

I decided that there just was not enough 'meat' to this article to include it in the book. However it is my pleasure to make it available here as a supplementary piece of light reading

Foreword

Like the one on 'Maggie's Farm', this article was written to try to reclaim a song that everybody I knew was sick to death of, due to its perennial, trashed beyond bearing each time appearances in the set lists of the time and preceding years. In both cases, whether or not I succeeded for my audiences, I did so for myself and enjoyed doing so.[1]

Everybody Must Get Stoned

Rainy Day Women #12 & 35' is a novelty song, whose sheer fun is compellingly infectious, with enough 'serious' points being raised to make it the perfect opener for the *Blonde On Blonde* double album. It is a tissue of outrageous and outrageously successful puns, both musical and lyrical.

The song's main pun, of course, is that of 'being stoned'. 'Being stoned' as in being high on dope, or 'being stoned' literally and metaphorically by those entirely too quick to judge. The reason this pun is so successful is that it has so many connotations on both of what for convenience's sake I will call the 'fun' and the 'serious' sides.

Before we look at these, though, I want to say that it is always going to be the 'fun' side which first strikes the listener. Indeed, in the majority of cases it is probably the only side that does, especially if the song is heard on the radio or as a single, rather than as the superb introduction it forms to *Blonde on Blonde*.

'Rainy Day Women #12 & 35' has been played live many hundreds of times, often as the final song of the night. Without fail the audience have lapped it up as an invitation to party and/or to celebrate the taking of drugs.

It is worth stressing this straightforward celebration of hedonism both from the artist and his audience, given the rather extreme po-facedness of many interpretations given in books and magazines on Dylan. This results, one suspects, from critics reared in the cloistered ivory towers of Lit. Crit. being unwilling, or unable, to admit that a song by someone they rate as an Artist could actually mainly be about fun, on one hand at least. And also from devoted fans putting Dylan on such a pedestal that each and every song must be seen to carry deep import. Since he has so often provided work that illuminates the human condition, some feel that all of his songs must therefore be informed with profound truth.

This isn't the case, as many songs testify. Dylan is all for celebrating the basic joys of rock'n'roll without engaging too much of his or your grey matter. On the other hand he is a major artist, and therefore even his fun often cannot help but be informed by insights. 'Rainy Day Women' does have that side to it, but it is not its primary face. This has to be remembered when reading interpretations that will have you reaching for your Bible to investigate the religious ramifications of what Dylan is singing, or before you follow instructions on how to decipher ancient mystical texts to discover the true meaning of numbers 12 and 35.

Dylan himself, in interviews, kept such things going with references to New Mexico and wild flights of fancy:

Well, you know my songs are all mathematical songs. Now, you know what that means so I'm not gonna have to go into that specifically here. It happens to be a protest song. ...and it borders on the mathematical, you know, idea of things, and this one specifically happens to be ... 'Rainy Day Women #12 & 35' happens to deal with a minority of, you know, cripples and Orientals and, uh, you know, and the world in which they live,.... It's another sort of a North Mexican kind of a thing, uh, very protesty. Very, very protesty. And, uh, one of the protestiest of all things I ever protested against in my protest years.[2]

Yes, thank you Bob for a nice taste of your defensive interview technique during the gruelling tours and accompanying inane media grillings of the mid '60s.

One listen to the song with its laughter, extraordinary instrumentation and 'off- stage' shouts would surely convince you that these musicians are having a whale of a time – and are inviting you to too. If you need any more convincing, just listen to Dylan's pronunciation of 'young and able' in the third stanza.

