# More Mind Polluting Words

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## a supplementary collection of Bob Dylan interviews and press conferences

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"Asking an artist to talk about his work
is like asking a plant to discuss horticulture."

Jean Cocteau

"The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery."

Francis Bacon

"The most seductive thing about art
is the personality of the artist himself."

Paul Cézanne

This document represents the second phase of our project to make available information about interviews of Bob Dylan to researchers, fans and those just plain curious. The first phase was the creation of the *Index of Bob Dylan Interviews and Press Conferences* (IBDIP), which is updated periodically and is also available on *The Bridge* website. The *Index* attempts to list all the known interviews, press conferences and phone-ins, whether they are available to collectors or not. This second phase, documents full text versions of relevant printed articles and transcripts of audio/video recordings as far as we are able.

A series of five privately produced booklets by the late John Baldwin (writing as 'Dr. Filth') called *The fiddler now upspoke*, were published in 1995-1997. These booklets attempted to collate full-text versions of all the interviews of Dylan up to that date, but they are now difficult to obtain. However, the text of these books, and much else besides, were included in a freely-available online publication called *Every Mind Polluting Word* (EMPW) by the late Artur Jarosinski. EMPW covered the period up to 2006 and, although Artur's website is now defunct, its contents are to be found on *archive.org* (https://archive.org/details/every-mind-polluting-word-2nd-edition). The present document is entitled *More Mind Polluting Words* in tribute to Artur's sterling efforts.

Since then, a large number of interviews dating from the period covered by Artur have become available from one source or another. Also, a number of interviews from subsequent years have been published. So the present document is intended reproduce as many of these as we can, and make them freely available on *The Bridge* website. Some interviews are incomplete in EPMW or in versions published elsewhere. In a number of cases, extended versions are now available and these are republished in full with the additional text indicated in **red** font. The intention is to provide updates of this document periodically, rather than add to it on a day-to-day basis.

Some of these interviews are brief, mundane, you might think pointless. Some are lengthy, but brief in terms of the Dylan quotes, but have been reproduced in their entirety to give the full context. Some items you may not regard as an interview *sensu stricto*. So be it! But in keeping with Artur's sentiment we attempt to include Every Mind Polluting Word taken from Dylan interviews; make of it what you will.

All civilised comments and contributions will be humbly appreciated.

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# 26 September 1961, Robert Shelton

Source: *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*, Robert Shelton, 1986, Harper Collins, New English Library, pages 108-111.

The interview took place in Folk City, New York City, New York.

Bob started a typical set with “I’m Gonna Get You, Sally Gal,” in a lively tempo. He set up a three-way conversation between his voice, guitar, and mouth harp. Suddenly you saw how he could share the stage with as brilliant a trio as The Greenbriars. **“Here’s a song suitable to this occasion,”** Dylan said, as he retuned his guitar and changed his mouth harp. He sailed into a traditional blues dirge, “This Life Is Killing Me.” His technique was everywhere, the covert technique of the folk idiom. It was antipolish, anticonscious of surface form, yet all those elements lay below. He gave the impression that he had started in music yesterday, not five years earlier. But one couldn’t be sure.

Between songs, Dylan droned a soliloquy, formless yet very funny. He started to tell a story about a toad. It was an open-ended shaggy-toad story that didn’t start anyplace, didn’t go anywhere, and didn’t end up anywhere, but it gave him a bit of fill-in patter while he tuned. His face was pouting and boyish. His slow delivery made him sound half-awake to optimists and half-asleep to pessimists. Next, he growled his way through **“a train song,”** “900 Miles.” To punctuate certain guitar breaks, he raised the body of his guitar to the microphone, an old country-music gambit that magnified the stringed sound.

In the background were the usual Folk City distractions. Bartenders clinked and poured as if starring in TV commercials. The cash register rang during soft passages. At the bar a few drunks were gabbing while others tried to silence them. Dylan was all concentration. **“Here’s a song outa my own head,”** he said, tuning his guitar for “Talikng New York,” a very old style of talking blues, in which three sparse chords support wry lyrics more spoken than sung. Dylan delivered his first protest song with a comic’s timing.

Bob turned to other songs out of other people’s heads. He moaned his way through “Dink’s Song,” long favored by Josh White and Cynthia Gooding; Dylan said he had picked it up on the Brazos River when he was down in Texas. Actually, the ballad hunter John A. Lomax had heard it in 1904 from a gin-drinking black woman who sang it as she wearily scrubbed her man’s laundry. It is one of the most pathetic women’s laments in American folk song. Bob did a variation on Van Ronk, with vamping guitar figures keeping the underlying pattern moving. At times his voice sounded like gravel being shovelled, at other times like a sob. He caught the original’s tension, grit, and plaintiveness. “I was never a motherless child,” folk singer Ed McCurdy used to say, “but I know what it feels like.” Dylan was never a black laundress, but he knew what it felt like. Occasionally, Dylan threw his head back full as if he were scanning the ceiling for his next words.

From Texas, the twenty-year-old world traveller took his audience to a famous Chicago bar, Muddy Waters’ Place, where he said he had picked up another blues song. He shuffled to the junk-heap upright piano and played primitive chords. Then he hit Woody’s road again, with “Hard Travelin’,” a lurching, careening road song, sticky with hot asphalt, aching with calloused feet. Then he did another couple of songs out of his own head, including “Bear Mountain” and “Talkin’ Hava Nagilah Blues,” his little jape of international “stylists” like Harry Belafonte and Theo Bikel.

The audience responded more to Dylan’s wit than to his slow, serious, intense material. Audience reaction led him to play Chaplinesque clown. He closed with his own “Song To Woody,” suspensefully built to keep attention focused on each new line.

After his set, we went back to the Folk City kitchen for his first press interview. The answers came fast, but I had a feeling that he was improvising and concealing. It went like this: **“I’m twenty years old, don’t turn twenty-one until May. I’ve been singing all my life, since I was ten. I was born in Duluth, Minnesota, or maybe it was Superior, Wisconsin, right across the line. I started travelling with a carnival at the age of thirteen. I did odd jobs and sang with the carnival. I cleaned up ponies and ran steam shovels, in Minnesota, North Dakota, and then on south. I graduated from high school. For a while, Sioux Falls, South Dakota was a home, and so was Gallup, New Mexico. I also lived in Fargo, North Dakota, and in a place called Hibbing, Minnesota. I went to the University of Minnesota for about eight months, but I didn’t like it too much. I used to play piano with Bobby Vee and the Shadows, a country rockabilly band. I came east in February 1961, and it’s just as hard as any town I’ve seen.”**

When he sang “Poor Girl,” he had pulled out a kitchen table knife and used the back of the blade to fret his guitar. Where did he learn that old blues bottleneck guitar? “**I learned to use a butcher knife,”** Bob replied, **“from an old guy named Wigglefoot in Gallup, New Mexico. He was a beaten-down old bluesman who**

**wore a patch on his eye. I do a lot of material I learned from Mance Lipscomb, but not in public. Mance was a big influence. I met him in Navasota, Texas, five years ago. I've been a farmhand too. I learned 'House Of The Rising Sun' from Dave Van Ronk and 'See That My Grave Is Kept Clean' from Blind Lemon Jefferson. I like the recordings of Rabbit Brown a lot too.**

**"Jack Elliott and Dave Van Ronk are the two best folk singers in New York. I can only sing one way… in the way I like to hear it. I don't have a pretty voice. I can't sing pretty, and I don't want to sing pretty."** Bob dropped the names of a lot of admired musicians, a mélange of those he had heard on recordings only and those he said he'd met and worked with. He appeared to have known them all. **"Yes, I like Ray Charles very much. I picked up the harmonica after hearing Walter Jacobs – you know, Little Walter – of the Muddy Waters band. But I play my own style of harmonica. I played piano for dancers in the carnival."**

Had he made any recordings? **"The recordings I've made haven't been released. I played with Gene Vincent in Nashville, but I don't know if they have been released… As to that bottleneck guitar, when I played a coffeehouse in Detroit I used a switchblade to get that sound. But when I pulled out the switchblade, six people in the audience walked out. They looked afraid. Now, I just use a kitchen knife so no one will walk out."** Any other musical influences? **"A lot, quite a lot. Woody Guthrie, of course. I have seen quite a lot of Woody since last winter. We can talk, even though he is sick. He likes my songs a lot. I met Jesse Fuller two years ago in Denver and studied with him."**

Bob went on for another set. I told Carla [Rotolo] that it had been a good interview and that I really loved his work and manner. But, I told her, I had the strange feeling he was putting me on. He seemed to have travelled so far and known so many famous and obscure musicians. He was evasive about his past. I told Carla to tell Bob there was a difference between kidding around with a Village guy and talking for publication. Minutes after Dylan's set Carla huddled with Bobby, and then we continued the interview at a table in between songs by The Greenbriar Boys.

**"Listen,"** Bob told me, **"I'm giving it to you straight. I wouldn't tell you anything that isn't true."** Did he want me to call him Bobby Dylan or Bob Dylan? He thought that one out, as if he were about to sign a contract. Half aloud, he repeated the two names to himself: **"Bob Dylan, Bobby Dylan, "Bob Dylan, Bobby Dylan… Make it Bob Dylan! That's what I'm really known as,"** he declared confidently. I wrote the review, which appeared in *The Times* on Friday, September 29, 1961.

# Late 1961, Unknown Interviewer (Racine Sunday Bulletin)

Source: Racine Sunday Bulletin, Wisconsin, US newspaper, 3 December 1961, section 2, page 8.

This quote from Dylan was published in *Racine Sunday Bulletin*, in an article entitled *Some Tips for Parents Buying Christmas Toys*. Whether this was part of a verbal exchange or a written response is not certain but, if it was an interview, it would likely have taken place in eastern USA, in late 1961. The article was syndicated.

**Keep It Simple**

Interest in music – or its equivalent, noise! – also characterizes all age groups, but here again parents often try to give kids too much too soon. Stringed instruments, for example, are hard to play, and can be quite frustrating when tried too young.

Even a harmonica is hard for a youngster to master (**"Any parent who thinks it's easy to get music out of a harmonica ought to try it himself,"** says noted harmonica virtuoso Bob Dylan). Toy pianos usually have poor tone, but electric chord organs have good tone and are among the best simple introductions to the basics of music.

# April 1962, Henrietta Yurchenco (1)

Source: *teenagers ingenue*, US magazine, Volume 5, Number 3, March 1963, pages 44, 47, 79-80.

An interview took place in New York City, New York and was broadcast in *Adventures in Folk Music*, on: WYNC Radio, New York, April 1962. Excerpts from this and perhaps other conversations at that time were included in the following article.

**The Folk Singing Generation**

When I asked the clerk in a record store, in 1950, for American folk music, he raised his eyebrows, shrugged and offered me the choice of perhaps a dozen items. Today the number of folk song records is staggering. Concerts of folk songs are performed in civic centers, campus coffee houses and night clubs. Hootenannies fill Carnegie Hall with enthusiastic, capacity audiences. And it is you who have done this! For young people, during the last few years, have begun to listen to, to love and to sing all types of folk music.

Today's serious young folk singers are, primarily, young people like yourselves, who have grown up during this folk singing revival. They have stepped out of the crowd of listening folk song enthusiasts to become performers in their own right. Their reasons for singing are, by and large, the same reasons you have for listening. As one young folk singer says, "Tin Pan Alley's pop songs are too contrived. The moon in June is all right, but the real tang of life is in folk material." Also they believe that folk song tend to bring people together in understanding and brotherhood. One visit to a folk song festival confirms this belief.

Though they have a common dedication to sing folk music as honestly and sincerely as they can, these young folk singers all differ in personality and style. Some, like Joan Baez, do not particularly care where the song comes from, but are concerned only with how they make the song sound. Others, especially singers just becoming popular, such as Bob Dylan and Hedy West, try to sound as close to the original backwoods style as possible. But however they sing, these young folk singers are singing to you, the generation who has made folk music the most modern sound! And now let's meet some of these top young folk music performers!

Probably the most talked-about singer in America today is Joan Baez. She has captivated the nation with her heavenly voice and simple unassuming way of singing. When she appears on the concert stage an almost reverential hush comes over the packed house filled with her devoted fans.

I met Joan one night in the audience at a folk-concert. Unobtrusive and unnoticed for a while by the crowd, she was wearing a modest red wool dress, her interesting face framed by her long dark hair. Not pretty by conventional standards, she is still strikingly attractive.

Joan told me, "I had a most unusual audience this season – at a Military Academy, of all places! About 800 boys up to senior high school age. They shouted and carried on so! Just like those audiences of the *Grand Old Opry* radio show in Tennessee!"

Joan never plays down to her listeners. She sings, always with quiet dignity, the old ballads of English origin such as "Mary Hamilton," love stories from our Appalachian mountains, lullabies and an occasional Mexican song. Her beautiful voice and interesting manner explain her enormous popularity.

From the Lowlands of Scotland comes Jean Redpath – strong, vigorous, energetic, full of fun and joy. Jean doesn't walk into a room – she bursts in. Her winning personality is matched by a fine intellect. Jean attended Edinburgh University to study English literature. "At school," she says, "I suffered from the same kind of restlessness, aimlessness and resentment of any kind of regimentation that seems to he common to my generation…"

Actually, she was so engrossed in learning, researching and performing folk songs that she left in her third year, with the blessings of her teachers, and came to try her luck in America. Her success on radio, at parties, on East and West Coast campuses was immediate, but she was seldom paid for the performances.

