least not if you want to be considered among the greatest artists of a generation and beyond. Dylan should be remembered for many things. For being an innovative and dazzling songwriter, a singer of peerless ability and emotion, and a performer of devastating talent. How important is it then that history preserves Dylan as a great poet?

Among Dylan's songs, some work much better than others when bereft of the music that was written for them, and the singing which brings them to life. One of those which works best of all is 'Boots of Spanish Leather'. If you have the lyric to hand, get it now and read it aloud. The very fact that a portion of the power of the song, starved of two-thirds of its oxygen, still comes across is testament to the literary powers of the lyric. But why should we settle for just reading the lyric, when we have the music and the singing given to it? And not just one set of music and singing, but many, many examples over a 40-year period.

As an aside on this point, are these three equal parts? The singing, the lyrics and the music? If not, which is the most important? On Dylan pool (which is a website for Dylan fans to discuss everything Dylan) recently, someone said, in furiously defending Dylan's vastly deteriorating voice and vocal ability, '*Dylan's voice is not his art. It's the lyrics.*'

It was one of those remarks that brings you to a dead stop. I knew instantly upon

reading it that the statement was completely wrong. Ask yourself, which do you prefer - other people singing Dylan's songs, or Dylan singing other people's songs? I would hazard a guess that for 99% of the people reading this, it would be the latter. So that suggests that the voice is the art, or at least an absolutely intrinsic part of it. The writing is also part of the art but, on examination, to a lesser extent than the voice.

So why is it then that we are blessed with so many hefty writings on Dylan's lyrical power, coming thick and fast, year after year, examining Dylan's lyrics from a literary criticism perspective? Recently we have had excellent books by the likes of Andrew Muir, Michael Gray and Christopher Ricks, really delving into the literary side of Dylan. It is perhaps disappointing that we do not have anywhere near the same amount of books on Dylan the singer, Dylan the musician, Dylan the performer. Paul Williams has led in this area in terms of performance, and Andrew Muir too with *Razor's Edge*. But I can't help but think that there aren't more of these sorts of books, or that they aren't as well supported, because they don't carry the same weight that is placed on the words. Otherwise how could a book as flawed and tedious as *Do You, Mr Jones?* not only be published, but reviewed in all the major newspapers in the land?

I digress, but it is relevant here, and all grist to the mill. 'Boots of Spanish Leather' gets its power from Dylan excelling in all three of these areas. It is beautifully written, has a beautiful melody and is beautifully sung. And it tackles subject

matter so very hard to do well without stumbling into the pitfalls of sentimentality and bland cliché. It is something all art strives for, strives to capture, and something Dylan has done successfully on many occasions. We turn to art since it reflects the human condition, from its basest level to its most glorious peaks. And that which defines the human condition, and separates us from the animals and the birds, is our existence in the past, the present and the future; time's cruellest trick, or greatest test, which casts mankind living perpetually in the present, but haunted by memories of the past and frightened by speculating on the unknown of the future.

To capture this very essence, the very essence of time, and human relationships within time, in a song, or a poem for that matter, is an artist's Holy Grail. It is what Dylan strove for consciously on *Blood On The Tracks*, in songs such as 'Tangled Up in Blue'. And it is what he achieves on 'Boots of Spanish Leather', written in early 1963, when Bob Dylan was just 21 years old.

*Oh I'm sailin' away my own true love  
I'm sailin' away in the morning  
Is there something I can send you from  
across the sea  
From the place that I'll be landing?*

Those opening words on the album version of the song are sung so mournfully. And with a neat trick by Dylan that I will come back to in a moment.

So many of us find the present so difficult to live in, because the past is invariably littered with regret and sorrow, lost loves, lost friends and bittersweet memories. The pain involved in losing a lover, of all the

unsaid words too painful to speak aloud, is beautifully presented in 'Boots of Spanish Leather'.

Back to that neat trick I mentioned. The song is written in a conversational style to begin with, with the first verse being sung from the point of view of the singer's lover, or former lover in actuality. Yet the sorrow Dylan invests in this opening verse reflects both the feelings of the person speaking the words in the song, and those of the singer himself.

The singer's lover makes her position clear in the first four words of the song:

*Oh I'm sailing away...*

The beauty of these first lines is due just as much to the words which aren't there, as the words that are. When you hear:

*Oh I'm sailing away my own true love*

You can hear and insert the word 'from' in the middle of the sentence, as that is what she is actually saying, 'Oh I'm sailing away *from* my own true love'. She is telling her love that she is going away and at the same time telling herself the truth of the situation, and letting the listener hear all of these things. Dylan, then, vocalises from the point of view of both characters at the same time. It is a remarkable achievement.

The first six verses of the song are conducted in pure conversational style, each verse in turn being voiced by the singer's lover, and then the singer, and set before the singer's lover has actually left. This part of the song is being conducted in the here and now, firmly rooted in the present, but is dealing with the future, the 'sailing away', and the past of their relationship together.

In that first verse the situation is becoming clear to us as listeners, while a game is being played between the two soon-to-be-parted lovers. She announces she is going away. She doesn't say if she will be back but it is implicit to the listener that she has her eyes firmly fixed on the longer term, and she lets it be known that she is sailing 'across the sea'. Already Dylan has conveyed that we should not take things at face value; the mournful sound of the voice tells us that this is no notification of a two-week holiday abroad. There is a spoonful of sugar being given here.

Verse two switches to the first person, the response to this devastating news that has just been received, with all its unsaid words and with all its implications. The conversational style is extremely effective not only in steering the narrative, but also in filling in the whole emotional canvas.

Verse two also makes the singer's position very clear to the listener, and to his lover. Don't send anything back - what do such material things matter? A memento? I want the real thing. I want you to come back home to me, where you belong:

*No, there's nothin' you can send me, my  
own true love,*

*There's nothin' I wish to be ownin'.*

*Just carry yourself back to me  
unspoiled,*

*From across that lonesome ocean.*

Love, not objects, is the only thing. Wonderful use too in that verse of the word unspoiled, as it again tells us so much, implies so much, in one word. When one lover leaves another, to work in another part of the country, or to work abroad, to go to university etc., there are

so many factors involved, so many things whizzing through your head, so many fears. The fear stems from the inescapable truth that your true love has decided to leave you. They have had to make a choice between you and something else and they have not chosen you.

The pragmatic/optimistic mind then fools you into thinking that the relationship still has a future, despite all the evidence staring you in the face. Your love is going to return to you, just as they said. So then your mind turns to the next thing, will they be the same? Will they have changed? Will their journey, and all their experiences with new people, without you, have 'spoiled' them? The use of that one word implies all this, and the whole verse sees our singer both deluded, but also with reality at the back of his mind, getting sly digs in to his lover. This whole song is about two people who both know exactly what the other is thinking and both know that the other knows, but are too afraid to say it.

The verse also brings in the word 'ownin'', which is another key word of the song as a whole. The issue of 'ownership' is often used in relationships, as one person will spit at the other 'you don't OWN me!' In this song, that issue of owning a person, against owning something material, is dealt with by the use of that word. It also triggers other thoughts and more background on the specific situation between the two protagonists. It would appear that this is a situation of 'I love you more than you love me'. The strength of love is not equal, always a painful thing, as Ani DiFranco put it so movingly in her song 'Sorry I am':

*I guess I never really loved you  
The way that you loved me  
And I guess I'll never be able to tell you  
How sorry I am*

This song could well be taken as the alternative letter that the singer's 'own true love' could have penned him, if she had taken the cruel-to-be-kind honesty option, rather than trying to offer the alternative of the gift. (If you haven't heard the song, do yourself a favour and find it to listen to, you will be well rewarded.)

Verse three confirms the game that is afoot with its opening lines:

*Oh, but I just thought you might want  
something fine  
Made of silver or of golden*

The lover knows full well that the one thing the person she has left behind wants is her, and not something 'fine'. She is easing a guilty conscience, as well as trying to make this as painless as possible. We also learn where the lover is bound... 'Either from the mountains of Madrid, or the coast of Barcelona'. This is no fleeting visit, if the trip is to Spain, and includes visiting both Madrid and Barcelona. Not exactly neighbouring cities. Again it is not so much what is being said, as what is being implied. The fourth verse sees the singer answer again, reaffirming that these things mean nothing. He goes further than material possessions, displaying the depths of his love by forsaking not just silver and gold, but 'the stars from the darkest night and the diamonds from the deepest ocean'. How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...