So there you have it, a fun song, a novelty hit single, a party song. Nonetheless, there are serious issues raised in the song – I just wanted to stress that the fun clearly predominates. As I will show below, there are references to young soldiers dying, to racism, to the generation gap, and, of course to the countless millions who have not yet learnt from the biblical story

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.[3]

Because, unquestionably, the song is about persecution as well as getting high. Note the constant drumming home of

They'll stone you. But one must never forget the song's central humour: of course the singer will feel such persecution everywhere – such paranoia is a very common effect of 'being stoned'! At the same time, also, Dylan was 'being stoned' by audiences around the world for moving to Rock from Folk. I have tried to stress that there are two sides to the song, 'fun' and 'serious'; Dylan cleverly has them co-existing throughout.

Interview quotes show Dylan fully aware of both the sides and their possible impacts; sometimes he discusses both at once, as with Philippe Adler for L'Express (16th June 1978). Notice how Dylan stresses that there are 'many meanings', but has no doubt as to which 'precise' meaning Adler is referring to.

PA: *Knowing the influence that you exercise over millions of young people, don't you think it is dangerous to go on singing Everybody Must Be Stoned? (sic)*

BD: *But that song has lot of other meanings.*

PA: *Maybe, but it does have a precise one.*

BD: *Marijuana isn't a drug like the others (a pause). Today there are drugs that are a lot more dangerous than in my time.*

In other interviews, such as this one with Jonathon Cott in December 1977, Dylan has shown that he consciously created the multi-levelled meanings of this seemingly innocuous novelty song, stressing alienation and persecution for standing up for what one believes in:

JC: *You can't really dance to one of your songs.*

BD: *I couldn't.*

JC: *Imagine dancing to 'Rainy Day Woman #12 & 35'. It's kind of alienating. Everyone thought it was about being stoned, but I always thought it was about being all alone.*

BD: *So did I. You could write about that for years....*

And also in the Bob Fass Radio Phone-in, 21st May 1986:

'Everybody must get stoned' is like when you go against the tide. ..you might in different times find yourself in an unfortunate situation and so to do what you believe in sometimes, people, uh, some people they just take offence to that. You know, I mean, you can look through history and find that people have taken offence to people who come out with a different viewpoint on things. And 'being stoned' is like...it's just a kind of way of saying that.

And this is, indeed, the point the song starts off from, Bob 'trying to be so good' but getting/being stoned instead:

*Well, they'll stone ya when you're trying to be so good,
They'll stone ya just a-like they said they would
They'll stone ya when you're tryin' to go home
Then they'll stone ya when you're there all alone
But I would not feel so all alone,
Everybody must get stoned*

As the verse progresses, you can hear why Jonathon Cott's interpretation rang so true. The repeated 'alone's in verse one are revisited in the last stanza to re-inforce the point. There is also something extremely sad in the attempt to reach the safety of home while being stoned – but, but, but who notices this sadness when first hearing the song? Sure, there's a resigned tone to the lyrics that acknowledges all-pervasive persecution, but everything you hear and feel screams 'hey its party time – let's get stoned'.

Stanzas two and three catalogue a host of 'normal' behaviours that we all go through every day, walkin' (there's a lot of that in stanza two), opening doors, sitting down, having breakfast, 'trying to make a buck' – all the time 'being stoned'. And it is all very humorously put across – yet there are hidden depths. The line:

They'll stone ya when you're tryin' to keep your seat

may not resonate much nowadays, but in the Sixties, and especially from the mouth of Bob Dylan, it irresistibly evoked the campaigns for racial equality and desegregation. Listeners then – and one would hope it is never completely forgotten – would recognize the significance of being able to take a seat on a bus without fear of persecution, regardless of one's skin colour.

By now the listener might also be thinking that there is more to the music than just party sounds; it comes across almost like a New Orleans jazz band marching down the street at times, or an unholy mixture of intoxicated players at a religious walk. Producer Bob Johnston has spoken of his attempts to capture a 'Salvation Army' sound in amongst the bedlam. He succeeded brilliantly; as I said above, the puns are musical as well as verbal. In verse three the lines:

*They'll stone ya when you're tryin' to make a buck
They'll stone ya and then they'll say, 'good luck.'*

debunk the God-given right of every American capitalist to make money by whatever means and at whatever cost to others. The 'good luck' here is as ironically meant as the one 'spoken' in 'Positively 4th Street':

*You see me on the street
You always act surprised
You say, 'How are you?' 'Good luck'
But you don't mean it*

They don't mean it here, either.