Jean says, "It seems a wee bit idealistic and unrealistic to say that money was and is a secondary consideration, but it's the case nevertheless. I feel almost an obligation to the material. For me, the song's the thing. In California I kept myself in pin money by doing just about any kind of odd job that offered itself – anything from night-nursing to baby-sitting."

Her finances have improved since then, with more concert appearances, records, TV shows and radio. She still can't get used to the fact that Americans love her rich Scottish burr, but is happy about it and is remaining here.

Jean has a repertory of some 400 songs and a few dozen children's ditties. She claims she is the first Scot to sing Blue-grass, American mountain music. But her first loyalty is to the songs she learned from her family. Old-time speech, the salty, spicy language of another day, is still spoken in her home in Scotland. "One of these days when I go home for a visit, I want to wire the house, put microphones everywhere and just tape every word my folks speak. I assure you it would be a marvelous document!."

Georgia-born Hedy West is a graduate of Western Carolina College. Her tastes run from folklore to classical music, but she loves to dance the Twist and is a fan of good jazz. When she isn't singing, she practices the piano and flute, both of which she plays well. Hedy's family sang folk songs as naturally as others breathe. Her father is a famous poet of North Georgia, and Hedy loves nothing better than writing music to his verses.

"He had a wonderful sense of humor which constantly bubbled over," she recalls of her childhood. "One of my fondest memories is of our trips to the Atlanta stockyards to sell beef from our farm. Daddy would entertain us with all kinds of songs."

Hedy is an attractive girl with piercing blue eyes. She seldom wears make up, and even when she appears on stage there is no artificiality about her. Her direct, honest self is reflected in this comment: "I like rough, realistic songs that tell the truth about life, like 'Cotton Mill Girls,' the story of the migration of mountain-folk to work in the factories, and 'Pans of Biscuits,' about the Depression of the 1890s." Her wide repertory includes many Old English Ballads. She sings these songs of ill-fated lovers, revenge and murder with tenderness and understanding, as if the events described happened just yesterday to people she knew intimately.

Probably the most provocative of the new folk singers is 21-year-old Bob Dylan. He has an air of innocence on stage. He used to sing for a living on the streets of Southern towns and cities. His corduroy Huck Finn cap is no affectation, but a reminder of those days when he passed it around for the collection. He has already been dubbed the Elvis Presley of Folk Music and Woodie Guthrie's Successor, but Bob resists attempts to classify him.

Bob sings blues in country style, cowboy songs – everything he has heard in years of wandering around America. But he sings nothing as well as his own songs. If he fulfills the promise shown so far, he may well come to be known as an important poet of the people. He told me of his meeting with one of the "Beat poets" who had several books published. The poet told Bob, "You have it all over us. Your poetry is great and you always find the right words."

**"I don't understand these people,"** Bob told me, **"You don't have to look around for the right words. There are words all around you. You just have to know what you want to say!"**

And Bob's songs show he knows what to say! Teen-agers, particularly, feel he speaks to them clearly and fearlessly:

*How many roads must a man walk down*

*Before he is called a man?*

*How many seas must the white dove sail*

*Before she sleeps in the sand?*

*How many times must the cannonballs fly*

*Before they're forever banned?*

*The answer, my friend is a-blowin' in the wind*

*The answer is a-blowin' in the wind.*

(© 1962 Witmark Music, Inc.)

A few winters ago Bob found himself in Wisconsin. Some college students going home to New York for the Christmas holidays offered him a lift. He went along, he says, **"just for the ride."** It was terribly cold in Manhattan, and he had nowhere to stay. Wandering through Greenwich Village, he entered one of the coffee houses featuring folk songs. **"I can sing folk songs,"** he said. The owner looked him over, nodded, "You're on!", and Bob walked up to the microphone. After a few songs and some solos on the harmonica, (it's slung around his neck so he can play the guitar at the same time) the crowd went wild.

Despite continuous successful appearances, he planned to return to Wisconsin with his friends. He had always viewed New York with distrust. The day of departure came, but that morning Bob watched some children playing in Washington Square Park. **"They were so friendly and so warm that I decided New York couldn't be that bad, so I stayed!"**

Of his early months in the city Bob says: **"I wrote wherever I happened to be. Sometimes I'd spend a whole day sitting at a corner table in a coffee house just writing whatever came into my head... just anything. I'd look at people for hours and I'd make up things about them, or I'd think, what kind of song would they like to hear… and I'd make one up."**

Though a serious poet, Bob can be very funny. His "Talkin' New York City" and whimsical "Talkin' Bear Mountain Picnic" always amuse his audiences. In the latter, we hear of the ill-fated picnic and the boat which could hold only three thousand:

*Took the wife and kids down to the pier.*

*There were six thousand people there.*

*Everybody had a ticket for the trip.*

*Oh well, I said, it's a pretty big ship!*

*(spoken aside)… Besides, the more the merrier!*

*Well, we all got on and what do you think,*

*That big old boat started to sink.*

*More people kept a-pilin' on…*

*That old ship was a-goin' down.*

*(aside)… Didn't look like no way to start a picnic!*

(© 1962 Duchess Music Corp.)

It will be interesting to follow the career of this unusual, versatile young man, who speaks with warmth and humility in words all can understand.

It's no surprise that Irish balladeers should bring cheers from American audiences. After all, their songs are really old friends. Who doesn't know "Danny Boy," and "Mother Machree"?

When the handsome Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem appear in their heavy white Irish pullover sweaters, the audience stirs expectantly and for good reason! Rousing good singers, and uproariously funny, their charm inevitably wins over the entire crowd. But they are more than mere entertainers with a fast quip. Their humor often shoots darts at human foibles, especially pretentiousness and hypocrisy.

The Tipperary Clancys and the Armaugh Makems have been singing folk songs from cradle to the grave for generations. Both families have always had fine traditional fiddlers and bag-pipers, and everyone could, and did, sing. Diane Hamilton, an expert collector of Irish folk songs, describes recording in the Makem home: "… We gathered early in the evening, often starting with just a few singers, mostly family… and ending around 2 A.M., the house packed to overflowing with neighbors and friends from all over the surrounding countryside who'd come to sing."

Despite this colorful background, neither Liam Clancy nor Tommy Makem, when they were in Ireland, wanted a folk singer's career. Tommy preferred American Hit Parade favorites and used to sing them nightly in the local pubs with a dance band. Liam says he wearied of the familiar folk songs until one day when, "Two Americans came to record the old tunes and revived some instinct in me…"

Despite their success as a singing group in America, in concert halls, on TV, radio and records, they return to Ireland almost every year. "We're having a terrific revival of folk music in Ireland, too," says Tommy Makem. "Ten years ago there were no more than a dozen bagpipers. Now they are springing up all over. I always go home for the big folk festival. What a time we have! About 40,000 people come, and there is dancing and singing right through three days and three nights, in the streets and the pubs! These competitions are always held in small towns that never have more than one hotel, so the townspeople put up the visitors… and there is more fiddling and piping in every house. I wouldn't miss it for anything!"

These are the young performers who, working in different styles, all find a beauty and excitement in the songs they sing. Folk music, quite simply, is universally appealing. But it seems that today folk music is especially appealing to young people. You, too, should be part of this exciting folk music revival. You can be by listening or singing folk songs. As Joan Baez says, "Just pick up a guitar and spend your time with others who sing folk songs. You'll find the songs offer some kind of truth in our disrupted world." For your Ingenue Folk Song Book, follow directions on page 44.

# April 1962, Henrietta Yurchenco (2)

Source: *Three Views of Bob Dylan: 2 - In Defense* published in: *Sounds & Fury*, US magazine, April 1966, pages 21-23.

An interview took place in New York City, New York and was broadcast in *Adventures in Folk Music*, on: WYNC Radio, New York, April 1962. Further excerpts from this and perhaps other conversations at that time were included in the second of a three-part article.

**Three Views of Bob Dylan: 2 - In Defense**

It is the fate of every public figure, politician or theatrical personality, to live in a "goldfish bowl." According to their own prejudices, columnists, disk jockeys, magazine editors, aficionados – and the public at large – *all* condemn and praise, spread rumours and idle gossip, and offer gratuitous and irrelevant predictions. "He's a bum," say one; "he's the White Hope," says the other – and there is nothing to be done about it! 'Tis the nature of the beast.

A recent target for this sort of public scrutiny is young Bob Dylan from Minnesota. Dylan made a stir the first time he walked into a Greenwich Village coffee house and offered a song for his supper, and has been making one ever since. Today he is a star entertainer, adored by young people throughout the country, imitated by a host of pop singers and instrumentalists. His record sales are astronomical, his appearances in universities and concert halls always S.R.O.

Everything Dylan does causes controversy. Even his clothes start tongues wagging. When Bob appeared for the first time he looked like all the other folk singers, wearing blue jeans and a railroad worker's cap (he told me it was for taking up collections). Today he wears bright expensive shirts and fancy boots. His mop of long curly hair hangs down almost to his shoulders.

His several TV appearances on the Steve Allen and Les Crane shows were nothing short of disastrous. Dylan refused to play the game according to the rules: he balked at talk and vapid TV repartee – but he did sing! Why in the world anyone asks him to do what he patently can't or won't do, and why he accepts engagements of this kind, is utterly baffling. Certainly money is not the whole explanation; several years ago, just at the beginning of his meteoric rise to fame, Dylan came down to WNYC for an interview (unpaid) on my program *Adventures in Folk Music*. The "interview" was a fiasco; in front of the mike, conversation bogged down hopelessly. Finally, engineer and production personnel said goodbye and disappeared. Then and only then did Dylan talk. In response to a single question, he spoke for two hours – eloquently, brilliantly and provocatively – but not for taping!

In our age of overexposure it is apparently not enough to excel in one's field; one must be articulate about it and about one's self and be available and responsive to public and critical demand and instruction. I suspect that even our astronauts are selected not only for scientific qualifications and physical endurance, but also, to some degree, for their effectiveness before a microphone.

The controversy over Bob Dylan as a poet extends beyond the minor points mentioned above. Literary academicians also have their say. The publication *Books* conducted a poll of professors, critics and poets, which brought the following responses: Said Howard Nemerov, "Mr. Dylan is not known to me. Regrets." An English professor at the University of Vermont commented: "Anyone who calls Bob Dylan 'the greatest poet in the United States today' has rocks in his head… Dylan is for the birds – and the bird-brained," or, "His poetry sounds like a very self-conscious imitation of Kerouac, and for an English teacher this is pretty feeble praise. My students… have lost respect for Dylan, for they think he is after publicity and the nearest buck." John Ciardi wrote: "My nephew (a drummer) would agree that Bob Dylan is a poet, but like all Bob Dylan fans I have met, he knows nothing about poetry. Neither does Bob Dylan." A few, like John Clellan Holmes, went to his defense: "He has the authentic mark of the bard on him, and I think it's safe to say that no one, years hence, will be able to understand just what it was like to live in this time without attending to what this astonishingly gifted young man has already achieved." All shades of opinion were represented – from blind hostility to unqualified praise, and also the indifference of an older generation forgetful of its own rebellious youth.

If Bob Dylan has done nothing else, he is responsible for the present widespread interest in poetry. He has taken it away from the academicians, off the dusty library shelves, and put it where it can be heard by countless thousands of young people. In our unpoetic age where an audience of a few hundred people at a poetry reading is unusual, Dylan's feat is quite remarkable.

From the start Dylan's poetry was characterized not only by the acuteness and individuality of his vision but by his gift for words and imagery. His poetic tools have been sharpened, particularly in his recent album *Highway*

*61 Revisited*. Virtuosity for its own sake, which sometimes needlessly halted the poetic flow, is now not so pronounced. Though still stunning and often startling, his images are more related to the central theme; therefore his construction is more disciplined, less erratic.

Dylan may be a popular poet, but he is not a simpleton, as some of his critics imply. He is very well read – and a poet of his time. Stanley Kunitz, quoted in Thomas Meehan's *New York Times* article, says: "… and popular art is the foundation on which fine art rests. Thus, the higher the level of taste there is in the popular arts, the more promising is the hope for the evolution of great fine art." But even more to the point is Kunitz' statement "…there is no reason why popular art and a more selective, esoteric art can't cheerfully coexist."