The final two verses of the six conversational ones take things a step further. The lover is forced into showing a bit more of her hand, letting her lover know what he has feared all along, and what we have suspected:

*That I might be gone a long time*

Pennies start falling all around and the killer blow is then delivered:

*Is there something I can send you to  
remember me by*

The truth is out, the words have been spoken. The seriousness of the situation has now been exposed, but even then the lover gives her spoonful of sugar, immediately following the line above with:

*To make your time more easy passin'*

This still implies that she may return and they could carry on where they left off, which is of course nonsense.

The singer answers verbally for the final time in verse six, knowing the truth now and despairing:

*Oh, how can, how can you ask me  
again*

The repeat of 'how can' emphasising the hurt and the despair the singer is feeling. This is the moment when we lie to ourselves, unable to see and accept the truth. All the wounded singer can do is repeat his position for a third time. All I want is you.

The final three verses are narrated by the singer after the event. This switch is crucial to the song's structure. We go from being voyeuristic eavesdroppers on a private conversation into being actual listeners, being told a story.

The seventh verse finds our singer having received a letter from on board

ship. We know the news is not good, not that we expected it to be, by the use of the word 'lonesome' in the opening line. These days are sad and lonesome indeed. Still non-committal, trying to spare the feelings of the singer, the lover avoids the cruel-to-be-kind approach:

*Saying I don't know when I'll be coming  
back again,*

*It depends on how I'm a-feelin'*

The last two verses see the singer finally take matters into his own hands. His vision is no longer blinded totally by love and he says what has needed to be said, and what has been implied all along. Although it is not implicit, it seems reasonable to assume that these last two verses detail a return letter that the singer has sent to his ex-lover on board ship. It could, of course, just be the case that he never actually replied to the letter, and the final two verses are just a verbal salvo, but the letter makes more sense. We have had a conversation, and now we have return letters.

In verse eight the singer writes these painful words. Everything that she has said thus far has indicated that this is not a long-distance relationship that has any future. This is not au revoir, this is goodbye:

*Well, if you, my love, must think that-  
a-way,*

*I'm sure your mind is roamin'*

*I'm sure your heart is not with me,*

*But with the country to where you're  
goin'*

It is clear that she is roaming in all senses. In actuality, in her mind and in her heart. It has taken a lot for the singer to be

able to actually say or write these words. The pain, built up in the first seven verses, is tangible.

The final verse is one of Dylan's fine final verses. He is a master of building a song, pacing it perfectly, giving the listener everything we need in terms of character, words said and unsaid. He matches this perfectly with the singing and the music and melody involved. Songs such as 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit', 'Idiot Wind' and 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll', to name but three obvious examples, all have that devastating last verse.

The romantic traditional folk language that the song uses throughout, such as all the 'Oh's, the turns of phrase, ('I'm a feelin'', and 'my own true love') and words such as 'lonesome', is used again to great effect in the opening line:

*So, take heed, take heed*

These lines take on extra significance due to their placing in the song. The song has seen this awkward painful dance of the unsaid between two parting lovers, with both speaking but neither really listening. In taking the bull by the horns in the proceeding verse and saying what needed to be said, the singer now feels suitably empowered to offer his lover some words of wisdom, and the main thing he is saying is 'listen'.

*So, take heed, take heed of the western  
wind*

*Take heed of the stormy weather*

These lines work on many levels. Pay close and careful attention to what I am saying, pay close and careful attention to the western wind and the stormy weather. The denouement of the whole song is

contained in the magnificent final lines, as powerful as any in Dylan's work:

*And yes, there's something you can send  
back to me,*

*Spanish boots of Spanish leather*

The verses that precede these lines have detailed the emotional journey of the singer and his lover. All the truths, the lies, the regrets, the love, the sorrow. It is all tangible, and it comes down to this, a sudden realisation, the bittersweet words of advice, and then the singer finally answers the question that was first asked way back in verse one. The singer has accepted the situation, is not deluded any longer, and knows his lover will never return to him. His request is to 'send' something back, not 'bring' back; just as in verse one, the singer's suspicions must have been raised by the use of the exact same language, his lover offering to 'send' him something back, rather than 'bring' something back.

And what better gift could she send back from Spain, for a man who needs to move on, and who needs some decent footwear to do it in? By asking for the boots, the singer closes the relationship, and also has the last word, although there is nothing in the song, and more importantly in the way it is sung, that leads you to think that there is anything bitter or revengeful in the singer. There is no idiot wind blowing around these people.

The song is both beautifully constructed and beautifully written. It is subtle, and is in turn simple and yet complex, like the human condition. The way the song manages to convey all of this, in nine four-line verses, 36 lines, is poetic

in terms of the depth of emotion the language conveys. And yet it is not a poem, despite its effectiveness on the page. This is an added bonus. Many of the clues that are got from reading the lyric are brought to life when the song is heard.

The 1963 album version, found on the album *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, is sung with remarkable sorrow and maturity; for a 22-year-old boy it boggles the mind. It is easy sometimes to think of Dylan as ageless, and to be fooled by the distance of time from the very early work, and forget how young he was. Any such thought automatically bring to mind the comment by Dylan of not carrying himself the way certain others did. He hopes he would in time. Of course he did, but listening back to the original versions of songs such as 'Boots of Spanish Leather', you realise that he already did in many ways.

The great bit of singing on the album version of the song is invested in the final 'Spanish' of the song. He stretches the word out, on the 'a' of 'Spanish', giving it a delightful emphasis. It was the key word of the whole piece and he realised that and sang it appropriately.

In terms of live performances, there are a few early ones worth a mention. Flicking through my collection, I turned up the 'Stud Terkel's Wax Museum' version from spring 1963, before even *Freewheelin'* was released, never mind *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. There the 21-year-old Dylan gives a straight reading of the song, but perhaps more interesting are his coy comments about it. When it is introduced as a 'boy meets girl' song,

Dylan corrects his host, saying it is a 'girl leaves boy' song. This already places 'Boots of Spanish Leather' in a more unusual camp. There aren't that many girl-leaves-boy songs. I think there are plenty of girl-cheats-on-boy and many many more boy-leaves-girl songs. And when he names the title the host presumes it is a reference to the traditional 'Gypsy Davy', a song which Dylan had performed back in 1961, and was later to record a variant of in 1993 on *Good as I Been to You*. On that album the song appears as 'Black Jack Davy', and contains the lines:

*Well she pulled off her high heeled shoes  
Made of Spanish leather*

It seems reasonable that Dylan may have been inspired by these lines, which were slightly different on the 'Gypsy Davy' Dylan sang in 1961, that time it was 'Buckskin gloves made of Spanish leather'. However, after agreeing with his host that this is where the title came from, Dylan then corrects himself:

*No no, not because of that, because I  
always wanted a pair of boots of  
Spanish leather*

It is said in that halting, jokey, nervous manner that Dylan had about him in many of these radio performances from the early years. Somehow confident and not at the same time, coy and shy and charming.

The song went unperformed for some 25-odd years, all through Dylan's glory years of the late 60's, 70's and early 80's. It reappeared out of the blue on the first night of what has since been dubbed the Never Ending Tour. Twenty-five years in the wilderness and then it reappeared.

And it reappeared at a time when Dylan was about to turn back to the traditional folk music that 'Boots of Spanish Leather' was born out of.

The song borrows its basic finger-picked melody from 'Girl from the North Country', which in turn was a borrow from Martin Carthy's arrangement of 'Scarborough Fair', which in turn was adapted from a traditional song entitled 'The Elfin Knight' and so it goes on and on and on... Both 'Girl from the North Country' and 'Boots of Spanish Leather', which are clearly related songs, both love songs based on the same melody, both written very much in the form of traditional English and Scottish folk ballads, see Dylan writing in a markedly different style from his own predominantly American folk- and blues-infused and Guthrie-influenced work. As Martin Carthy himself said in a recent interview:

*In return we gave the Americans songs... The English actually changed Dylan's way of writing songs. His first album Bob Dylan was basically little blues bits and pieces with the occasional American version of a folk song thrown in. His second album The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan was almost finished when he came to England in 1962. When he went back home he wrote at least two songs to complete it. One of them was 'Bob Dylan's Dream' which he learnt from me singing a song called 'Lord Franklin'. Another was 'Girl from the North Country', which derives from 'Scarborough Fair'. 'Boots of Spanish Leather' from 'Times They Are A-Changin', that's got London in it some-*

*where... I don't know where, I've just got a hunch. The whole of that album's smothered in this shift in musical direction. The tunes are far more expansive, they're more of this side of the Atlantic. Dylan was a piece of blotting paper, he still is. He hears stuff and he just gobbles it up and out it comes in another form.*

That final sentence seems particularly applicable to Dylan's entire career, and is of course very relevant when applied to his most recent work, "*Love and Theft*". And back in 1988, with the launch of that remarkable tour, Dylan was finding those traditional roots all over again. A feature of the NET from 1988-1992 was the number of traditional songs that Dylan was redefining night after night. It was no coincidence that songs such as 'Boots of Spanish Leather' sat alongside traditionals such as 'Barbara Allen' and 'Eileen Aroon'. They are born out of the same traditions, share the same roots. It is also no surprise that Dylan then recorded two albums of traditional material in 1992 and 1993, including the aforementioned possible titular inspiration for 'Boots of Spanish Leather', 'Blackjack Davey'.