Stanza four seems to be, again, concentrating on 'normal' behaviour – in this case Dylan is playing to his audience with:

*They'll stone you when you're riding in your car
They'll stone you when you're playing your guitar*

Whereas the opening two lines:

*Well, they'll stone you and say that it's the end
Then they'll stone you and then they'll come back again*

just seem to suggest that one has no escape, these people doing the stoning will cheat and lie just to get the chance to stone you again. There is, though, a more specific interpretation possible here, depending on how one accepts the title of the song. I will come to this interpretation soon.

The concluding verse reiterates many of the points made in the opening one: again we have the stress on being 'alone', while the second line:

They'll stone you when you are walking home

neatly echoes stanzas one and two. Then Dylan drops in more lines that resonate far beyond the chaotic fun of the music and performance:

*They'll stone you and then say you are brave
They'll stone you when you are set down in your grave*

Which, as in the anti-racism line already quoted, come from the same Dylan who wrote 'Hero Blues', 'Masters of War' and other anti-militarism songs that mourned the waste of young men being sent off to be maimed or killed. So you see, Dylan was – as usual – not talking complete nonsense in his surrealistic responses to interview questions in the Sixties. (It is a protest song, after all!) Also, specifically in 'Hero Blues' and 'John Brown' Dylan sings of women sending/encouraging young men off to war. This is a clue to yet another level one can read into the lyrics of this song: This is that it is men continually being put down by women. I do not subscribe to the view that this is the central theme, but I certainly think it informs the song in places – particularly in the last three verses. It is discouraged neither by the male camaraderie of the musicians, sounding for all the world like the malrevellers escaped from their wives' surveillance in, say, Robert Burns's Tam O'Shanter. Nor by the biblical proverb:

A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.[4]

Which may be another clue to a title that has inspired many an interpretation; the most common being that 'Rainy Day Women' is a slang term for marijuana.

I fear I may be straying into the very territory that I lampooned earlier, so I will hastily return to my opening position, stressing the 'fun' side of the song. Despite my other comments above, to this listener the musicians sound more like the partying inhabitants of Burns's anarchic dance The Jolly Beggars, which also celebrates escape via musical and narcotic bliss from society's cruel attacks on the individual spirit.[5]

So what does the whole song mean, and what is the relevance of the title? It means all I have said above and more. Dylan, in full 1966 interview-mode again, following on from our earlier Stockholm quote, answers like this:

KB: *Why that title? It's never mentioned in the song.*

BD: *We, we never mention things that we love. And that's, where I come from that is, that's blasphemy, blas-per-for-me, you know that word? Blas-per-for-me?*

KB: *Yeah. It has to do with God.*

KB: *Shall we have a listen to the song?*

BD: *OK.*

KB: Which is selling quite well in the States. How do you feel about that?

BD: It's, it's, it's horrible.

KB: It is?

BD: Yeah. I don't wanna, uh ... because it is a protest song. Protest songs, really; shouldn't really, uh, we shouldn't really listen to protest songs.

KB: Well; I see it in the way that a lot of people buy the record and listen to it, the radio stations and so on. So a lot of people could get the message in that case.

BD: Yeah. They do get the message. I'm glad they're getting the message.[6]

[1] This first appeared in Freewheelin' Quarterly.

[2] Klas Burling interview, Stockholm 28/4/1966

[3] John: 8.7 King James Version

[4] Proverbs 27:15 King James Version

[5] For text and commentary, see: <http://www.robertburns.org/works/79.shtml> and <http://www.robertburns.plus.com/loveandliberty.htm>

[6] Klas Burling interview, Stockholm 28/4/1966

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