The folk music community has been shaken to its very roots ever since Dylan appeared at the Newport Folk Festival in the summer of 1965 with Paul Butterfield's Blues Band. Writing in *Sing Out*, the nation's leading folk music magazine, Paul Nelson stated that Newport 1965 split apart the two biggest names in folk music, Pete Seeger (who had the backing of the crowd) and Bob Dylan (who was booed off the stage). He writes, "They (the audience) might have believed they were choosing humanity over a reckless me-for-me attitude, but they weren't. They were choosing suffocation over invention and adventure, backwards over forwards, a dead hand instead of a live one." For Nelson also it seems only a matter of Seeger versus Dylan, whether to accept Pete's quest for a better, more brotherly world – or Bob's, "where things aren't often pretty, where there isn't often hope, where man isn't always noble, but where, most importantly, there exists a reality that coincides with that of this planet. Was it to be marshmallows and cottoncandy or meat and potatoes." The choice (continues Mr. Nelson) is between "A nice guy who has subjugated and weakened his art through his constant insistence on a world that never was and never can be, or an angry, passionate poet who demands his art to be all, who demands not to be owned, not to be restricted…"

This oversimplification does gross injustice to Seeger, Dylan, and the audience. It underestimates the great range of Seeger's seasoned understanding and overestimates the profundity of young Dylan's insights. It reflects a recurrent (and regrettable) need of both aficionados and critics – the need for "variety" in their diet of hero-worship; which partly explains why they periodically provide their heroes with a pedestal and just as regularly yank it from under them – a pedestal their heroes never asked for in the first place, by the way. Why in the name of good folk music should anyone have to "choose between" two such authentic (and different) artists as Seeger and Dylan? Cannot we "choose" *both?*

Mr. Nelson makes more sense on the subject of the artist's freedom to write when and how he pleases. Even before Newport, Dylan's free-wheeling wandering from the topical song field had kicked up a storm in folk-song circles. What a blow it was to have the most gifted songwriter since Guthrie not only "desert" the ranks, but disassociate himself from the "movement" entirely! The fact that Bob has never pretended to be solely a protest song writer has not stopped his critics from either condemning him or preaching the path of righteousness to him, or warning him of the dire pitfalls of commercial success.

In one of my talks with Bob at the outset of his career, he described the early months in New York: **"I wrote wherever I happened to be. Sometimes I'd spend a whole day sitting at a corner table in a coffee house just writing whatever came into my head… just anything. I'd look at people for hours and I'd make up things about them, or I'd think, what kind of song would they like to hear and I'd make one up."** Hardly the words of a young writer concerned only with the hot issues of the outer world.

If it were only a question of entertainment criteria, if Dylan were only another Rudy Vallee, Frank Sinatra, Eddie Fisher, or Bing Crosby (all great performers in the popular field) we would have nothing to talk about. But Dylan is different from them all; he is a creator, and he has his literary finger on the pulse of the perplexing problems that beset young people today. His subjects, whether they concern (as they did until recently) political and social issues or whether they reflect inner problems (his current preoccupations), are all germane to our times and his life.

Whether Dylan is a great poet, history will have to decide, but he is unquestionably our most popular. He has given poetry a significance and stature which it has never had in American life. Furthermore, he is a bard – a singing poet in an ancient but thoroughly neglected tradition.

European, Near and Far Eastern and African epic poets have for thousands of years sung their national chronicles. Today, epic poetry (sung poetry) is an important factor in the national culture and has passed into the literary traditions of other lands. Not even such fine poets as Walt Whitman and Robert Frost – among our greatest – were truly popular poets; they were known mainly to intellectuals. This is not of course to imply that all popular poets are great, nor that the stature of the others is diminished.

In his latest albums, *Bringing It All Back Home* (Columbia CL2328 or CS (stereo) 9128) and *Highway 61 Revisited* (Columbia CL 2389 or CS (stereo) 8189), Dylan sings of the chaos and the absurdities of our changing world, the lack of understanding between adults and the young. He ridicules the dullness, the inadequacies and pointlessness of academic life. He chides those of his own generation who would settle for a comfortable protected world, who let others make decisions for them, who prefer status and security to adventure in life. Of the fearful he says, **"there're some people terrified of the bomb, but there are other people terrified to be seen carrying a modern screen magazine."** He speaks out frankly about love and

sex. His poetry reflects a positive attitude: it seems to urge: live as fully and purposefully as possible, intellectually and emotionally. Obviously Dylan is still a protest writer: what else could he be called?

The subjects of Dylan's songs, the substance of his thoughts, are neither startling nor new. The "sexual revolution" which began after World War I is still growing; this present generation has already reaped some advantage from it. (At least teenagers can talk about it at the dinner table.) As for the academic world, when has it not been under fire from hot youth? What makes Dylan's poetic themes relevant today – in short what is "new" – is today's frame of reference. Never before has mankind been threatened, as we are today, with *total destruction*; that is why attitudes toward pleasure for its own sake, the absurdity of life, the desire to escape (or to stand fast and accomplish), are all proper grist to his poetic mill. Because he is a poet, and young, Dylan is frequently impatient, disgusted, intolerant. But one thing is certain: for the young people, whose passionate challenge to the world and its values has not yet been "tempered" by the wear-and-tear of the years, or by the weary cynicism that too often passes for wisdom, and who seem to sense, even when they cannot always critically evaluate, the meaning of his poetry, Bob Dylan is the most popular, the most powerful figure of our time.

The music in Dylan's first albums was in the mainstream of American folk music of the early 1960s. The sources of his musical settings were blues, Southern Appalachian country music, traditional ballads, Woody Guthrie, and early Elvis Presley (before his snake-hipping era). Accompanying himself on guitar and harmonica, Bob emulated country rather than city style. His singing was crude, direct, unembellished, and vey appropriate to his material. Then came the switch to rock-and-roll, or folk-rock, as the combination of folk tune and electrified instruments is called. On the basis of this development (hardly new, for Dylan had been playing popular piano for a long time), he has been roundly condemned by folk music fans.

Duane Eddy, the well known R&R man, has recently recorded Dylan's tunes in instrumental arrangements – and it is quite surprising how good they really are. While it is true that the engineering on *Highway 61 Revisited*, all folk-rock, makes it almost impossible to hear the words over the metallic clang of the instrumental backing, it should not obscure the fact that the album has some great tunes. Some of it is very exciting, but an entire LP of clang, clang, heard at top volume (a necessary condition for listening), is exhausting. What I find unpardonable is the lack of song texts. It has long been the practice of many recording companies to include the words on the album jacket. Why not on Dylan's, where the words are absolutely necessary? Most listeners I know rehear each song a dozen times, writing the words out as best they can. A book of lyrics of *Highway 61* is now in the music stores, so if you want to get the maximum benefit, another investment – a book – is necessary.

Time will tell whether Dylan is a flash in the pan or of lasting importance. I hope Bob will decide for himself what his next move will be, without the "advice" of either his doting admirers or his critics. He has a basic honesty which should see him through. When his first album appeared, my review in *The American Record Guide* was unfavourable. When we met for the first time, Bob looked me squarely in the eye and said, **"I read your review…"**. "I'm sorry", I said, "I didn't like that record!" **"Oh that's all right"**, he said, smiling shyly, **"it *was* terrible, and you were the only one who said so. Thanks!"**

His present disassociation from the issues of war, integration, and nuclear destruction may only be temporary. Part of his irritation may undoubtedly be attributed to the pontifical and patronizing hounding of the people in the topical song field. But nothing is forever. Dylan has shown his ability to express contemporary life on many levels, all of them valid and pertinent to our time. If he chooses to ignore the political scene today, that is his privilege; but no one can accuse him of hiding in an ivory tower. No one denies the urgency of such issues as war and peace, integration, and the war on poverty, but this hardly justifies anyone setting himself up as censor. Will success corrupt him? That remains to be seen. For the present, in this time of dreary conformity and intellectual cowardice in the face of a world gone mad, Dylan's words and music are fresh and alive, and deserve to be heard.

# June 1962, Gil Turner

Source: *Sing Out!*, US magazine, Volume 12, Number 4, October/November 1962, pages 5-7, 9-10.

The interview took place in New York City, New York.

**Bob Dylan - A New Voice Singing New Songs**

"Let me drink from the waters where the mountain streams flood,

"Let the smell of wild flowers flow free through my blood,

"Let me sleep in your meadows with your green grassy leaves,

"Let me walk down the highway with my brothers in peace."

These are the words of the most prolific young songwriter in America today. Bob Dylan has sung them, along with scores of songs he **"put together,"** in coffee houses, nightclubs, taverns, "strip joints," living rooms and the stage of Carnegie Recital Hall. At the age of 21 he has won critical acclaim, a Columbia recording contract, and a clear place as a significant figure in American folk music.

In February 1961 Bob Dylan landed on the New York Island at the end of a zig-zaggy thumb ride across the country from S. Dakota. He was wearing a pair of dusty dungarees, holey shoes, a corduroy Huck Finn cap and he had a beat-up Gibson guitar and two squeaky harmonicas. He wanted a try at singing his 'folky' songs for the people in the big city and to meet the man whose life and music had had a great influence on his own – Woody Guthrie. He had first seen Woody in Burbank, California, a number of years before but had had only the opportunity to watch and listen from a distance and say a brief hello after the program. The second meeting bridged the gap of several generations and began a friendship based on the love of good songs and a common view towards life.

Born in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1941, Bob Dylan began his 'rambling' at the age of a few months. For the next nineteen years he made his home in Gallup, New Mexico; Cheyenne, S.D.; Sioux Falls, S.D.; Phillipsburg, Kansas; Hibbing, Minn.; Fargo, N.D.; and Minneapolis. He dates his interest in music and his own singing **"as far back as I can remember."** Everywhere he went his ears were wide open for the music around him. He listened to blues singers, cowboy singers, pop singers and others soaking up music and styles with an uncanny memory and facility for assimilation. Gradually, his own preferences developed and became more clear, the strongest areas being Negro blues and country music. Among the musicians and singers who influenced him were Hank Williams, Muddy Waters, Jelly Roll Morton, Leadbelly, Mance Lipscomb and Big Joe Williams.

Dylan's first appearances in New York were at hootenannies held in the afternoon hours in Greenwich Village coffee houses. It was at one of these that I first heard him, blowing blues harmonica with singer guitarist, Mark Spoelstra. There was apparent in his singing, playing and lyric improvisation an expressive freedom seldom encountered among white blues singers. Bob Dylan in performance, however, is more than a blues singer. His flare for the comic gesture and the spontaneous quip, the ability to relate his thoughts on practically any subject from hitch-hiking to the phoniness of Tin Pan Alley, and make it entertaining, make Bob's stage personality. It is not a contrived, play-acted personality. One gets the impression that his talk and story-telling on stage are things that just came into his head that he thought you might be interested in.

Part of Dylan's magnetism lies in the fact that he is not the slightest bit afraid of falling flat on his face. If he gets an idea for a song or a story, he does it on the spot without worrying about whether it will come out exactly polished and right. There's a sense of "what's he going to do next?" Whatever comes it is often as much a surprise to the performer as to the audience. Harry Jackson, cowboy singer, painter and sculptor, summed up a Dylan performance rather graphically one night: "He's so goddamned real, it's unbelievable!"

Reality and truth are words that Bob Dylan will use often if you get him into a serious discussion about anything. They are his criteria for evaluating the world around him, the people in it (especially other folksingers), songs to sing and songs to write. If the reality is harsh, tragic, funny or meaningless, it should be thought about, looked at and described. Says Dylan, **"I don't have to be anybody like those guys up on Broadway that're always writin' about 'I'm hot for you and you're hot for me – ooka dooka dicka dee.' There's other things in the world besides love and sex that're important too. People shouldn't turn their backs on 'em just because they ain't pretty to look at. How is the world ever gonna get any better if we're afraid to look at these things?"** Some of "these things" are discrimination, capital punishment, lynching, fallout shelters and peace. (**"The best fallout shelter I ever saw is the Grand Canyon. They oughta put a roof on it and let all the generals and bigshot politicians go and live in it. They seem to like these fallout things pretty much so let 'em live in 'em."**)

Although he can execute some intricate blues runs, do fancy three-finger picking and play in a variety of open tunings, Dylan sticks mostly to simple three-chord patterns and a rhythmic, driving flat-picking style. For him, the words are the important thing and don't need a lot of show-offy instrumental ballast to help them out. **"I could sing 'Porgy and Bess' with two chords, G and D, and still get the story across."**

His vocal style is rough and unpolished, reflecting a conscious effort to recapture the earthy realism of the rural country blues. It is a distinctive, highly personalised style combining many musical influences and innovations.

His first Columbia album, titled simply "Bob Dylan," while capturing some really superb performances, does not show the breadth of his talent. It contains only one humorous selection – a talking blues about some of his New York experiences – and one other song of his own composition, "Song to Woody." With this relatively minor reservation, the record can be wholeheartedly endorsed as an excellent first album and also, incidentally, as a reflection of the growing maturity of the Columbia A & R department. According to advance reports, the second Bob Dylan album will contain a good deal more of his original songs which usually reveal him at his interpretive best.

Dylan's reception from the critics has been mixed and promises to stir up controversy as his audience grows. Robert Shelton of the N. Y. Times finds him to be "bursting at the seams with talent" and is appreciative of his "originality and inspiration," while McCall's magazine regards him as "a young man with the style and voice of an outraged bear." Dylan's reaction to the latter: **"Hah, they don't even know what a bear sounds like. Probably never saw one. Anyway, I don't even know if it's so bad to sound like a bear. When a bear growls, he's really sayin' somethin'."** Newsweek says he "looks and acts like the square's version of a folksinger" (whatever that might be). A prominent critic privately dubs him the "Elvis Presley of folk music." The latter designation is not meant to be derogatory, but merely reflects his wide appeal to young audiences.

His night club appearances at Gerde's Folk City in New York have attracted predominantly youthful and enthusiastic audiences while the elders in the crowd seemed puzzled at his style of singing. Several teenage imitations of Dylan, harmonica, Huck Finn cap and repertoire, have already made their appearance in the Greenwich Village folksong scene. Although he maintains his performance is not consciously tailored for the young, the largest portion of his growing following is made up of persons near his own age.