Around this time Dylan performed a version of 'Farewell to the Gold' and also included 'Canadee-i-o' on *Good As I Been To You*, both of which were clearly inspired by Nic Jones. Nic Jones is an English folk singer and a dazzlingly talented guitar player, and both of those songs were included on Jones's last album proper *Penguin Eggs*. I should say 'was' a dazzlingly talented folk singer as he was very badly injured in a road accident in

1982 and had to retire after a long spell in a coma. A real tragedy. The only Dylan song I have a recording of Nic Jones performing is...yes, you guessed it, 'Boots of Spanish Leather'. And a fine version it is too. You would have no idea, if you did not know, that this was a contemporary song, a Bob Dylan song no less. Dylan, famed for his surrealist lyrics, his bringing poetry into 'pop' music. Jones's version sits amongst his collection of English and Scottish folk ballads very nicely. Kith and kin.

Following the '88 reintroduction of 'Boots of Spanish leather' it became something of an NET regular. There is a beautiful version to be heard in glorious quality on the Eugene, Oregon soundboard of 14th June 1999. This is a good example of a recent NET version. The song is played close to the original arrangement, with lovely acoustic guitar and Dylan giving a to-die-for mournful emotion-filled vocal. I could not imagine a version of the song more poignant, more encompassing of all the themes expressed in the song. It even gives us a repeat of the original album vocal on the final 'Spanish', as Dylan sings:

*Spanish boots of Spaaaaaaanish leather*

So the arrangement of the song, the melody, the vocal inflections, the mood, always seemed fixed. The '88 era arrangement had more gusto to it, as all those performances did, but there was no rearrangement of the song. And as it missed '66-'88, it missed all those tours that specialised in rearranging songs; it might have got an interesting reading in '66 or '75-'76 or '78, but it was not to be.

And so we come to this year, 2003. Not a distinguished one in terms of Dylan's career. I tend to think of the great NET years as being '88-'92, '95, '99-'00 and that remarkable autumn tour of '02. That however, was all the more remarkable as it came at a time when Dylan was, vocally at least, suffering from a real decline. This decline had been noticeable in 2001, the rest of 2002 and then, more than ever before in his history, in 2003.

The spring and summer shows of 2003 were not encouraging from a vocal perspective. Dylan, after having tortured us all with the so called 'sing-song' voice for some time, where he would go UP at the end of each LINE in a very predictable and irritating FASHION, robbing the songs of any real POWER, developed a new voice, even more irritating. This one was a breathless low painful sound, which resembled a man swallowing his own tongue whilst trying to speak. He combined this and the 'sing-song' to leave his voice at an all-time low.

To try and cover this maybe, acoustic songs had become a thing of distant memory, preserved in the past. Up until 1993, with the exception of a few odd years Dylan had been at least an occasional solo acoustic performer throughout his career. This shift from '93 onwards, particularly noticeable in the last few years, is seismic, but is not often commented upon. To lose Dylan the solo acoustic performer, as we have, is a massive blow. We still had acoustic-style performances, the '95 sets being superb examples, and the first six songs throughout '99 and '00 being other good

examples. But from 2001 we got acoustic sets that were becoming harder and harder to differentiate from the electric songs. A string band sound was employed, and then electric instruments began to creep in, and the acoustic songs were lost, maybe forever. Of course this has meant that the traditional covers Dylan used to play changed their nature as well. In '99, '00 and '01, these took on a bluegrass form, lively show-opening songs, and thus were American-rooted, rather than folk ballads from across the ocean.

There seemed no room for these sorts of folk ballads in Bob's shows any longer. Maybe he could not carry them vocally if they were to be included. When 'Man of Constant Sorrow' appeared in 2002, it was an *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou* style rocked-up version. The covers that defined the 2002 autumn tour were all contemporary, all electric full band songs. In 2003, only one cover song has been performed by Dylan and his band, with a number of disastrous efforts during his slots with The Dead.

But the year did see a sudden new approach to how Bob was performing his own solo acoustic works. The same songs appeared as had done throughout the NET, but done in very different ways; 'Desolation Row', 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll', 'It Ain't Me, Babe', 'Girl from the North Country', and, of course, 'Boots of Spanish Leather'. This last song was fairly dramatically rearranged for the first show of the year's European tour, in Helsinki. Listening to the recording from that night, it is very much a work in progress, but the bare bones are there to see. The song has a

slower, more defined pace to it, the opening acoustic guitar chords and accompanying guitar figure setting the tone of the arrangement. Dylan himself would add his own unique brand of electric guitar. A recording from Stockholm showed the song was coming together, and people were beginning to talk, emails and Internet chat took off. The recording we got from Karlstad, a Swedish lakeside town 160 miles west of Stockholm, was something of a revelation. Bob was taking the vocal by the horns and it was becoming a wild and free-ranging affair.

Listening to it, you are hooked, not knowing where Dylan is going with the vocal next. At times he reverts to the breathless painful tongue-swallowing that dominated the summer, but at other times, the years are stripped away as the vocal soars like it used to. When he hits those moments it takes your breath away. Dylan is not hiding here, but sounds like he is relishing tackling the vocal, adding different variations every night. He also still knows the importance of that final verse, as he usually saves his biggest effort for those lines. In Karlstad we get a majestic reading of them, taking them and setting them to a new melody entirely, the voice sounding fantastically powerful and free, just as those last lines represent just those emotions in the narrator. Things were getting better, and the one song from every show I wanted to hear was 'Boots of Spanish Leather'.

Dylan then played two nights in Hamburg, at the famous small Docks venue, on the 17th and the 18th October. 'Boots' was played on both nights, and after

the trying, the practising, the determination to really nail it, he produced the best performance so far on the 17th, and then the best of the lot, and one of the finest renditions of the song I have ever heard, certainly the most dramatic, on the 18th.

My appetite had been whetted by reports that the version on the 17th was to die for. The previous performances had been promising enough for me to believe this, especially in the intimate setting in Hamburg. When I heard the recording of the song from that night, I was a little disappointed. There was still too much gargling, too much gruff, breathless lack of tone in the voice. It was thrilling to hear still, but the real emotion of the song, the *x* factor for want of a better expression, seemed missing. The performance of the 18th went by seemingly unnoticed, or not thought worthy of particular mention by many that seemed to be there, witnessing it in person. However, in one of those perverse being there v hearing it on CD/MP3 moments, the version of the 18th was the culmination of everything Bob had seemingly been striving for with this dramatic rearrangement and new approach to a song now over 40 years old.

If you can, listen now to that version of the 18th. If you haven't heard it, do all you can to rectify that. Bob has now given up playing electric guitar on the song, despite the fact that it added a certain tension and suitably unsettling and sea-faring effect. It was maybe the key to unlocking the vocal though, as shorn of his axe, and back behind the keys, the band created the perfect setting for the song, with the new measured, carefully paced rhythm.

The vocal is the best I have heard from 2003, and easily the most gripping. It is not only edge-of-your-seat stuff, but it has glorious turns of phrase, most notably in two places. The first is his phrasing of 'easy'. It is so unexpected that it needs repeated listens to check you weren't hearing things, but on the line:

*make your time more easy passin'*

Dylan sings that one word and trips down his scale, not in one long slide down, as he did with the word 'lonely' frequently on 'Accidentally Like a Martyr' in autumn 2002, but actually in a way so you can hear all the notes on the way down. One of the thrills of hearing this is hearing the appreciative crowd cheering wildly after this moment. This is no fake cheer, as you get when crowds in 2003 cheer the line:

*even the president of the United States  
sometimes must have to stand naked*

during 'It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)'. This is a bugbear of mine, as crowds seek to replicate what they have heard on record, *Before The Flood* in this case, without seemingly realising that they are confining that moment to nothing more than fake nostalgia. Those that cheer would do well to remember Dylan's line 'Inside the museums, infinity goes up on trial'. To hear a crowd actually reacting to a live moment, spontaneously, is thrilling. In Hamburg, the atmosphere of the shows sounds fantastic, and Dylan seems to feed off the cheer he has received for this line. He must know that it is not stage-managed, the line not normally being one that would get a cheer by rote, and he feeds off of it, sensing he is doing well, seeing the excitement in the crowd, which is for something he has

just done, as opposed to something he once did. There is no celebrating the memory here.