While Bob is a noteworthy folk performer with a bright future, I believe his most significant and lasting contribution will be in the songs that he writes, three examples of which appear in these pages. Dylan avoids the terms "write" or "compose" in connection with his songs. **"The songs are there. They exist all by themselves just waiting for someone to write them down. I just put them down on paper. If I didn't do it, somebody else would."** His method of writing places the emphasis on the words, the tune almost always being borrowed or adapted from one he has heard somewhere, usually a traditional one. I remember the first night he heard the tune he used for the "Ballad of Donald White." It was in Bonnie Dobson's version of the "Ballad of Peter Amberly." He heard the tune, liked it, made a mental record of it and a few days later "Donald White" was complete. About this song Dylan says: **"I'd seen Donald White's name in a Seattle paper in about 1959. It said he was a killer. The next time I saw him was on a television set. My gal Sue said I'd be interested in him so we went and watched… Donald White was sent home from prisons and institutions 'cause they had no room. He asked to be sent back 'cause he couldn't find no room in life. He murdered someone 'cause he couldn't find no room in life. Now they killed him 'cause he couldn't find no room in life. They killed him and when they did I lost some of my room in life. When are some people gonna wake up and see that sometimes people aren't really their enemies but their victims?"**

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

In one of his songs rejecting atomic war as a possible solution for differences among nations he says:

"If I had riches and rubies and crowns

"I'd buy the whole world and I'd change things around,

"I'd throw all the guns and the tanks in the sea,

"For they all are the mistakes of our past history."

His concluding lines for a "Ballad of Emmett Till":

If you can't speak out against this kind of thing

A crime that's so unjust,

Your eyes are filled with dead men's dirt

Your mind is filled with dust.

Your arms and legs must be in shackled and chained

Your blood must cease to flow,
For you would let this human race
Fall down so godawful low.

From a lively song celebrating the bold actions of students on the civil rights front:

Red and white and brown and black,
We're ridin' this train on a one-way track
We got this far and we ain't turnin' back
We ain't gonna grieve no more.
There's a time to plant and a time to plow
A time to stand and a time to bow,
There's a time to grieve but that ain't now
We ain't gonna grieve no more.

Dylan's flare for the comic is usually put to use in the talking blues form. His "Talking Bear Mountain" is based on newspaper stories of counterfeit tickets sold for an excursion and the resulting overcrowding of the boat. "Talkin' New York" satirises some of his early troubles in the big city. "Talkin' Havah Nagilah" was made up especially for members of the audience that shout out requests for songs way out of his line.

Dylan is adamant in his insistence that his songs remain as he has written them without being watered down. There is at least one major record company A & R man bemoaning Dylan's stubbornness in refusing to alter one of his songs. He wanted to use "Gamblin' Willie" for one of his popular recording stars, but wanted a verse changed so that the cause of Willie's gambling became an unfortunate love affair. Dylan refused on the ground that Willie was a real person whom he knew and the change would not conform to the truth as he knew it.

Dylan's plans are simply to keep on singing wherever people want to hear him (but preferably not in night clubs) and putting down songs as fast as they come into his head. The present record is five songs in one night. The latest is a song about blacklisting, inspired by the case of John Henry Faulk. The chorus of it goes:

Go down, go down you gates of hate,
You gates that keep good men in chains,
Go down and die the lowest death,
And never rise again.

# Mid August 1962, Rachel Price

Source: *FM-Stereo Guide*, US magazine, October 1962, pages [13]-15. The text reproduced here is from *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 137, March-April 2008, pages 47-49.

**BOB DYLAN**

In the winter of ’61 a nineteen year old folksinger fresh from the West, wandered into midtown Manhattan with suitcase in hand and a guitar on his back. Minutes later a policeman approached him and in the manner native to New York’s finest asked to see his identification. It was shown. "What are you doing here, buddy? If it wasn’t so cold, I’d open your cases and check them. You’d better leave the district." The youth deciding to follow such strongly worded advice, made his way downtown to Greenwich Village and hasn’t been approached by a policeman since.

Born in Minnesota and arriving in N.Y. straight from six months at the University where he learned that “lots of people go to college,” Bob Dylan got his first real opportunity to sing in New York at Gerde’s Folk City in the Village. Mr. Dylan is a folksinger of strength, a “putter together” of songs about anything that absorbs his interest, and a musician who accompanies himself on guitar and harmonica with great skill and facility. Although Dylan has had no formal musical training his control of the steel stringed guitar, working in blues and also country patterns, shows a developing style reminiscent of the primitive country singing men whom he points out as his influences. His harmonica playing is laughing and hard - a whooping style which comments aptly on the lyrics. He has been likened to his good friend Woody Guthrie, called a musical Chaplin because of his ragamuffin appearance and manner of delivery; however, there is a definite style in the making and an original intelligence at work. Such songs as *Talking New York* which describes his reception in the city and *Talking Havah Nagilah* which satirizes folk songs and singers are incisive, humorous and biting comments. While his more serious topical songs (*Song to Woody* and *Answers Blown in the Wind*) show sharp insight as well as an unusual lyric gift. **“Some people,”** he says, **“consider me a poet, but I can’t think about it. There are too many poets.”** He writes songs about incidents that move him to sing. **“Marilyn Monroe’s death is worthy of a song about all of the little people who took advantage of her, and didn’t take time to think that she was a person. Just sitting around at Actor’s Studio she was more glamorous than a hundred Elizabeth Taylors.”**

Despite his tousled appearance, his distinctive and ever present corduroy cap and a far from soothing singing style, Bob Dylan has recently been made aware that he is a public figure. With one record on the market and a second *Bob Dylan’s Blues* scheduled for release soon, he finds himself in a new and, for him, difficult position. **“Everyplace”** according to the singer, **“is a state a mind. When I came to New York, I spent a lot of time visiting Woody Guthrie sick in a New Jersey hospital and I wrote a song to him. But I don’t think I would write it today.”** His statement did not seem to come from a change of affection, but from being caught for the first time in a tug between his personal life and assumed responsibilities. He seems to feel unable to move out. He has a contract and responsibilities to critics who befriended him at an earlier period in his career when Village coffee houses rejected him because… “You sound like a hillbilly. We want folksingers here.” Dylan participated in a Singout at Carnegie Hall last month and is to give a Town Hall recital on October 5. He has consistently been praised by the critics, but his attitude is not that of a young man on his way up. **“I am,”** he says, **“unable to think about the future. I just returned from a trip to the West and I had forgotten how quiet and pleasant life was there. You don’t have to plan things, they just happen. Right now I’m waiting... waiting for my girl to come home from a trip.”** In another mood, he is very excited about his career, about his opportunity to appear on the stage with Pete Seeger, about his life in New York with his girl, Susie.

Bob Dylan doesn’t talk as well as he writes songs. His inarticulateness exists only until one hits upon something which touches him personally, and then disappears. It doesn’t at all affect his brusque, clear and unsentimental vocal arrangements. **“I sing any song that comes to mind. I talk for awhile until I can think of something to sing.”** He has no difficulty with an audience, and his humorous and sardonic way with topical lyrics belie his conversational hesitancy. He is a gentle mannered and cooperative young man but he is really insistent on doing things in his own way. **“I was happiest the most when John Hammond asked me to record. Not only because of the chance to record, but because I admired the man who asked me. I want to give but on my terms. Nightclubs are not my terms. People go there to see gladiators fight, and I don’t want to be a part of the spectacle.”** He also objects to performing for a teenage audience. **“Teenagers have so much stuff shot at them because they buy so much, and are such easy prey. I don’t want to be one more bullet in the gun aimed at them.”** He seems concerned about the diluted music that makes up the teenagers listening fare because **“I am not so far removed from those years myself. Elvis Presley was a good singer in the beginning...”**

# October 1962, Billy Faier

Source: Broadcast on *The Billy Faier Show*, on: BAI-FM radio, New York, October 1962. Transcript published in *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 80, Winter 2024, pages 8-9, 11. Transcribed by Mike Wyvill.

This interview took place in New York City.

BF: Bob Dylan is about to hang himself. Too bad this isn't television so maybe we should be thankful for small favours though, I mean this not being television. Could you do *Baby, Let Me Follow You Down*? He's taking off his coat, straightening out his hair [laughs]. It's all yours Bob.

BD: [Difficult to make out but something like:] **you don't wanna sing that**.

BF: Now, that's a good question.

BD: **Yeah, it's outta tune, did I ever tune it up?**

Other: Yeah.

[There follows a period of tuning up with some inaudible interjections by others in the radio room. Dylan then performs *Baby, Let Me Follow You Down* which is followed by some studio applause.]

BF: Yeah! Say, are you doing any requests?

BD: **How's that?**

BF: Would you do the *Talking John Birch*? Uh?

BD: **Oh, yeah**. [Dylan begins tuning his guitar.]

BF: I'm gonna lower this for ya. We like to give all points of view a hearing on this station.

[Dylan continues tuning.]

BD: **I usually have Dave Van Ronk of New York tune my guitar.**

BF: He plays pretty good too.

[Dylan performs *Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues*.]

BF: What's the one you did with John Gibbons on the last Cynthia Gooding show – that *TB Blues*.

BD: **I can't remember….**

BF: [interrupts] What about *The Ballad of Emmett Till*, can you remember that one?

BD: [guitar strumming] **You wanna hear that one?**

BF: Go! I wanna hear you sing, right?

[Dylan performs *The Death of Emmett Till*.]

BD: **You like that one?**

BF: Yeah, I like that one. Did you write it?

BD: **Yeah, I wrote that one.**

BF: Yeah, you don't have to sing one, you can rest a while. Suit yourself. I just don't want you to wear out.

BD: [interrupts] **For a few days I haven't sung this. It's been goin' through my mind now.**

BF: Alright, go ahead.

BD: **For four or five days, for some reason I've not sung it. I just wanna see if it comes out alright.**

BF: Hope it does.

[Dylan performs *Make Me A Pallet On Your Floor*.]

BF: Y'know, when you were singin' that… Anyway, those of you who have just tuned in, we've been listening to Bob Dylan singing the last fifteen, twenty minutes and, Bob, while you were singing the John Birch Talkin' Blues or the Talkin' John Birch some irate listener called up and said something to the effect if you're going to sing any John Birch songs you sing an anti-Communist song too.

BD: **Aha**.

BF: Now I don't think this is necessarily true.

BD: **I don't know any anti-Communist songs.**

BF: I don't know any either but I mean you know there are a lot of anti-Communist songs but they're by groups

that are left of the Communists, you know, so they'd be pretty obscure, but I just thought I'd tell you. What I'd like to say to that gentleman, if he's still listening, is that everyone is welcome here on the station generally to present their views and on this programme to sing any songs they want and if you know any anti-Communist songs and wanna sing them please come on up and do so.

# Early January 1963, Richard Fariña

Source: *Mademoiselle*, US magazine, August 1964. The text reproduced here is from *The American Folk Scene: Dimensions of the Folksong Revival*, edited by David A De Turk & A Poulin, 1967, Dell Publishing, New York, pages 250-258.

This interview took place in London, England and must have taken place before 16 January 1963 when Dylan flew back to New York.

**Baez and Dylan: A Generation Singing Out**

When Bob Dylan drove across the Berkeley campus with his songs in a hip pocket and a station wagon full of friends, it was as if the undergraduates had been whispering of his imminent arrival for months. They seemed, occasionally, to believe he might not actually come, that some malevolent force or organization would get in the way. From north into Oregon and as far south as Fort Ord, near Monterey, college-age listeners had found time to make the trip, secure tickets, and locate seats in the mammoth Berkeley Community Theatre. They had come with a sense of collective expectancy, some attracted by already implausible legend, some critical of an idiom that seemed too maverick to be substantial, but most with an eye to taking part in a passing event that promised more than usual significance for their generation.

Each of Dylan's concerts this past year had had a way of arousing the same feeling. There was no sensation of his having performed somewhere the previous night or of a schedule that would take him away once the inevitable post-concert party was over. There was, instead, the familiar comparison with James Dean, at times explicit, at times unspoken, an impulsive awareness of his physical perishability. Catch him now, was the idea. Next week he might be mangled on a motorcycle.

The Berkeley performance did little to set anyone at ease. It often looked as if it were calculated to do the opposite, as a result both of its haphazard form and the provocative nature of its content. There were songs about the shooting of Medgar Evers, the Mississippi drowning of Emmet Till, the corporate tactics of munitions executives, even a fiercely cynical review of American war history called "With God on Our Side." Dylan appeared as usual in well-worn clothes, said whatever occurred to him at the time, and sang his songs in no particular order. When he surprised everyone by introducing Joan Baez from the wings, the students were electrified. Their applause was potent, overwhelming, unmitigated. Had a literary audience been confronted by Dylan Thomas and Edna St. Vincent Millay the mood of aesthetic anxiety might have been the same.

To professional observers – and I talked to a good many – this mood threatened to overreach the abilities of the unassisted performers. They spoke of the fragility of the two people on stage, the lack of props and dramatic lighting, the absence of accompanying musicians, the banality of costume. A writer from one of the new folk magazines told me, "They can't be *that* confident, man; sooner or later they're going to play a wrong chord." But he was talking in terms of show-business proficiency, while the performers themselves were concerned with more durable values. They never doubted their capacity to equal the ovation, and, if anything, they felt applause was a dubious reward for their efforts.