Buoyed by this, the rest of the song is wonderful, giving whole new areas within a song we thought we knew so well, and knew everything about. The narrator may be saying the same words, but in the new dramatic vocal he is telling a slightly different story. And this great version deserves a really telling final verse, and Dylan recognises that and pulls out all the stops he is capable of pulling out in October 2003.

*So take heed, take heed, of the western  
wind*

*Take heed of the stormy weather*

These lines are marvellously sung. Each 'take heed' sees the 'heed' emphasised, pushed hard, sounding the 'd' sound with full power, as if to say 'you better listen to this'. The 'western wind' is given marvellous range, making the words airy and windy. 'Stormy weather' sees the years fall away again, as Dylan delivers the word 'weather' with a gorgeous roll of the 'er' at the end. And as very special as these two lines are, as well as they are sung, they turn out to be the appetisers for the main course, of the two pay-off lines, the answer to his true love's question.

*And yes there's something you can send  
back to me*

*Spanish boots of Spanish leather*

The 'and yes' is delivered with a sense of majesty, a sense of realisation, a sense of knowledge, which benefits the human drama that has gone before it. It is in turns confident and self-deprecating. The line 'there's something you can send back to me'

is vocalised in an ever descending pattern, leading us down the steps to the killer line:

And yes  
     *there's*  
         *something*  
             *you can*  
                 *send*  
                     *back*  
                         *to*  
                             *me*

The words 'send' and 'back to me' are also given particular emphasis, and in the bittersweet spiral Dylan affords the words in the melody, they become particularly wistful.

And so to the final line. Dylan, remembering the way he had delivered the word 'easy' earlier in the song, and knowing the reaction it got, knows what he will do with that vital final 'Spanish', that we have seen he has afforded special significance since the very first recording of the song back in 1963. The line is the final declaration, and needs to be delivered with the relevant emphasis:

*Spanish boots of Spanish Leather*

And the second 'Spanish' is sung, just as he sung 'easy', earlier in the song, tripping down the scale. He goes down on the 'i' of 'Spanish', setting up with the 'Span' and then going down on the 'i', note by note:

*Span - i*  
     *i*  
         *i*  
             *i*  
                 *i*  
                     *i*  
                         *i*  
                             *i*  
                                 *ish*

and then he delivers the final 'leather', amid the cheers that have been rightfully generated by that triumphant 'Spanish'. The song comes to an end on a high, a high generated by Dylan and his vocalising of the song, a 40-year-old song, always sung in a particular way. A high that is tangible in Dylan, in the audience, and in the listener hearing it second-hand via MP3 or CD or whatever your preferred source is. And all this was achieved, not just by the beautiful words, but the combination of them with a dramatic new arrangement, and most importantly of all, by the voice, in this case the deteriorating 2003 what's left of a voice, singing and searching and fighting its way to something new and meaningful again. So you see, the voice IS the art.



# Philosophical Reflections

by Martin van Hees

## ‘Trust yourself’ - Us versus us

When you trust another person, you believe that he will not harm you. Though such a belief is a characteristic of trust, it is not all that there is to it. The Russian peasant I saw in a documentary last night cannot harm me for the simple reason that he does not know I exist and probably does not care whether I do, nor has he any reason to find out. Yet it would be odd to say that I trust (or distrust) him. Trust not only entails the expectation that another person will not harm you, it also presupposes the actual ability of this other person to harm you. It is for this reason that trust pertains to the interaction with people with whom we have a certain relationship, people we know and who affect, or can affect, our lives. In fact, the act of trusting often *creates* the other’s ability to harm you. Trust thus makes you vulnerable. Suppose you have done something in the past that you find rather embarrassing. Although you have hitherto kept the story to yourself, you now disclose the secret to

a very good friend. But precisely by trusting him with the story you make yourself vulnerable: now he *can* ridicule you and *can* tell your friends about the silly things you have done in the past.

Given the close relationship between trust, human relationships and vulnerability it is no wonder that different views about the ‘nature of man’ lead to different views about trust. An optimistic view of mankind leads one to emphasize the importance of trust. By trusting another person you create a bond with him. You know that you make yourself vulnerable, he knows not only that you know this but also that you know that he knows it, et cetera. Since you also expect him not to take advantage of it, your act of trust is a sign that you are willing to cooperate with him. Given an optimistic view, we have an explanation of how trust is conducive to human cooperation and thus also to all the nice things that cooperation between human beings is assumed to entail. However, if one has a grim picture of mankind, then trust will be evaluated

differently. Suppose, for instance, that we all want more or less the same things (wealth, a good reputation, etc.), but that these things are scarce: not everybody can be wealthy, not everybody can have a good reputation. Assume furthermore that everybody is trying to get the best in the 'struggle for existence'. It would then not be very smart to trust others: by making yourself vulnerable, others will take advantage of you.

'Trust Yourself' clearly seems to evoke this grim picture. We are on our own 'in a land of wolves and thieves', and making ourselves vulnerable to others is therefore bound to hurt us. To be sure, the song does not deny that there is a potential benefit to trusting others. It mentions the experience of beauty, truth and love, but it is made clear that these benefits may not occur. As the song states, 'beauty may only turn to rust', 'the truth may only be ashes and dust', and another person's love 'may only be lust'. These risks apparently outweigh the potential benefits: we should play it safe and trust no one. In itself such a disillusioned view is not too interesting. Statements about the inherent badness (or goodness) of human nature justify a good yawn. The directness of the song's description of man's badness makes it even worse; the average American TV preacher does a better job of bringing home the message about the presumed rotten state of mankind.

So should the lyrics therefore be dismissed as uninteresting, as typical of the quality of much of Dylan's writing in the eighties? It would probably be so if we were to focus only on the song's message

not to trust others. But that's only part of what the song is about. In fact, the emphasis of the lyrics lies elsewhere, to wit, on the fact that we should trust *ourselves*. Now this could itself be taken as just another way of making the same point. The call to trust ourselves is then taken to be a natural consequence of the fact that we should not trust others: you should trust yourself because you cannot trust the others. But note that such a conclusion cannot be justified. If it is true that human nature is fundamentally corrupt, then we cannot trust ourselves either. How could we, being wolves and thieves, trust ourselves to do 'what's right', for instance? And yet, according to the song this is something we can do. Stated differently, the song constitutes a paradox: given a seemingly pessimistic view about the nature of man it urges us to take an optimistic view about our own nature.

The paradox breaks down, though, if we drop the assumption that the call to trust ourselves is based on the view that man is basically evil. The acts of many people may not be especially kind, but that does not mean that people are *inherently* unkind. The call to trust yourself should not be seen as advice on how to deal with all the bad people out there, but rather as an appeal to all of us to abandon our acquired badness: it is not 'us versus them' but rather 'us versus us'. And this is a battle that the song suggests can be won: we can do what's right, that is, we can trust ourselves.

# Red, White and Blue Shoe Strings

by Andrew Davies

Oslo 7/4/2002

The Canadian sitting opposite me is about four feet tall but has the obligatory beaming smile with the pristine teeth, even at two o'clock on a cold morning overlooking downtown Oslo. His face is smugly mocking me for the crime of only having witnessed a dozen or so Bob Dylan shows in my lifetime and tells me with the superior voice that you know nothing until you have seen the man at least fifty times. I sit quietly and take in the words as I drink my pint. This is wrong as well, I am told. The real Dylan fan, it seems, celebrates after the gig with a bottle of gassy, weak lager. With a shaved head, innocent pink *I Love NYC* t-shirt and tight army-issue jeans, said Canadian seems blissfully unaware that we are drinking in a bar right in the heart of Norway's camp capital. At ten past two, I am still undecided on whether to tell him.

It was a strange Sunday in Oslo. The day had been warmed up by the kind of hot sun that only blesses northern Europe a couple of times a year but now, beneath a dark sky free from insulating clouds, the

promising-sounding *London Pub* was providing the shelter from the storm, so to speak; a pun that when put to the Canadian, had the lad howling and laughing like an insane bear. Between the slurping of his fizzy beverage, the Canadian delights in telling me that he had a great time watching Bob on the Isle of Wight 1971. Even putting his report down to an accidental, tired, late-night slip-of-the-tongue (again, he's in the right place), our hero is talking the sort of nonsense that you don't need to hear when decibels are still ringing in your painful ears and I'm beginning to feel insulted. I mean, assuming that the boy wasn't spying on the Dylan family during a private visit to the Isle of Wight a good two years after the famous festival, he's already told me that he was born on the day before Kennedy was shot which would mean November 21st, 1963. Therefore, if he actually meant he saw the man at the gig in question, an event that actually took place on the last day of August 1969, then he would only have been five years old. Now even with the weary mind, I found myself recalling the conversation we shared during the walk from the venue to the bar. He told me that he lived with his

parents for the first nineteen years of his life in Vancouver; his late mother, due to some serious complaint, was always too ill to travel and his father, a local schoolmaster, has a sense of community so strong that he has never left the province of British Columbia, let alone Canada. The Canadian rather bitterly making the point that he never knew any family vacations. In overdrive, I studied the facts and decided that it was unlikely that the schoolmaster would have a passport and would therefore be unable to add any offspring to such a document. This would mean that my Canadian friend would have been unable to leave Canada until he was old enough to get some papers of his own. Now, I don't know what age you legally need to be in the country to secure your own passport, but I would imagine it's older than five. I did not have the energy to challenge my friend on the matter as I had already devoted the rest of the evening to bourbon but if we had met here a few hours ago, before the show, he would have had some explaining to do. For now, I smiled quietly to myself and took everything else he said with half a ton of salt. Looking forward to the sport, I ordered him more gassy beer and a couple of chasers and let him witter on with his words.

On his back had been a rucksack that was a few inches bigger than himself and apparently contained everything the hardcore Bobcat needed to survive on a tour. You would expect the thing to be clanking with the sound of knocking saucepans, like your man Charles Hawtrey in *Carry On Camping*. There were notebooks to

record not only set-lists but the instrument changes and the duration of each track. Apparently, Dylan and his band played 'Duncan and Brady' in Boston in, like, one minute fifty-eight. If you needed to know what brands of guitar and strings Mick Taylor used during the mid-eighties tour of Europe, then you knew the man to ask. Also in the sack was an awful travel guide that had been more battered by touring than Keith Richards, Ozzy Osbourne and Shane MacGowan put together. I didn't get the chance to check the date of publication but I noticed when I flicked through it that West Germany and East Germany were both listed so that made it at least twelve years old. I have no idea how useful such an outdated book would prove but it seemed to make him happy. There were also a great number of empty plastic bottles, some lavatory paper and a flashlight. In terms of clothes, there was only the one pair of bad khaki combat-trousers and a questionable collection of old tour shirts. I also managed to spy a bumper pack of twenty-four condoms, quite incredible for a person for whom one would have been optimistic. If everyone was to find themselves doing either one thing or the other, then he would be expecting rain, if you catch my drift. I had a go at explaining to him that *The Grateful Dead 1986 World Tour*; *Donington Monsters of Rock 1990*; *Rolling Stones Urban Wheels* and the like with the faded black look are hardly likely to be the garments that get you much sex during an early summer trot around Europe but he seemed confident enough nevertheless.

This man was the perfect subject on which to conduct the necessary research for my articles. I mean, in fairness, the Canadian is not alone in following Dylan around the globe and I was interested to know what made these loyal subjects put themselves through it. I knew that such devotion had to run far deeper than a life-long affection for *Blonde On Blonde*, but what makes hundreds of intelligent, ordinary people spend seven or eight months of the year on the road, sleeping in hovels and on beaches just to hear 'Forever Young' played for the four hundredth time? As well as everything else, and I know that Rock n' Roll doesn't think of mundane things like expense, how the hell do these people afford it? I needed to know. Using myself and a handful of nights on Dylan's excellent Autumn 2000 UK tour as a case study, I tried to work out in my mind how much such a jaunt was going to cost. As a rough idea: five concert tickets (Cardiff, Manchester, Glasgow and two in London) costing at least £25 a pop; five nights in the most filthy, basic, pits of B&B's will probably cost something in the region of £200; train or bus travel between the cities will cost an extra God-only-knows how much and then you've got to eat and wet your whistle. In basic economic terms, I worked the duration of 2000, full-time and without break to afford five glorious stops on the Dylan tour, the eventual bill coming in somewhere close to a two-week super holiday in the Bahamas. So, tell me if you will, how does the spindly Canadian keep up that sort of financial pace for months on end? A man's financial business is his own, I

know, but I'm going to get the bugger to tell me by the time the show hits London.

A few hours earlier, I had been standing patiently outside Oslo's Spektrum Centre with a few thousand others, some of the Canadian's ilk, some of mine but all united by the one common sympathy. The incredible thing that one immediately notices in the line before a Dylan show is not only the intense calm but the realisation that it has more to do with the respect Bob's followers have for their idol than the interesting cigarettes that are being smoked by about 60% of those present. The friendly atmosphere of Bob's audience family is infectious and stories of past concerts and set-list prayers are shared with zeal and I find myself talking with strangers heatedly. When the man himself arrives among a canopy of security personnel, nobody shouts out. Instead, we all stand with hushed breath and watch our hero make his way quietly into the building. Then, of course, everybody commences to do what they were doing before he turned their heads. The good people of Oslo, as well as a healthy representation from the UK and America, are not here to see David Cassidy or Donovan, they are here for the second night of Dylan's European "*Love And Theft*" Tour and they know it.

Refreshment for all those near by was supplied by Jerry, a veteran of thirty Dylan concerts who makes his way in the world under the pretence of managing the bar around the corner from the venue. There was enough tequila and lime to float a ship but my new best friend would take no cash in return; what he wanted was conversation and fun with other Bobcats. Who said

generosity and human goodwill was dead? Things turned a little strange when Jerry told me everything he knew about seducing impressionable young barmaids after hours to the sounds of *Nashville Skyline*. The trick seemed to be in the understanding that they were easily pleased, materially speaking. They would have to be, I thought to myself, given that *Nashville Skyline* must be one of the shortest records ever made. It is amazing, Jerry went on, how far you can get on a Chinese take-away and a bottle of 11% red wine. His knowledge and experience on the subject was vast and there was talk of a memoir although he said it would be kept under lock and key until his death. The reason for this drastic postponement seemed to be linked to some encounter with a well-known Norwegian celebrity, the name of whom Jerry would not disclose. He would say, however, that she was the most adaptable and supple individual he had ever known. Waving off my suggestion that he should consult the tabloids with the incident, Jerry said that the matter had been given much thought but in the end he had decided that the newspaper copy would not be in a position to tell the whole story in full graphic detail but a book would be less restrictive with the necessary use of sexual swear words. The said memoir would be left to his wife on the understanding that she offers the rights for sale.

With a head full of tequila, I narrowly avoided the rubber-glove treatment from the snarling Scandinavian gorilla on the door and rushed towards the stage with excitement. Naturally, there were a grinning bunch of denim wearers already

there. Bob, in a bout of poor form has taken to getting his security to choose some people from the back of the queue and let them in first. The reason seems to be that the man is tired of seeing the same old faces in the first few rows. The Canadian, having no words against his hero, insisted that Dylan's attitude was understandable and, like, cool. I explained to him in a million different ways that those who are prepared to arrive early and sit out in all weathers deserve their place at the front but nothing would get through to him. Bob had spoken and any attempts to question his word were tantamount to blasphemy.

The simple stage with instruments ready to be picked up by their masters was a wonderful site; of course, you are never going to get a U2 or Pink Floyd style stage show from Dylan. There is no fuss or curtain; the whole scene may look like a grand scale pub-band set up but when darkness falls on the arena, every heart beats with a rare emotion exclusively reserved for genuine icons and you remember exactly why you have gone to all the trouble. His long-time introduction announcement is also powerful due to its simplicity and when the man himself is standing a matter of feet in front of you, strutting his way through 'Times' and 'Desolation Row' you start to understand what it's all about. Bob may be nearly sixty-one years old but he's still the same hip rogue from *Dont Look Back*. The band is still awesome, tight and confident as they blast through the set with authority. One of the Bobcat's favourite pastimes is to conjecture on set-lists because as they will rightly tell you, there is nobody else on the

touring circuit that on any one night could play any twenty tunes from a repertoire of hundreds. One can, of course, be reasonably sure of hearing standards like 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'Like a Rolling Stone' and 'Tangled Up in Blue' on a nightly basis although it is by no means a one hundred percent certainty; Dylan is forever keeping his audience guessing. Maybe the significance of this can be better understood when compared to others on the road; better still, Dylan's contemporaries. It is unthinkable that any show on Paul McCartney's current tour will not feature 'Hey Jude', for example. Likewise, Jagger and his mob have always rolled out 'Satisfaction' and their fans will always demand it but if Dylan decides tomorrow that he can't be bothered with 'Like a Rolling Stone' and replaces it with 'The Groom's Still Waiting at the Alter', we will express some initial surprise, sure, but it will soon be forgotten and dismissed as simply a set-list alteration. It will not go down in history as the night when Dylan didn't play his most popular song; I remember reading an interview with Geezer Butler once who said that Black Sabbath fans were close to rioting when the band one night omitted 'Paranoid' from their set during a US tour. A strange comparison granted, but there you go.