They claimed to be there not as virtuosos in the field of concertized folk music but as purveyors of an enjoined social consciousness and responsibility. They believed they were offering contemporaries the new musical expression of a tenuous American legacy, a legacy that threatened to become the most destructive and morally inconsistent in the nation's history. They felt the intolerability of bigoted opposition to civil rights, the absurdity of life under a polluted atmosphere, and they were confident that a majority of their listeners felt the same way. "I don't know how they do it," said a San Francisco columnist, "but they certainly do it." When they left the stage to a whirlwind of enthusiastic cheers, it seemed that the previously unspoken word of protest, like the torch of President Kennedy's inaugural address, had most certainly been passed.

Significantly, when Joan and Dylan are together and away from the crush of admirers and hangers-on, the protest is seldom discussed. They are far more likely putter with the harmonies of a rock 'n' roll tune or run through the vital scenes of a recent movie than consider the tactics of civil disobedience or the abhorrence of biological warfare. Like many another person in his early twenties, they derive a sense of political indignation from the totality of every-day conversations and media that surround them – a process more akin to osmosis than ratiocination. And because of this subjective approach to the problems at hand, metaphor is better suited than directness to their respective dispositions.

"I don't like the word 'bomb' in a song," Joan said one evening, watching a fire in her sister's small Carmel cabin. The flames were the kind that hissed and crackled, causing small coals to pop, and sometimes explode with surprising violence. They seemed to reinforce her feeling that simple, explicit reference to heat and

radiation was too easy to slough off, that this never evoked anything more than superficial interest and sympathy in an insufferable situation. Speaking or singing with regard to megatons, fall-out, strontium 90, nuclear deterrents, overkill ratios, genetic mutation, all in so many facile phrases, might have been necessary for raising the initial indignation of the populace, but it was certainly not sufficient. "People don't listen to words like those," she said. "They hear them, sure, but they don't listen."

Certainly, popular American reaction to these concepts had already proved, on the whole, nothing short of apathetic. A more meaningful vocabulary was needed to loosen fundamental feelings. Students across the country were helplessly aware of this fact whenever their civil or political protests were met by blatantly bureaucratic response from public officials, elders, and even fellow students. Posters scrawled with "Ban the Bomb" or "No More Jim Crow" were invariably treated with a disdain that belied any awareness of the gravity of the causal situation. The students, seeking a more profound language and finding such language in folk music, looked to folk musicians as their spokesmen; and the musicians said and sang what they could. Last year, however, the vivid and topical imagery of a self-styled Midwestern folk-poet finally lent their arguments more vigorous meaning. And even from the point of view of the bureaucrats, this meaning was difficult to evade.

**"It ain't nothin' just to walk around and sing,"** Dylan said: **"you just have to step out a little, right?"** We were strolling in the pre-dawn London fog a year and a half ago, six months before he made the now historic appearance at the Newport Folk Festival. **"Take Joanie, man, she's still singin' about Mary Hamilton. I mean where's that at? She's walked around on picket lines, she's got all kinds of feeling, so why ain't she steppin' out?"**

Joan quite possibly had asked herself the same question. As much as any of the young people who looked at her for guidance, she was, at the time, bewildered and confused by the lack of official response to the protesting college voices. She had very little material to help her. At one point she was enough concerned about the content of her repertoire to consider abandoning public appearances until she had something more substantial to offer. Traditional ballads, ethnic music from one culture or another were not satisfactory for someone whose conception of folk singing extended so far beyond an adequate rendering. Her most emphatic song was "What Have They Done to the Rain?" and she was, one felt, more personally moved by the image of a small boy standing alone in a tainted shower than by the implication of the remaining lyrical content.

By May, 1963, however, she had a firsthand opportunity to hear Dylan perform at the Monterey Folk Festival in California. His strong-willed, untempered, but nonetheless poetic approach to the problem filled the gap and left her awed and impressed. Moreover, by the time she had finished going over the songs he left behind, it seemed his lyrics would finally provide the substance for her continuing role as a soulful representative of the generation, a young woman whose very function seemed defined by an ability to mirror alternatives to the malaise of the times.

Meaningfully enough, the highest personification of these social concerns was not indifferent to Joan's role. Just weeks before the Dallas assassination ended an era of Washington style that was based in part on an implicit acceptance of contemporary arts, Joan received a telegram from Lyndon B. Johnson asking her to perform for the President. Since that time, the invitation was renewed, and on May 26 she sang for President Johnson at a Democratic fund raising show. Yet, it speaks for her place in the company of essentially interpretive artists that she has never strayed very far from the sensibilities of those closest to her age.

By living the life many university students would like to live, were it not for the daily concerns of textbooks and money from home, and by spending most of her public time in and around the nation's campuses, she has had no trouble keeping a half-conscious finger on an eager college pulse. Young people are very much aware that she drives an XKE and that it has been in the repair pits an inordinate number of times. So much so that a recent *Channing* television show used the car as an insipid symbol of the paradox of high speed and homely folk tradition. Some who live nearby are also used to seeing her chug down the Big Sur coast at midnight with four dogs in a red jeep, to watch the moon above the Pacific. To most students it comes as no surprise that she is refusing to pay 60 percent of her income tax, a figure that corresponds to the government's allotment for defense.

Occasionally one gets the feeling that people try too hard to relegate her to a premature immortality, and the subsequent rumours are in kind: She has come down with a mysterious paralysis and will never sing again; she has been arrested at the Mexican border with a Jaguar full of narcotics; she is living with Marlon Brando on a Choctaw Indian reservation. In what many would call the alarming calm of her California surroundings, the exoticism of these stories seems absurd.

It was to her home in Carmel that Dylan came last spring just after the Berkeley concert. He was on his way to Los Angeles in the station wagon, travelling with Paul Clayton, once the most recorded professional in the folk revival; Bobby Neuwirth, one of the half-dozen surviving hipster nomads who shuttle back and forth between Berkeley and Harvard Square; and a lazy-lidded black-booted friend called Victor, who seemed to be his road manager. They arrived bearing gifts of French-fried almonds, glazed walnuts, bleached cashews, dried figs, oranges, and prunes. Here again the legions of image-makers might well have been disappointed by the progress of the evening. How could so volatile a company get itself together without some sort of apocalyptic

scene dominating the action? Instead, Joan's mother, visiting from Paris, cooked a beef stew. We talked about old friends, listened to the Everly Brothers, and finally got Clayton to do a number of songs that few others can sing with such understated composure. The only overt references to Dylan's music came when Joan said she might want to record an entire album of his songs and he told her, "sure thing."

The college student's reaction to Dylan has been somewhat more complex than their acceptance of Joan, however. It was clear from his initial entry on the folk scene that he was neither as musically gifted and delicate, nor as consistent in performance as she. Yet Robert Shelton, now the editor of *Hootenanny* magazine, predicted that these very qualities would contribute to his popularity. "He's a moving target," Shelton said in New York, "and he'll fascinate the people who try to shoot him down." In the beginning, when he was better known for his Huck Finn corduroy cap than his abilities as a composer, he jumped back and forth between Boston and New York, developing a style and manner that brought the manifestation of the pregnant pause to uncanny perfection. Some still found a discomforting similarity to Jack Elliott, or too much affectation in his droll delivery; but everyone agreed his smirk implied a certain something left unsaid and that whatever it was, if he got around to letting you in on the secret, it would be worthwhile.

It developed that this something was his writing. In no time, Dylan nearly abandoned established material for songs of his own composition. The transition from one to the other was nearly imperceptible since he had the good sense to keep his overall cadence within the framework of familiar traditional music. He begged and borrowed from the established ballad styles of the past (in some cases quite freely), from the prolific works of Woody Guthrie, from the contemporary production of friends like Clayton. But the stories he told in his songs had nothing to do with unrequited Appalachian love affairs or idealized whorehouses in New Orleans. They told about the cane murder of Negro servant Hattie Carroll, the death of boxer Davey Moore, the unbroken chains of injustice waiting for the hammers of a crusading era. They went right to the heart of his decade's most recurring preoccupation: that in a time of totally irreversible technological progress, moral amelioration has pathetically faltered; that no matter how much international attention is focused on macrocosmic affairs, the plight of the individual must be considered, or we are forever lost.

Such a theme has often been associated with the output of folk poets; in fact, since the time John Henry laid down his hammer and died from the completion of the industrial revolution, they have celebrated little else. But even including the dynamic figures of Guthrie and Leadbelly in this century, no creator of the idiom has ever received such a wide cross section of public attention. It is quite possible that already, within the astonishing space of a single year, Dylan has outdistanced the notoriety of still another spiritual forbear, Robert Burns. And like Burns he has the romantic's eye for trading bouts of hard writing with hard living. He often runs the two together, courting all the available kinds and degrees of disaster, sleeping little, partying late, and taking full-time advantage of the musician's scene in New York's Greenwich Village, where he keeps a small apartment. Using a blowtorch on the middle of the candle is less aesthetic than burning it at both ends, but more people see the flame. He can dip in and out of traditional forms at will, shift temperament from cynical humor to objective tragedy, and never lose sight of what people his age want to hear.

This wanting is in no way a passive or camouflaged matter. It is part and parcel of a generation's active desire to confront the very sources of hypocrisy, which in early years deceived them into thinking that God was perforce on their side, the good guys were always United States Marines, that if they didn't watch the skies day and night the Russians, Vietnamese, North Koreans, tribal Africans, and Lord knows who else would swoop down in the darkness and force them all into salt mines. Dylan feels a very critical trust was betrayed in these exaggerations. He feels further, in what amounts to a militant attitude, that it is up to him to speak out for the millions around him who lack the fortitude to talk themselves.

Because he speaks for them, undergraduates in many ways seek to identify with his public image, just as they have with Joan's. They search for the same breed of rough Wellingtons and scuff them up with charcoal before wearing. They spend weekends hitchhiking, not so much to get somewhere as to log hours on the road. I've even come across an otherwise excellent guitarist and harmonica player from Fort Ord who tried a crash diet with Army food in order to achieve the necessary gaunt look. The image, of course, has shifted with Dylan's increasing maturity. Some fans are reluctant to accept his early attempts at playing with his past. Last winter, an article in *Newsweek* went to great pains recalling his middle-class upbringing in Hibbing, Minnesota, and alluding to a prior, less attractive surname, which had been removed by the courts. After the Berkeley concert a nineteen-year-old girl in a shawl told me, "He has a knack for saying what younger people want to hear. It's only too bad he had to change his name and not be able to accept himself." I reminded her that she liked his music, but she went on: "People want an image. They carry it around to make their scene look more important. They're so many guys wanting to be something they're not, that Bobby makes a nice alternative. At least he has integrity."

The seeming paradox between name-changing and integrity is significant. His admirers enjoy possessing a certain amount of private information and using it against him as insidiously as they try to hasten Joan's premature immortality. But he has done something they will never do: stepped so cleanly away from his antecedents and into the exhilarating world of creative action as to make the precise nature of an early history look insignificant. Behind the college students of America today, no matter what their protest against

segregation, injustice, and thermonuclear war, are the realities of their parents, the monthly check, and their hometown. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, as the title of his second album sets him up, lives in a world that is the realm of their alter-ego.

But in the meantime the word still has to be passed, and both Joan and Dylan go to the campuses to make sure that it gets there. After the evening of the French-fried almonds and beef stew, both of them journeyed into Southern California – Dylan with his friends in the station wagon, Joan in the XKE. There was some anticipatory talk of getting together at one or more of the concerts, but circumstances were not propitious and they went their separate ways. Dylan stayed at the Thunderbird Motel in Hollywood, drifting out to parties and local folk nightclubs between engagements; Joan stayed with friends of the family in Redlands, lying in the sun, going to bed early. She sang at her old high school one afternoon and was moved to tears by the standing ovation. When she did an encore, her mention of Dylan's name brought cheers. That same night, he returned the compliment to a devoted audience in Riverside.

It could be said that during these respective performances, as with each of their concerts before predominately young crowds, their specific relationship to their generation is most unhindered and best understood. They utter a statement of unmistakably mortal grievance against what they stand to inherit as a result of the blunders of their immediate forbears. In the one case this statement is from the source, in the other through interpretation, but in neither is there any distance between expression and experience. To the young men and women who listen, the message is as meaningful as if it were uttered in the intimacy of their own secluded thought.

# Mid to Late January 1963, Alan Lomax

Source: *Lomax Digital Archive*: https://archive.culturalequity.org/field-work/bob-dylan-1963/new-york-city-163/masters-war-commentary-bob-dylan-about-masters-war-john. The transcript reproduced here is from *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 70, Summer 2021 (published August 2021), pages 98-99.

This interview was conducted in Alan Lomax's apartment, New York City.

**It Was In Putney**

When Dylan returned from his visit to the UK in early 1963 he popped over to Alan Lomax's apartment to play him one of his new songs which Lomax sensibly recorded. It has now been made available together with the conversation that followed it in which Dylan discusses how he came to write it and more. Here is what was said:

AL Where did you write that Bobby?

**I wrote that, I think I wrote that one in England. I wrote that in England.**

AL Was it something you read about in the papers?