'All Along the Watchtower' (thoroughly deserved and appreciated encore number two) is played tonight with furious purpose as though Dylan is after reclaiming it back for himself. As the song comes crashing to its climax, the audience wears a communal smile, a sight usually seen in Oslo on the faces of Jerry's barmaids; too numb to do anything other

than applaud the man and his band as they stand there motionless and lap up the adoration. After a minute or two, Dylan turns on his heel and disappears backstage; nobody calls for more, his faithful would prefer he get some rest and hope that he hasn't over-exerted himself. Back out in the cold Oslo night, minds once again return to alcohol and a Dylan-fuelled conversation. On the hop for more free tequila, I head to Jerry's Bar but find it in darkness. Disappointed but unbroken, I wandered around Oslo for a while in a trance until I meet up with the Canadian on his way to what he says is an English bar.

And that is how it all started.

### Copenhagen 8/4/2002

The following morning with a mild hangover and numb legs, all I wanted to do was to sleep but the harsh reality hit me that I had to catch the plane from Oslo to Copenhagen. The Canadian was probably long gone by now as he was taking the scenic train and ferry option. The way conversation had gone last night, I had got the impression that he wanted desperately to be a George Jackson type figure but I had him down as more of a William Zanzinger sort of guy; but more of that later.

My immediate problem was that I had got too drunk last night and as any lunatic who attempts to follow Dylan around the globe will know, you have to pace yourself. A missed plane will throw your whole trip

into panic and will probably result in missed shows and what if he plays 'Isis' or 'Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' and you are not there to see it because you had one too many tequilas last night? To the travelling Bobcat, this would be unthinkable and soul destroying. The thought of the Canadian sniggering at my amateurish first-night excitement was enough to spur me into life. So, out of bed with me and out of the hotel after a sharp breakfast of some bizarre Norwegian sausages and the sly hair-of-the-dog.

The Canadian can scoff about it as much as he likes but I was disproportionately grateful that my expense account stretches to plane travel. In terms of the conventional travel memoir, the train would probably offer the most adventure and subsequent story-telling potential but this was to be an endurance contest; energy had to be saved a every opportunity if things I was going to be still alive by the time the tour reached London.

As I sat in the clinically clean departure lounge, I got out the old mini-disc player and listened to one of the hastily gathered bootlegs that I had picked up from my flat before leaving for mainland Europe. Of course, what I really wanted was a recording of last night's gig. The constant evolution of Dylan's tunes in performance mean that the bootleg market is massive; after seeing the man's most recent performance, I couldn't help but feel that my recordings from 2000 and 2001 were a bit outdated and would have gladly boosted the illegal industry had the lad in the grotesque stripy uniform been selling CD-R's instead of coffee. I had found that in my haste to pack,

I had accidentally picked up a recording of the Rolling Thunder Revue from 1975. I copied it from a CD I bought a few years ago in Portobello Road for a friend but had obviously got them mixed up. Although I love the albums recorded at the time of the tour, I had always for one reason or another felt a certain ambivalence to the recordings of the shows themselves. Most commentaries seem to be of the opinion that these shows feature some of Bob's most powerful live work and represent a significant purple-patch in the Dylan onstage canon but I was always more cautious. The main reason for this, I think, must be *Hard Rain*, the 1976 official document of the tour that accompanied a television film. A natural starting point when collecting live recordings from this period, *Hard Rain* is not only a generally poor piece of plastic but, I've now decided, an unfair representation of the times. I may be alone in this; magazine polls often feature the thing in Best-Live-Album-Of-All-Time polls so maybe I'm missing something magical. It cannot be denied that the music is passionate and harsh with a rough-edge. Often, of course, this is a combination that produces some unforgettable live performances, the Manchester Free Trade Hall perhaps being the best case for this argument, but too often the arrangements are just brash and noisy. Take 'Lay Lady Lay', even allowing for Dylan's appetite for reinterpretation, the version on *Hard Rain* is not a let down because it is unrecognisable to the original offering but distressing because the new arrangement is an awful, unholy row that has been stripped of all its *Nashville Skyline* subtlety. I have always maintained also that

the same is true of 'Shelter from the Storm' and was disappointed to see that the recording had won a place on the otherwise interesting, Japanese *Live 1961-2000* album. Now, with this in mind, listen to 'I Don't Believe You' as it sounds on *Another Side of Bob Dylan* and then again live in 1966. What we've got here are essentially two completely different songs but both equally as mind-blowing. In short, the main point here is that Bob set in 1966 high standards in the science of song rearrangement that he just doesn't live up to on *Hard Rain*.

Nevertheless, it was the Rolling Thunder disc that got put in the machine. I hadn't listened to the show for a good while; probably not since I got it home from buying it. It was much better than I had remembered, awesome in fact. I was especially pleased that there were four more tracks on the disc than were displayed on the case. The last forty minutes before boarding found me lost in an afternoon matinee performance from 27 years ago and especially in remarkable adaptations of 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' and 'The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll'. I was starting to see why the era was so reverently championed, 'Idiot Wind' (*Hard Rain's* main saving grace) had always suggested that the potential was there and that the tour had been badly represented on record rather than poorly executed. I jumped on the plane invigorated with the knowledge that when I got home there would be a whole archive of tapes waiting for me to re-explore with fresh ears.

With the aching head now cleared up, the only negative feeling within me was the unfortunate knowledge that a poorly timed

but badly needed trip to the toilet had the devastating result of me missing 'Solid Rock' last night in Oslo. I had discussed the performance with zeal with the beaming Canadian after the show, not wanting to admit to have missed such a spectacle. Dylan was now really pulling out all the stops and digging deep into his back catalogue. He had been doing this a lot recently. 'Solid Rock' was joined by 'Man of Constant Sorrow' in the line up and the latter alone was enough to inspire to higher levels of jubilant drunkenness than I had planned. Although, I must sadly admit that the introductions of 'Country Pie' and 'If Dogs Run Free' had a similar effect in 2000.

It is probably a slightly harsh stereotype to say that Scandinavia has an air of the melancholy in its culture but the traveller is aware of an odd empty feeling when trotting around its cities. This is often put down to the dark climate, of course, but there is something more to it than just this. I cannot explain the business in lines, you understand, but if there is one exception to this rule then it would be Copenhagen. It's one hell of a place with the cafés full of people ready to engage in conversation about the most bizarre of subjects that range from (and I kid you not) The Band's *Music From Big Pink*, loft insulation and the state of Denmark's fish exportation industry. The Danes are also generally proud that along with the United Kingdom, they are currently having no part in the European single currency. However, whether the visiting Bobcat comprehends the economics or not, Copenhagen is a damn expensive place to spend the night; unless, of course, you are a Canadian with a

bottomless piggy bank. There are hoards of musicians busking colourful attempts of 'Knockin' on Heavens Door' and 'Hurricane' in a strange language all over the beautiful town centre. One of the budding Bobs tells me that the language is Danish and that should probably not be considered strange seeing as we are in Denmark. The point taken, I moved on but was beginning to be convinced that I was in the world's greatest city for dreaming away the afternoon a show that for my own sanity, had to contain 'Solid Rock'.

The line outside the venue was not as atmospheric as the one in Oslo but I was kind of glad because I wanted to watch the show on my own and with my own reactions. There are often those around you at Dylan shows who love nothing more than to tell you that the song you have just had a religious experience hearing was played much better in Alabama in 1986. A superiority trip is all this sort of thing is and those who have forgotten why they are there in the first place are usually the ones who speak such words. Tonight, possibly energised by a great afternoon spent exploring Copenhagen's delightful tourist attractions and listening to the Rolling Thunder disc, I was not going to let any such talk burst my bubble. I was due to meet the Canadian outside the venue after the gig for a drink so normality could resume then. My state of mind may have been a factor but as soon as Dylan took the stage in Denmark, everything was perfect. His voice was strong and he used it as an instrument, bending the strings at will. There was a longer than usual pause while the band picked up their electrical instru-

ments after an impressive 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit' as though to torment me as much as possible before putting me out of my 'Solid Rock' misery. When it came, it was fantastic. The first time I had heard it done live and here I was uncharacteristically grooving around the standing area. This is entertainment, after all. The rest of the audience were affected in the same way and the reception was frantic enough to suggest that the Copenhagen branch of HMV will have sold out of copies of *Saved* by tomorrow lunchtime. Occasionally, Bob finds the inspiration and hits the nail right on the head; this was the finest Dylan show I had seen since the fabulous Cardiff performance in 2000.