**Yeah, I think I wrote it about… Well them people over in England don't like Kennedy much you know. When the English papers came out I remember I was in this rehearsal house sort of thing out there in Putney. You know where that is? An' I just kept seein' the papers every day 'bout 'They're putting down MacMillan' 'cos they know Kennedy's gonna screw him on these missiles. An' Kennedy goes down to Nassau or some place to talk an' they got headlines in the paper underneath MacMillan's face goin' "Don't mistreat me, don't mistreat me, how can you treat a poor maiden so?" All because the United States won't give 'em these guns, these bombs, y'know. 'Cos the United States don't want 'em to have 'em an' the United States wants to be this big power or somethin' like that. An' then De Gaulle, he's beautiful, De Gaulle an' he had this big thing out there. He said he's got his bomb an' he's gonna explode it. You don't get this stuff in papers back here. Seems like it's a different statement. An' he's got a bomb an' he's gonna explode it some place around England y'now. An' they're all worried in England an' he says "No, the United States can test their bombs 'cos we're gonna test this one too 'cos France has always been a big power and France can have a bomb." An' Khrushchev, he's the beautifulest guy, well he's a poet, Khrushchev. Oh wow. He's a poet, him man. When he talks… in the paper it has this huge statements by Khrushchev, they say "Who won?" they say in the thing about over Cuba and Khrushchev says "Did you win?" An' everybody in the United States thinks they win an' they think everybody in Russia thinks that they win in Russia 'cos everybody here thinks that we won so we think that everybody in Russia thinks that they win. But Khrushchev says "Hey, no baby." He says "Russia didn't win." He says "United States didn't win." He says "Humanity wins". He's talkin' about this guy, when he was fighting in the Second World War, and he was a commander in the army. He said he gave somebody an order to do something y'know, an' the guy came back an' he didn't do it an' he says to Khrushchev 'I couldn't do it, I couldn't do the order." An' Khrushchev was kinda pissed off by this and he says "Why don't you take a gun and shoot yourself?" he says, walkin' away. An' the guy says "Just a minute" an' the guy comes up in front of Khrushchev an' takes a gun an' kills himself right in front of Khrushchev. An' Khrushchev says "He thought that was gonna make him hero." He said "It didn't make him a hero, it stank." He said "That ain't bein' a hero!"**

# 28 March 1963, Bob Fass

Source: Broadcast on *Radio Unnameable*, WBAI-radio, New York, 28 March 1963. Transcript published in *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 80, Winter 2024, pages 11-13, 15-17, 19-21, 23. Transcribed by Alan Hoaksey.

This interview took place in New York City. Suze Rotolo was also being interviewed. Not so much an interview, more Dylan and Suze clowning around, improvising in the studio with Bob Fass. Dylan poses variously as 'Rory Grossman', 'Frog Rugster', 'Rumple Billy Burp' and 'Elvis Bickel'.

Fass: Well you're gonna have to talk then for a while Bob.

**Dylan: Yeah.**

Fass: No, not sigh.

**Dylan: Its… He's best at talking, Johnny Cash.**

Fass: [???] fantastic talker. I think we ought to give Bob…

[Indecipherable chat with music playing loudly over the top.]

<plays 'In My Time Of Dying'>

Fass: And then Bob Dylan walked in. And I had just coincidently cued up a Bob Dylan record I was gonna play. Bob Dylan's 'Freight Train Blues'. There was gonna be another 'Freight Train Blues', then we were going to somebody else's blues. That was all. But Bob Dylan is here and he brought up an acetate, which is a recording that is from his new unreleased album and the record for this is not… we're not plugging it because the record company doesn't even know he's here and they'd probably be very bugged because there's a release date on it or something. But don't worry Bob, because nobody listens.

**Dylan: Right.**

Fass: OK. So er…

**Dylan: I'm not gonna listen because I'm not at home myself.**

Fass: Yeah? We were gonna… I'll tell you what, we'll talk to Bob Dylan and we'll try to get some more of Steve Gable's tapes from Mexico. Pig squealing, that kind of thing. And more like that.

ANO: It's a coincidence squealing.

Fass: There's absolutely no connection between pig squealing and 'Corrina'.

<plays 'Oxford Town' and 'Corrina, Corrina'>

Fass: OK. We're on now.

**Dylan:** [chuckles]

Fass: Now I'm in the studio and er…

ANO: Need some coffee?

Fass: First of all I announced that cut incorrectly. First time I said that we were gonna hear 'Corrina'. We didn't hear 'Corrina'. We heard 'Oxford Town' and then the second time, right, you know, I didn't wanna make a bad joke so I just let it go right into 'Corrina'. So we heard 'Corrina' and 'Oxford Town' – it was backwards, inside out. Bob Dylan is here in the studio. It sounds as though I'm in a… I'm operating from inside a piano. It's a terribly echoey thing here. I don't know why. But anyway… talk Bob.

**Dylan: Uh, go ahead.**

[people talking over each other]

**Dylan: I played it last time. It's called 'I Shall Be Free'. And then we'll talk.**

<plays 'I Shall Be Free'>

**Dylan:** [inaudible] **they didn't put it on.**

Fass: What did you say?

**Dylan: There's about twenty more verses to that, but they cut me off.**

[Laughter]

Fass: That was Bob Dylan. And what's that called?

**Dylan: 'I Shall Be Free'.**

Fass: You certainly were.

<plays 'Down The Highway'>

Fass: Ladies and gentlemen, that was the great Bob Dylan you just heard. And, while the record was going on in the studio, I'm afraid that John Harold and Dylan, Mr Dylan, who was here with us and his… young sweetheart Suze Rotolo left the studio. And now we have to take their place Snork Randle, Suze Annamurkel and Rory Grossman. And, actually, the whole scene is changed and we'd like to get these people to say a few words to the listening public. And I'm Snork Randle. Well Rory and cracking up all over the place [Suze giggles] let's hear a few giggles from you. Well Snurk.

**Dylan:** [coughs] **I have a cold, you know.**

Suze: Right.

**Dylan: It's too bad they all had to leave and leave us here like this. What did you think of the party last night?**

Fass: It was pretty good. It was pretty good. sorry that some of the people from Sioux Falls High School couldn't make it though. But it's… it was pretty good to see some of the old people. Yeah.

**Dylan: Buster looked good, didn't he?**

Fass: Buster? Yeah, yeah. He is er… curly headed as ever. Yeah, and how'd you like it Suze? Anna?

Suze: Oh, I thought it was fine, really fine. really.

Fass: Yeah. They tell me, Rory, that you've been recording under the pseudonym of Bob Dylan. Are you trying to take thename away or trying to cash in on Dylan's fame?

**Dylan: No, well that wasn't true, that wasn't true. I did make one record under that name but it was quickly taken off the market and everything got settled, you know. But I didn't do it again. That's the important thing. I don't expect to be doing it again in the near future. Maybe now and then give it a go but, you know, that's that. That's as far as that goes. As far as recording under the name Bob Dylan, I'm just using my own name, Rory Grossman.**

Fass: I see. Yes, well that was Rory Grossman. er… sometimes people know him as Bob Dylan. There's quite a resemblance. We'd like to play one of Rory's tunes and you'll see the amazing similarity between the two. What do we have?

**Dylan: Well Snurk, wait a second now, you know. I don't wanna do that because I might get some people mad. You know… you know John Harold, the guy that just left?**

Fass: Yeah.

**Dylan: What do you think of him?**

Fass: Well it's weird. I don't know, these er… I mean hillbillies are kinda weird around New York. I don't know how it… how it works that you find these guys living down The Village and stuff, and I…

**Dylan: I have one thing against them, you know, generally. I don't know, ever since I heard Ed McCurdy, I sort of knew where Johnny got his start, you know.**

Fass: Yeah, that's true.

**Dylan: I mean, it's (?straight like) guitar… guitars right, you know.**

Fass: Yeah. That's kinda a funny thing because at the same time that John Harold did sort of start picking up on the Ed McCurdy thing, Bob Dylan – a lot of people don't know this little fact – but he is actually the third member of that famous clothing chain, what is it? Er… Brooks Brothers. He's er…

**Dylan: Well… well.**

Fass: You're his brother. And it's an amazing thing. He doesn't quite model their clothes and though he doesn't have his own [unintelligible]

**Dylan:** [unintelligible] **sleeping in back of the store. That's what it is…**

Fass: Oh.

**Dylan: …how that came about, you know.**

Fass: Yeah, I did hear that once. Say, do we have a record there of Rory? What's that? He's waving in the control room. I'm actually… I'm not too familiar with the radio station jargon. The… what? [people talking over each other] Oh, that's… this is the Ten Street Rumblers are gonna do something now, here. It's one of those crazy city bluegrass groups with actually Snurk [fades]…

<plays 'Talkin' New York'>

**Dylan: Howdy. This is Frog Rugster. Sitting next to me is Roshie R. Buckland. Next to him is Nancy Jones. We just sort of came in here, there are three other people before us. We're sort of looking 'em out and now they're in the hall. What we're in here for is… we're starting a new improvisation of theatre. It's called naked theatre and it's gonna be running about July. We're trying to find a theatre house for it and…**

Suze: We're not soliciting though.

**Dylan: No, we're not soliciting, anything like that. But we're gonna sort of throw it around and get the ideas across here, what we all mean by this naked theatre type thing. It's… it's a very, very personal type theatre. It's sort of like there are no actors on the stage. Everybody is an audience and er… Roshie, why don't you tell the people a little bit?**

Fass: Well, it's weird. I think it's gonna be wild stuff… all that naked theatre stuff and all. It's gonna be weird.

Suze: Well you can't really classify it enough, well you know.

Fass: That's true. Except that it's gonna be a little weird.

**Dylan: It'll be kinda naked. Naked's the word.**

Fass: Uh, yeah.

Suze: No, no. Don't use the word.

Fass: Don't use the word. Wild stuff making this, you know.

*-----*-----*

**Dylan: Howdy, this is Rumple Billy Burp with Alexis Menuhin and Aaron [???] III. We're here… we got them… them people that were here before talking about that naked stuff we sort of laid them out, too. And right now they're taking the elevator down. We're up here, we have a little group, it's called Folksinger Suits Incorporated. And we make clothes for folksingers to play on the stage, in the house, in the coffee houses, all over the place in the concert arenas, on the highway. Just about any place you wanna go we make the clothes for the folksingers to go with. And on my… on my left, over here, is the stylish Miss Alexis Menuhin, and she's a cousin of the violinist. She plays the violin and she knows a lot about it, and she's just recently taken up the fiddle and is trying to get a little closer to the way that people dress. And she'll tell you a little bit about the dressing of these… of what our organisation does. Alexis, can you evaluate on that a little bit?**

Suze: Well, I have to do a lot of research still, being as how I gave up the classical violin to get more of the sense and feeling, you know, of the folk world as it is, you know, and folk scene. I have to mingle with the folks…

**Dylan: Yes, yes.**

Suze: …you understand? Therefore, it's hard for me to know I am designing because I have been walking about the New York places where one sees the folksingers, you know, the real 'in' folksinger types. And I see what clothes they wear and how they're most comfortable. I wanna keep it good and folky – that should be our motto most likely, you know. We're still working on… this is a sorta, you know Aaron [?Simplestreet], you know, he's… he's right 'in', he's really 'in', and…

**Dylan: You know a few of the folksingers don't you.**

Suze: Right, yes.

Fass: [adopting a stupid voice] Duh, yes I do. And I've gotta song that kinda explains the whole works. It's 'Streets of Laredo' and it's [?] explains. It goes [sings]:

♫ I can see by your outfit that you are a cowboy.

You can see by my outfit that I'm a cowboy, too.

We can see by our outfits that we are all cowboys.

If you get an outfit, you can be a cowboy, too. ♪♫

Suze: [sarcastically] Oh, that's lovely. [claps] That's lovely.

Fass: Thank you very much.

Suze: Fine.

**Dylan: You told the rambler uniform, you know, the hitch-hiking one… uniform that you've been designing.**

Fass: Oh!

Suze: The hard travelling chapter.

Fass: That's… kinda funny, it has something to do, a little bit, with the naked theater they were talking about before.

Suze: [laughs]

Fass: It… they don't quite wear too much when they're on the road. It's one big rip. The whole thing [sings] ♪♫ Sing songs ♪♫ Sing, he said. Well, I'm sorry, I don't really [?] that Acapulco stuff so, you know… Well, actually, it's an interesting thing, folksingers' uniforms…

*-----*-----*

**Dylan: Speaking of modern poetry… we have a poet here tonight, his name is Harold Johns and he happens to be one of the finest Village poets around. I read his poetry just about any place you could possibly think of reading poetry. And I hear him constantly through the streets and echoing through the alleys. Poetry! And Harold Johns happens to be sitting right next to me right now. My name happens to be Elvis Bikel. Harold, how are you?**

Fass: Well, I'm not feeling too good.

**Dylan: Why?**

Fass: Well, you see, it's like this:

This morning I rose
From my sweet repose
I outs on my clothes
And down the streets I goes
I meets one of my foes
By the name of Mose
And you suppose
I step on his toes
And he struck out a blow
Which I couldn't oppose
And hits my nose
And causes blood to go
In the river where the water goes
Up I rose
And I brush off my clothes
And down the streets I goes
To my sweet repose
And that's all I knows.

Suze: Oh! Oh! Oh! That's so beautiful.

**Dylan: That knocks me out. You can't say anything at all without poetry coming out of your lips, can you?**

Fass: That's true. I do not talk all the time, but when I do, I talk in rhyme.

Suze: Oh! See folks, there are geniuses left. There are.

**Dylan: I… I'd even talk to you sitting here because you sort of put me down just sort of being there, you know. And I can't really think of anything to say to such a genius, you know. I… I… would you like to read a serious poem or just so you shout out one for the people.**

Fass: Well, er… I'm just sitting here a spell, I don't know exactly what to yell. But, let's see, what the… [cuts]

*-----*-----*

Fass: We're now gonna discuss a real, sort of, modern day subject, sort of time machines. A lot of people feel now that they'd like to escape from life in different forms and we do this in other ways. But time machines are… we were just thinking of this subject before as it was… it was a movie by that name, and it was a fantastic movie and… Suze, Suzianna, Marianna.

Suze: Yeah.

Fass: Saying she wished she had a time machine. Why don't you tell us what you'd do with it if you had one.

Suze: Well, most people, I suppose, would go forward. But I'd go right backward, way back. I'd go back… back to the Stone Age and watch how it goes up and then come back, to present times. Then go off into the future and become a prophet of some sort. Right?

**Dylan: Well, you can get to me now. I just came back from a trip I took in a time machine. I've got lots of things to tell. Lots of things which I really can't say, you know, 'cause if I did say, it would sort of spoil things for a lot of people if I happened to tell what I'd seen, you know, tomorrow and that. But I'm all for time machines. I'm er… I'm all for 'em. I have absolutely nothing against 'em. Let 'em live. Let 'em be. Everybody, you know, do what they want. What about you?**

Fass: I like 'em too. I'd like to know… I don't know… It's kinda like hard to think where I'd take my time to. That's kinda a weird thing in the movie, actually. People are up to a time where there's blond-headed people that can't talk and hairy monsters underground… and stuff. It's just a… it's a weird thing to think of… to place this time machine in one spot and keep it spinning. And he's now got a record here. It's called 'The Time Machine'. Here we go folks with time machine recording.

<plays 'I'll Fly Away' by Carolyn Hester with Dylan on harmonica>

# Early August 1963, Jack A Smith

Source: *The National Guardian*, US newspaper, 22 August 1963, page 7. The text reproduced here is from *Broadside* (New York), US magazine, Number 31, September 1963, page 4.

The location of this interview is unknown.

**A world of his own**

From Minnesota two years ago decamped a roughneck rebel poet and dreamer named Bob Dylan, then 20, packing his guitar and songs, bound-for-glory to New York where he settled unquietly on the Lower East Side and set about to dismember the Establishment, limb by limb.

**"Slush in my boots all winter long wandering around the Village. Cold winter – snow that high,"** he gestured during an interview, arms describing the biggest snowbank since the blizzard of '88. **"Worked all day in a Greenwich Village coffee house blowing harmonica behind some guy for one or two dollars a day – had to eat."**

Bob Dylan has come a long way in two years. Known today as the "most prolific young songwriter in America," his topical protest songs are heard at integration and peace rallies, on records, radio and in concert across the nation. His particular concerns are war, discrimination, capital punishment and exploitation, and his poems and songs reflect implacable anger at warmongers, racists, brutal police and the wealthy – all of whom, he says in a recent song, "ain't a-gonna run my world."

Motivated by a strong desire to run his own world, Dylan utilizes the most trenchant weapons at his command – a poetic imagination and contempt for injustice – to denounce those who want to run it for him, whether they hide behind a KKK hood or a stock market ticker.

Clad in worn boots, rough black trousers and a rumpled work shirt, Dylan's slight frame presents itself as a challenge to all that is comfortable and complacent in American life. His singing is uncontrived and forceful. His language is a combination of working class Minnesota, uncompromised by rules of grammar, and the hip jargon of Harlem and the Village.

**"I don't think when I write,"** he said. **"I just react and put it down on paper. I'm serious about everything I write. For instance, I get mad when I see friends of mine sitting in Southern jails, getting their heads beat in. What comes out in my music is a call for action."**

Dylan has often been compared with Woody Guthrie, whom he reveres, and with Bertolt Brecht, his favorite poet. There are elements of both in his songs and even in his general conversation. Describing the misery brought on the workers of his native state by Eastern mining interests – personalizing the latter with the pronoun "he," Dylan "talked" a song of exploitation and rebellion:

**"You should'a seen what he did to the town I was raised in – seen how he left it. He sucked up my town. It's too late now for the people – they're lost. When will it be too late for him?**

**The same guy who sucked up my town wants to bomb Cuba, but he don't want to do it himself – send the kids. He made all this money, but what does he do to earn it? Take away his money and he'd die. Punch him in the gut enough times and he'd die. He's a criminal, a crook, a murderer."**

Dylan's songs are attempts to punch "him" in the gut. Beyond this he does not profess any social or political philosophy other than the desire for a world in which **"everybody can just walk around without anybody bothering them."** His rebellion is personal, directed against repressive anti-life forces in general, rather than to specifics such as economics and politics.

Capitalism? – **"Well I object to somebody riding around in a Cadillac when somebody else is lying in the gutter."**

Socialism? – **"I'd like to visit Russia someday; see what it's like, maybe meet a Russian girl."**

United States? – **"Ain't nobody can say anything honest in the United States. Every place you look is cluttered with phoneys and lies."** Kennedy? – **"He's all right but he's phoney, pretending all the time."**

Politics? – "**No, I'm not gonna vote because there's nobody to vote for: nobody that looks like me, the way I feel… I'd like to see a government made up of people like Bertrand Russell, Jim Forman (of SNCC), Marlon Brando and people like that."**

Dylan returned recently from the South where he sang during a Negro voter registration drive. He plans to go back soon. In Mississippi, he says, **"there's a feeling in the air. More people are willing to say, 'To hell with my security, I want my rights.' I want to help them if I can. They really dig my music down there, too."**

One of Dylan's most popular songs, "Blowin' in the Wind," reflects the "feeling" in Mississippi and, indeed, throughout the nation: "How many roads must a man walk down before he's called a man/ How many seas must a white dove sail before he sleeps in the sand/ How many times must the cannon balls fly before they're forever banned?/ The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind…"

# Mid 1963, Leroy F. Aarons

Source: *The Washington Post*, US newspaper, 18 August 1963, page G1.

The location of this interview is unknown.

**Fresh Voice Rising in Folk Widerness**

**"Man, I don't work my songs out. I burp 'em out."**

This is the way a skinny, untidy blond youth named Bob Dylan explains the talent that seem destined to make him a show business sensation.

Dylan, 22, has captured the imagination of a large following which is spreading the word about the Greenwich Village rebel who writes and sings songs of anguished protest.

He has been called both a great poet and a phoney. Pete Seeger, the sage of the folk singing set, sees him as heir to the Woodie Guthrie tradition of the 1930s. Others find his sloppiness, Midwestern drawl and flip nonconformity all part of an image designed to win him profitable notoriety.

The answer to the riddle of Dylan probably lies somewhere in between. But anyone who has watched the reaction of a young audience (such as at last month's Newport Folk Festival) to a Dylan performance, is aware that here is someone to be reckoned with.

Dylan's origins are obscure, and he seems to prefer it that way. He says he was born in Sioux Falls, S. D., but other reports place his birth in Minnesota and even New York.

As for education, he talks about auditing courses for six months at the University of Minneapolis. It seems he left home quite young, and spent years wandering across the face of the country, finally settling in Greenwich Village.

His songs – there are now more than 200 of them – are topical, bitter and uncompromising. The words are disarmingly simple, yet there is no denying passages of great power.

Dylan delivers them with an intensity born of obsession. One can see the Furies flying about as his nasal voice performs its anguished exorcism – blond head thrown back sharp, intense eyes clenched beneath pained brow, his thin dungareed body arched against the struggle.

The effect on his audience is electric. And it is an audience that is constantly growing. One of his songs, "Blowin In The Wind", is a hit record as sung by Peter, Paul and Mary. His record albums are bestsellers, and there is talk of a movie contract. If modern press agentry does its job (Dylan's manager is Al Grossman, who guides the fortunes of Peter, Paul and Mary and also Odetta), Dylan could well become this generation's James Dean.

But, unlike Dean, Dylan is a rebel with a cause. His songs rage against a world dominated by the powerful and the unscrupulous. The people of his songs are victims of a great omnipotent THEY – the bombmakers, the warmongers, the politicians, the segregationists, the rightists.

It is Dylan's message, combined with an almost animal sensuality, that sparks his audience. (For all his untidiness, he has sex appeal – or is it because of it?) Many older listeners are repelled, but his young following finds in Dylan an expression of their own half-formed protest against the injustices that outrage the innocent.

(His detractors have asked whether audience reaction to his songs is not merely a guilt spasm for their own lack of action.)

One of Dylan's songs, gaining wide popularity, is "With God on Our Side," a bitter denunciation of the ways in which man rationalizes the evils of war:

*When the Second World War*
*Came to an end*
*We forgave the Germans*
*And then we were friends*
*Though they murdered six million*
*In the ovens they fried*
*The Germans now too have*
*God on their side*

In another pacifist song, “Masters Of War,” Dylan fantasises the destruction of the war conspirators in a final verse:

*I hope that you die and your death will be soon*
*I’ll follow your casket by the pale afternoon*
*And I’ll watch while you’re lowered down to your death bed*
*The I’ll stand over your grave ’till I’m sure that you’re dead.*

One feels in talking with Dylan that here is an explosive, talented youth who might well have turned to hijacking cars had not the fates led him to a more constructive expression at his inner anguish. This anguish seems to have its roots in some very personal struggle, but it takes outer form in a cosmic way – namely protest against man’s inhumanity.

Dylan denies being a “protest” writer, pointing to a number of humorous, untopical songs. He also makes no claim to any special talent, hence the “burp” remark at the beginning of this article.

**“If I didn’t write this stuff I’d go nuts,”** he says. **“I’ve got all these thoughts inside me, and I gotta say ’em. Most people can’t say ’em. They keep it all inside. It’s for these people that I write my songs.”**

Press agentry? Truth? Who knows? Probably a good deal of both.

# 31 January 1964, Helen McNamara

Source: *The Toronto Telegram*, Canadian newspaper, 3 February 1964.

This interview took place in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

**Final Quest is 'Loaded'**

The last Quest show to be produced by Daryl Duke before he leaves for Hollywood and the Steve Allen Show could be one of the most controversial programs in that newsworthy series.

Slated for March 10 is a show called The Times Are a'Changin', the title of an album made by folk singer Bob Dylan, who has within his short flight to fame, been called a folk poet, singer, composer, and a rebellious spokesman for America's younger generation.

The idol of high school and college students, Dylan was in Toronto to tape the show last week. He was enjoying the experience **"because I can't sing on TV in the United States."**

SHOCKING

The lean, shaggy haired 23-year-old said with a faint smile: **"They don't want anyone to be offended."**

With only two U.S. TV shows to his credit (both documentaries) Dylan said he had been asked to sing on the Ed Sullivan show.

**"I wanted to sing my song, Talking John Birch, which Ed and the producers dug, but the censor said I would have to sing something else, something like what the Clancy Brothers would sing. I walked out."**

Dylan, who accompanies himself with guitar and harmonica, sings in a style that combines Negro blues and country music on topics that range over segregation, politics, war mongering, love and loneliness.

AN IDOL

They are so powerfully presented that he is gathering avid young followers who, it is said, idolize him because he says the things they can't express themselves.

**"Well, if the kids say I speak for them, that's beautiful,"** said Dylan wryly, **"but I haven't reached the masses one little bit."**

Dylan squelched the tag of being the new Woody Guthrie, a spokesman of the '30's [*sic*].

Guthrie, he added, came out of the depression years when there were two sides, a time when you knew all your friends and all your enemies. **"Now it's different."**

Since Dylan first ran away from his home town of Duluth, Minn. at 10, he has been obsessed with phoniness.

But he has also suffered its effects.

WAS BORED

**"I used to run away because I was bored with the routine, but I was also writing short stories and poems.**

**"This went on until I was about 12, then I started to be influenced, I was destroyed by phoney forces, by the James Dean fads and the Marlon Brando gimmicks."**

Today he does not seem to be any more certain of what he is **("I don't consider myself an entertainer. I don't want to be known as a folk singer"**) but he has a goal.

He's writing a novel and a play which he hopes will be an extension of the ideas he has put into songs.

Whatever Dylan's ultimate form of expression, of one thing he is certain. **"I have accepted the fact of my not being understood."**

If the sales of his records and the recording of his songs by other folk singers are any criterion, however, Dylan is far from being misunderstood. Whether he likes it or not, he has a public.

# 1 February 1964, Murray Reiss, Jim McKelvey, Henry Tarvainen and Bill Cameron

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Source: *Gargoyle*, University of Toronto student publication, February 1964, single page [unpaginated]. This article was also reprinted in *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 225, March 2024, pages 48-52.

This interview took place in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

**Gargoyle Interviews Bob Dylan**

-- This is your first time on television in North America isn't it?