The only coherent thought that I was up to on the way out of the arena was just how good the "*Love And Theft*" songs are when played live. Other than this I was drained, the Canadian was there waiting for me by the time I reached the cold reality of the outside and I met him with an enthusiastic shaking of the hand. Between us, we probably used the word *awesome* a thousand times on the short walk between the gig and the pub. I would be ready for some discussion once I was sat down and comfortable. Once again, the Canadian and myself were walking to a late-night bar after a Dylan show in Scandinavia only tonight there were three subtle differences: we had just witnessed a genuinely classic Bob performance, I had managed to be present for 'Solid Rock' and this time, I was choosing the bar.

Copenhagen was still alive by the time we reached the centre, probably too alive, in truth. The clubs and bars all seemed

pretty full and lively; even the tranquil cafés where I had spent the afternoon had transformed into Euro pop disco frenzies. In little humour for these sorts of venues, plus the reality that checking the Canadian's rucksack into one of the cloak-rooms would have cost us the same price as a plane ticket home, we made our way to the plush downstairs piano bar of my hotel. Expense accounts are wonderful things; the city centre hotel I was temporarily calling home had a good few more stars than it would have done had I be shelling out for it myself. As to whether the account would stretch to refreshments, I was unsure but willing to chance my luck.

The Canadian relieved himself of his mammoth rucksack burden and we found a vacant table as far away from the ivory tinkling crooner as possible. Despite the late hour, there were a significant number of people in the bar, most of them sombre looking businessmen with their lady friends; some of them may have even been their wives. It was a seedy-looking place but had a nice warm feel to it even though there were very few people indeed who looked like they may have been at the Dylan show. My friend lost his starry-eyed excitement about tonight's performance as he took his first sip and the opportunity to level some criticisms at our Bob. His main beef was that Dylan and the band had only played one tune ('Cold Irons Bound') from *Time Out Of Mind* at the Copenhagen Forum and that this was, apparently, a sad and unforgivable neglect of a great album. The topic made me think back to a great evening that I had spent at

an audience with Michael Gray, author of *Song And Dance Man*, a startling achievement in Dylan critique. The evening was part of the 2001 Bath Literature Festival and from the stage of the Guildhall, Gray described *Time Out Of Mind* as 'patchy'. It was an observation that struck me quite powerfully at the time and has stayed with me ever since, not because I found it strange that such a Dylan connoisseur should consider one of the man's most respected classics 'patchy' but, on the contrary, because I agreed with him. I had been struggling with my feelings towards *Time Out Of Mind* until that evening. I had been unable to explain exactly why a record that was well crafted, beautifully sounding and that certainly contained some great song writing was, in my mind, inferior to *World Gone Wrong*. It is possible that Michael Gray's comments made me feel that it was OK not to be rapturous about such an acclaimed work and that at last, I had an ally in the argument. It was something I had thought a lot about and had been unable to see the wood for the trees in my attitude towards the record, when Gray summed up my feelings about it in a word, my malaise was lifted slightly and subsequently I have been able to enjoy the album. For this reason alone, I consider that evening a successful one but I do still consider *Time Out Of Mind* to be a bit hit and miss. For example, I have never really got on with 'To Make You Feel My Love' and even though I have witnessed some good concert performances of 'Love Sick', I find it curiously overrated on record. 'Cold Irons Bound' and 'Highlands' are great

songs but have been far better represented on stage where they seem to have grown new life free from their studio confinement. However, what is good about the record is fantastic; 'Trying to Get to Heaven' can take the breath away and restore it only when it deems it necessary while the sublime 'Not Dark Yet' is, by anybody's standards, a masterpiece of a song, an enigmatic illustration of Dylan as the absolute master of his craft and a reminder of exactly what he is capable of when he puts his mind to it. In terms of creating an atmosphere, there is little even in Dylan's vast canon that can equal it, check out its positioning in the film *Wonder Boys* where it perfectly captures the lonely macabre of Michael Douglas's protagonist.

The song was played by Michael Gray on that evening in Bath as the finale to his lecture and was followed by some of the most amusing comments of the whole evening. The amiable Festival compère lady, who introduced Gray and rounded up matters with the obligatory thanks, said in earnest that what we should now all do is write to Radio One and get them to play 'Not Dark Yet' and this way, we can get it to number one in the charts on Sunday. There were smiles in the audience and the absurdity of the suggestion was not lost on a polite but grinning Michael Gray. The same lady had earlier expressed surprise and shock that Sonny and Cher's 'All I Really Want To Do' had been written by Bob Dylan.

The Canadian was not with me on the *Time Out Of Mind* debate but did agree that the tracks on the album had grown in

power on the road. However, he was still adamant that he would have liked to hear more and this seemed to sour his memory of the whole evening. I thought this a shame; we had both agreed that the show had been great and while I always enjoy some debate, I do not see the need to go out of one's way to find unnecessary criticism. Something like 'Not Dark Yet' would always be a treat, sure, but Dylan has a new album out and we did get 'Sugar Baby', 'Summer Days' and 'Honest With Me' from "*Love And Theft*". Intriguingly, the Canadian didn't seem to have too many good things to say about Bob's latest record though we didn't end up having this conversation just yet. I was toying with the idea of arguing that although the highs on "*Love And Theft*" do not peak as extremely as those from *Time Out Of Mind*, there a fewer lows and on the whole, the album is more consistent, but I let it go.

Conversation turned instead to Dylan's previous round of touring, a trek around the southern states of the US in January and February. The Canadian spoke with great enthusiasm about the trip itself but nothing about the music. I heard great tales about catching trains from Tampa to Atlanta, terrible businesses in \$75-a-night Texan motels, hooking up with former Deadheads and drinking cheap rum at, like, six in the morning with someone who used to roadie with Jerry Garcia but though all of this, he told me nothing about Dylan. My first reaction was that the guy was just spinning me a yarn and hadn't really been there at all as he had little to say about the

specifics of the gigs themselves but he later produced an album of notes and ticket stubs which proved he was indeed there, at least in body.

The only Dylan related information he would give me was that the great man and his band were on better form then that they are now. This irritated me on a few levels; mainly because it smacked of what I think I mentioned above about the attempted bubble bursting. Also, the Grateful Dead association always puts me on my guard and I'm not sure that Dylan's connections with the band and their followers have always proved positive. The bright Canadian eyes had fired with the story about the guy who claimed that he used to roadie for Garcia, so impressed as he was by the probable lie. I sensed that, to the Canadian, meeting someone who used to work for Garcia was more of a life-enhancing event than it would be to actually meet Dylan himself. The Dead connection raised in me an interesting mental point. I had been thinking of ways to bring the Canadian back to the expense of following Dylan around and hopefully getting an explanation out of him about how exactly he does it. Now, I thought it possible that he was actually addicted more to touring than Dylan and to my disappointment; I found this to be the case. To the Canadian, it transpired, although he was a genuine fan of Dylan, the Never Ending Tour was merely a substitute for his following of the now defunct Dead. In short, Dylan is the only related performer touring with the same level of intensity that the Dead had done before Garcia's death. The recent US tour

that saw Dylan effectively supporting Phil Lesh was, as far as the Canadian was concerned, a dream bill. For my own part, I find it absurd that Dylan should be less of an attraction than someone as insignificant as Lesh. I also dislike shared billings in general, as Bob's shortened sets tend to lean heavily towards his greatest hits. However, it would have been hypocritical of me to attack Lesh and burst the Canadian's memory bubble so I said nothing.

Our evening came to an end at a little after 3am when the Canadian said that he had to make haste to catch the early morning bus to Hamburg. Germany was indeed the next stop on the Never Ending Tour and although work commitments meant that I had to stay in Copenhagen for a few days and miss the next three shows, I would resume my touring in Hannover on April 13th. In actual fact, as much as I would have liked to have made the first three German shows, I was looking forward to staying in Denmark for a few days, it would give me time to let the two shows I had seen thus far sink in and hopefully give me the opportunity to score some recordings of both.

As he left the bar, responding poorly to my sincere question as to whether he has to buy a bus ticket for his rucksack, the Canadian left me with words that we would meet again in Germany. When he was out of sight, I made a silent bet with myself that when I spoke to him in Hannover, he would report with smug tones that I had missed the three best shows that Dylan had played since the Royal Albert Hall.

## Hannover 13/4/2002

Within a few days, my work-related Copenhagen obligations were met and I was ready to resume my travels and rejoin the latest leg of the Never Ending Tour. A few hurried minutes after my 10am check out, I was boarding a huge white coach with more wheels than I would have expected; my transport across the Danish / German border and south through Hamburg to Hannover. Even though I managed to get some sleep on the journey, I was still surprised at the speed at which we arrived in Hannover, which importantly for me, was in plenty of time for tonight's show. I was looking forward to seeing the Canadian and hearing his reviews of the three German shows that I had already missed. Of course, the set-lists that I had investigated, via the net, had delighted and depressed me with equal measure. Delighted because they featured yet more exciting and innovative new song selections and depressing because I hadn't been there to experience them.

In Hamburg, for example, Dylan had played 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'. The online café in Copenhagen had seemed a very lonely place when I read that this sublime chestnut had been played without me. I had never heard it played live, I don't even have any bootlegs with it on and although, of course, I've heard the song about a million times before, the prospect of hearing it performed live with the backing of this excellent band excited the hell out of me. That aside, the

Hamburg show appeared to be, on paper at least, solid but unspectacular. There was not too much more to rue missing, mainly because I was confident that I would see it all again over the next few weeks. If he had done a one-off performance of the whole *John Wesley Harding* album from start to finish, however, then I probably would have shot myself.

'Visions of Johanna' was the news that leapt from the list of the Berlin show and was another source of pining depression until I listened to a CD that I had with me from Portland, Maine in 1999 which features a sublime version of the song and served to exorcise the demon, as it were. Finally, the third German show (in Leipzig) served as a vehicle for three from *Time Out Of Mind*, which, hopefully, pleased the Canadian but would probably have upset him because 'Can't Wait' was, like, three seconds shorter than it was in Bossier City. The second and third shows did not feature 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' and that set off irrational alarm bells in my head that maybe Bob was unhappy with the performance and had scrapped the idea of playing it again.

The Stadionsportshalle in Hannover is a nice enough venue, if slightly industrial and being back on the tour had put me in high spirits so, once again, I was determined to enjoy the show. I was slightly late arriving after having trouble with securing my bus tickets for tomorrow's train journey to Frankfurt, so by the time I got to the arena, most people were already packed in. I wandered about the hall looking for the Canadian but not inclined

to push through a crowd of sturdy Germans, I gave up after a few fruitless minutes. As there was still a while to go and my late arrival had meant that I was nowhere near the stage, I decided to go to the bar for a quick pint of ale before the festivities began. There were many British Bobcats in the bar, probably because German beer is glorious and should be more freely available elsewhere in Europe.

Nothing tonight, however, was to please me as much as bumping into my old friend, Norman. An excellent man of Dylan, Norm takes some introducing and if there is to be a definitive example of the Dylan servant's undying devotion to their master, then it is he. From birth, Norm has been more or less totally deaf in the left ear, conducting his day-to-day business with the help of an elaborate looking hearing aid and occasional sign language. I had first met Norm in Glasgow in 2000 and stood with him on several further stops on that particular visit to the UK. His frequent attendances at Dylan shows are often complex affairs; it is imperative that he stands on the fringes as he cannot risk his sensitive ear equipment being accidentally knocked and damaged in any crowd rush. A few initial bars of an introduction will see Norm scrambling frantically through his memory bank to find the song required before fixing his eyes on Dylan's lip movements. An impressive action, in fairness, as it can sometimes be difficult to identify what song is being played until well into the first verse and our Bob does tend to mess about with his words. In Glasgow, Norm had told me that the book is there to help him out but

he is actually able to pick up 95 per cent of what is coming through the PA. He cannot always get up the deepest low tones that occasionally vibrate from Tony Garnier's stand-up bass and also fails to register the odd bass drum thud. This can, at times, be disorientating for Norm and tends to throw his balance. At the other end of the scale, Norm also loses out on some of the top end high-pitched guitar notes during the solos. Much of Bob's one fingered soloing is lost on him, a phenomenon that Norm himself had said with a smile, is probably no bad thing.

The show itself came and went with relatively little fuss although I was far from disappointed with the quality of it. The brief instrumental opener that was reminiscent of a lame Irish jig brought about a strange atmosphere that hung around for the rest of the night. Things like 'Duncan and Brady' or 'Hallelujah, I'm Ready To Go' are great set openers and serve well in getting the blood pumping up at the top of the show. This rather muted start possibly contributed to the aforementioned odd mood that was to grow throughout the evening. My heart sank a bit by the time 'Mr. Tambourine Man' had begun the second batch of acoustic tunes as I guessed that the chance of hearing 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' had probably passed. Most of those around me had been to at least one of the other German shows and were of the opinion that this was the weakest thus far. Of course, whether they would have been of that opinion had they not seen what had gone before; I don't know.

I failed to catch the Canadian that night but I arranged to meet Norm the next morning for breakfast in a café near the railway station, as we were intent on catching the same train to Frankfurt. At first, I had intended to once again use the big mad bus with the additional wheels but bottled it upon seeing how far Frankfurt was from Hannover on the map. The day of the 14th had no show so this meant that inter-city travelling would be a more casual affair. Satisfied with our hearty meal, (the Germans really tend to pull out all the stops with their breakfast menus) we got ourselves some liquid refreshment for the trip and boarded the impressively punctual train. We sat at a comfortable space with a table to ourselves and as the train started to slowly pull out of the station, I spied the Canadian making his way slowly in through the door of the next carriage, greatly hindered by his belongings. I attracted his attention and signalled that there was a seat here for him, he nodded in reply and gestured that he would just dispose of the rucksack. A fair bit of chaos then ensued with your man's farcical attempts to wedge his pack in the overhead compartments whilst struggling to keep his feet on the moving train. The German guard is not the man to put up with any value of disruptive behaviour and I feared that when the said uniformed official ran through the carriage with the enraged face on him, my Canadian friend was in hot water. Thankfully, the guard merely ordered the offending passenger to take his seat and leave the luggage for him to attend to. Seated at last, I introduced

the Canadian to Norm and we got on with the business of discussing the pressing Dylan-related issues. I will not insult the reader's intelligence by documenting what the Canadian had to say about the shows that I had missed in relation to the ones that I have seen but Norm took the conversation on by echoing my own sentiments that the "*Love And Theft*" songs were really coming into their own when played live. Consistent to his opinions on the matter, the Canadian told us that he had been disappointed with the record in general although he admitted that it had its 'moments'. The two men, however, found some common ground when one of them mentioned that their favourite Dylan album was *Desire*. I was unable to contribute too much to the conversation as my own favourite Dylan album tends to change on a weekly basis, but the subject of *Desire* as a favourite album has always interested me. The songs definitely have a warm appeal to them and most Dylan fans seem to have a very fond place for it. I have spoken to many people who will name the record as their favourite, I even have a friend who despises Dylan intensely but considers *Desire* to be the finest album ever made. Maybe it could be put down to the fact that it succeeded *Blood On The Tracks*, an album rich in gems that re-established Dylan as a major player both critically and commercially.

We spent a good hour of the train journey discussing other possibilities for the success and enduring appeal of *Desire*. These included the fact that the tracks on the record were, with the exception of 'Sara' and 'One More Cup of Coffee',

co-written with Jaques Levy and that maybe Dylan had his song writing refreshed and challenged by the process and politics of having another writer on board. The haunting violin playing of Scarlet Rivera and the magical way that it blends in with the rest of Dylan's band was another theory. For an example, listen to the opening minute or so of 'Isis' or the introduction to 'One More Cup of Coffee' where Dylan seems to know when not to blow his harp and give Scarlet the freedom and space to play. Finally, I have always found it strange that the recent incarnations of the Never Ending Tour have featured absolutely nothing from *Desire*

and there are no hints that it will in the foreseeable future. Such comments, though, must always be uttered with caution as Dylan will probably prove me wrong and play 'Romance in Durango' and 'Oh Sister' tomorrow night. The last hour was spent with our headphones on; each of us silently and contently listening to different snapshots of Dylan's glittering past. By the time we were rolling into Frankfurt's Hauptbahnhof station, our beer had dried up and we were all ready to enjoy the rest of our 'day off'.

*Our intrepid traveller's tale continues in Judas! issue nine.*

### Back Issues

Copies of issues 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 are still available from our website at: [www.judasmagazine.com](http://www.judasmagazine.com)

or by post from:

Woodstock Publications

8 Laxton Grange

Bluntisham, Cambridgeshire PE28 3XU

United Kingdom



UK...£5.50 Europe...£6.00 USA/Canada...\$12.50  
Rest of World...£7.50