**No, I've been on television in the States a couple of times. I did this one because of Daryl Duke, it was his last show, and I could do things I can't do anyplace else, certainly not in the States. I've been on some programs in the United States, but they were specific central kinds of programs where what I did went into what the program was all about and so if somebody didn't dig it they could turn it off anyway. But I did walk off the Ed Sullivan Show. I was promised that I could sing "Talking John Birch" on the show. I went to rehearsal and I did it, and then just an hour before the show, the CBS censors said I had to do another song, they said, 'can't you sing something nice, like the Clancy Brothers, we've had the Clancy Brothers on before and they've sung nice songs', and I couldn't do that. This is the only time where I've ever had this complete freedom.**

-- Do you really notice the difference between working here and working in the States?

**Oh yeah. Well, I don't know if this is Daryl or the CBC but whatever it is, it's like the BBC in England and the CBC here, whatever their hangups and drawbacks may be, have much more freedom than in the United States. There's not much freedom there.**

-- Yeah, they've had Seeger here. The CBC doesn't have to worry about the sponsors saying we don't want you to do this. In one of the songs on your first album you talk about meeting Ric von Schmidt at Harvard...

**Harvard?**

-- "I first met Ric while strollin' through the green pastures of Harvard University"?

**Oh that was my first record. Oh man, like I'd forgot that. I made that two and a half years ago, that's an old, old record, I wasn't even <u>me</u>. I was still learning language then, I was writing then, but what I was writing I was still scared to sing, and there was no one else who was writing, and anything I did write I didn't sing, I read it, at poet gatherings and stuff like that. I sung things which came in a certain form on the first record. I wrote a song about Woody Guthrie which was only on there because it came in a certain form and it made a certain amount of sense song-wise. But the rest of the stuff I never did sing until just after that. There was nobody else singing and writing -- everybody was either singing and also writing, but nobody was singing what they were writing. I did both.**

-- Same as Woody Guthrie?

**Well, Woody, the influence he had on me has worn off, it had worn off about a year ago, about a year and a half ago maybe. The influence wore off when he ceased to be an idol to me, I used to visit him in the hospital every day, and just talk to him, and by seeing him, he just sort of busted himself all down, he wasn't an idol. And from there on in, the idols I did have, like in idol stages... You see everybody has idols, even if its for a minute they're still an idol for some time. You have to have an idol, so you have idols, Little Richard, Jack Kerouac, or Marlon Brando, stuff like this, even if they lasted a split second they were still idols for a time. Woody was a big idol to me at one time, but I met him, got to know him -- not know him really, but to talk to him, and I got to pour out myself to him I got to him on that kind of level, and it was the kind of thing where I couldn't feel honest anymore, things all started looking phoney to me, absolutely everything the things I was doing, singing Woody's songs for money, singing folk songs for money, all of a sudden this seemed very phoney to me.**

-- Like Jack Elliott?

**Well Jack Elliott's a good friend of mine, he's one of my best friends. I met him accidently. He happens to be a folksinger, and my friends, the people I am with all the time aren't folksingers, but Jack is…**

-- Well, Jack sings a lot of Woody Guthrie's songs.

**Yeah, Jack is a completely different thing. I know Jack on another level too, and he's very beautiful, and what he's doing is very real.**

-- ·You said in the paper today you are writing a novel…

**I am…**

-- Is it sort of the things you do on the back of albums, is it that kind of operation?

**I don't know when it's ever going to be done. I'm writing a play which is going to be done sooner than the novel. I've written some plays before but I've never written anything I'd really want to produce, except this one now, I want to see it get done.**

-- You coming up to Canada at all to sing?

**I don't know about singing, you see, because I don't work that much, I don't play concerts that much. I'm in this accidently. I'm known, well-known, for the only reason because the songs I write -- I know a lot of people, I just know them through wierd [*sic*] circles and they sing what I write. I would never be known if it wasn't for Pete Seeger, or Joan Baez, or even Peter Paul & Mary, Marlene Dietrich, through all kinds of people. I don't know if you know some people in New York City, but they just do things. I used to hang around the Living Theatre, and after midnight there used to be Moon-dog and Hugh Romney -- the Living Theatre is busted now, but all these kind of things, wherever people are doing something, are honestly saying they're hung-up and they're lonely. Everybody's lonely, only because everybody's alone. People don't eat and sleep for you; people don't kiss for you. You have your own hang-ups, it makes you lonely, everybody's lonely, and I can't really recognize anybody unless they admit this. It ceases a lot in the folk music field, of people singing folk songs. not to learn, because I sang folk songs the same way I played the trumpet for about two months, or wore a white tie and a black shirt for about two weeks. It was just a phase, it was a learning thing, and from folksongs I learned the language, I learned a lot about people, by singing them and knowing them and remembering them, I was conciously (*sic*) aware of them. Because folk songs are a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful thing, really like the god-almighty arts, if it's used, things have to be used. It's there for the using, it's not there for the becoming, it's not there to *become* a folk song, you have to use it to learn about you, and whatever you want to do. English ballads, Scottish ballads, I see them in images – it's too wierd [*sic*] for me, I can't sit down and sing something like "Barbara Allan," because it goes deeper than just myself singing it, it goes into legends and Bibles, it goes into curses and myths, it goes into plagues, it goes into all kinds of wierd [*sic*] things, things that I don't know about, can't pretend to know about. The only guy I know that can really do it is a guy I know named Paul Clayton, he's the only guy I've ever heard or seen who can sing songs like this, because he's a medium, he's not trying to personalize it, he's bringing it to you.**

-- Would you say Joan Baez is the same way?

**No, I wouldn't say Joanie's that way, she's just plain beautiful, whatever she does, it sounds beautiful. Her voice is like a mirror -- she can do anything beautiful, she just has that kind of thing. But Paul, he's a trance.**

-- I've got a couple of friends who are just starting to learn about things like this, they've always been jazz or classics. I played them Peter, Paul & Mary's "Blowin' in the Wind", and they thought fine, just great, and then I played them yours and they thought too much, the first time, like 'turn it off, forget it', but after a few times it grows on them.

**Well, that's a strange thing, "Blowin' in the Wind", that's a song I wrote in twenty minutes and I wrote it two and a half years ago, I wrote it in the Black Pussycat, down on McDougal St., I just wrote it just like that and that song has been around since then. The New World Singers, they were singing that song a year before Peter Paul & Mary were, and when Peter Paul & Mary made it famous it was like 'who's this Bob Dylan? what's he writing?', and it's like nobody can recognize that I was on the street all the way up till then.**

-- Did this bother you?

**No, but it was unrecognizable towards people, all of a sudden Bob Dylan's name came into their life, and they were saying who's Bob Dylan the same way they would be saying that about Bobby Darin. All of a sudden they recognize Bobby Darin, and they say wow! who's this Bobby Darin? and they find out about him, and they read about him, all this publicity, and you accept the idea that Bobby Darin has wanted to be a movie star for a long time and now you see him and you accept what he's been for a long time. But with me, I haven't changed, I was bumming around then, and I'm bumming around now, only because I can't abandon my friends, I can't abandon their feelings and I can't pretend I don't know about real things, I can't pretend I don't know them, I don't think about them. Through all the phony bullshit, -- when it's bullshit there's no such thing as a half bullshit, or a fourth bullshit, it's bullshit. None of my friends, none of the places I hang around, none of the people I stay with are bullshit people, and none of them are jealous people, none of them are after anybody. The same with me -- I'm not after anybody, I'm not jealous of anybody, I can honestly say I'm not jealous of really anybody. I get hurt a lot, by people that are jealous of me, for a split second but then I come out of it all the time, I have so many beautiful things to see, so many beautiful images to use, that it doesn't matter. There is an immediate shock all the time, but it doesn't last very long.**

-- Do you find these kids who think “Bobby Dylan, wow he’s god!” do you find these bugging you?

**It bugs me when they say something they’re so sure about, and I know if I’m an idol to them, if I’m their god -- I might be their god, but they are no disciple of mine, they haven’t gotten what I’m saying, though they think they do. Just a little while ago, this cat came up outside, and had the gall, the nerve, to say -- I was talking to a very nice fellow out there and his girlfriend, and here comes this character, and first of all he wants to buy a harmonica from me. That’s ridiculous, he can buy a harmonica, I’ve got a harmonica but it’s not going to be any better than anything he can buy. It will just mislead him, falsify him to sell him my harmonica. I know what he’s going to do with it, he’s going to tell them this is Bob Dylan’s harmonica, and he gave it to me because he liked me. I don’t care about that, all I have to say is no, I’m not going to sell you my harmonica, please don’t even ask to buy it, get your own harmonica, please, I’ll pay for it even.**

**Then he asks me why don’t you write a song about commercialism. I mean I’ve sung six fuckin’ songs at the program here, and if it’s not evident enough that not the kind of cat goes around writing songs about commercialism if that’s what’s on my mind, like if the Kingston Trio has bothered me so much that I write a song about it, if it’s really going to sway somebody one way or the other, and he’s going to get a movement going, it’s really going to matter one little bit in human life in years to come, and it’s going to make somebody happy or unhappy, that’s a whole other thing. But it’s utterly plain ridiculous -- here he comes and wants to know if I ever write a song about commercialism. I don’t write songs about commercialism in folk music it’s never even crossed my mind, I mean why think about it, and he couldn’t understand that. And he’s a fan of mine, he wants to buy my harmonica, I’m his god. Is this going to satisfy me, knowing that I’m his god, when he doesn’t even see me, he doesn’t even hear what I say? What good does it do, man? It can make me pissed off, because I don’t want it, I don’t want to be a god, an idol, I want to be friends.**

-- Do you see any path or direction your songs take? You’re talking now about bullshit and about friendship and...

**No, I used to write bullshit songs, I went through a phase of writing bullshit songs about two and a half years ago. When I made my first record I wrote many more songs than were on that record. I didn’t record them only because I couldn’t at that time. But then I made the second record, then people wanted me to sing songs I wrote. I used to write songs, like I’d say, ‘yeah, what’s bad, pick out something bad, like segregation, O.K., here we go’ and I’d pick one of the thousand million little points I can pick and explode it, some of them which I didn’t know about. I wrote a song about Emmett Till, which in all honesty was a bullshit song, I can say that now, because now I wouldn’t write it, but when I wrote it, it wasn’t a bullshit song to me. But I realize now that my reasons and motives behind it were phony. I didn’t have to write it; I was bothered by many other things that I pretended I wasn’t bothered by, in order to write this song about Emmett Till, a person I never even knew.**

-- This was thing to write about?

**No, it wasn’t the thing to write about, at that time it wasn’t...**

-- No, I mean to you personally.

**Yeah, to me personally, because nobody else had ever done it, and it was quick at hand, and knowing that people knew who Emmett Till was. I wrote the song, and I wouldn’t sing it, I couldn’t imagine anyone really singing it. I haven’t written to my mind a phony song ever since -- oh, for two years I’ve only written one song, to my mind, that I don’t believe in, one song that puts me up tight and gets me embarrassed when I hear it. I don’t sing it anymore, but some people do. There are just a few lines in it that aren’t really true, aren’t really where it’s at. They are true, but they are too true, and the trueness of them is actually a cliche, and I don’t write in cliches. I recognize it as a cliche only know (*sic*) when I look back and see other people singing it, I shudder, because it’s not my words anymore.**

-- May we ask what it is?

**I’m only speaking of one verse in the song, and the song is “If Today Were not a Crooked Highway”. It’s a beautiful song, the only verse I can’t make in it is the last verse that goes: “There’s beauty in the silver singing river. There’s beauty in the rainbow in the skies/ But, of these nothing else can match/ The beauty I remember in my true love’s eyes.” It’s pillow-soft, It’s not me anymore, because I don’t think that way, that way has been spoken for a million times, and it’s not for me to say. The second verse is my words, and the first verse is my words.**

Dylan’s manager: “Bob there are five people waiting in a cab.”

**Yeah, well I have to leave now. I’m sorry I didn’t get more of a chance to see everybody, but I just came to do this show, it was really the imporant (*sic*) thing, because I can’t do this anyplace else. I know I will never be able to do another one like it, not in, the States. If I do it will be a miracle.**

# 24 April 1964, Stuart Crump

Source: *Brown University Daily Herald*, US student newspaper, 28 April 1964.

This interview took place in Providence, Rhode Island.

**Folksingers Don't Eat Enough Mushrooms**

An off-the-cuff interview with any performer can be a harrowing experience, and if that personality happens to be one poet-singer Bob Dylan, the result can resemble a farce as much as an interview.

Dylan's sudden rise to prominence as the number one folk singer and writer of the decade has not gone to his head. When I handed him a copy of his third record album and requested that he autograph it, he proceeded to draw a beard and mustache on his own picture, and then signed it with a Congressman-like signature.

Asked what he thought of all his success, he answered in a voice completely different from his singing voice, **"What success? Where? I don't even consider myself a folk singer. Do you?"** I declined to answer.

Is (*sic*) asked him to define the blues. He thought and thought and said, **"The blues is a pair of pants without any pockets. Do you like that?"** I said it was a good one, and he continued, **"The blues is a pair of *torn* pants without anything in the pockets."** He added, **"Blues is a colour. That's all."**

"What do you consider is your place in American folk music?" I asked. He again insisted, **"I'm not a folk singer anymore than anybody is."** And then as he climbed into the car, he hollered out, much to the delight of some three or four dozen fans, **"Folk singers are Communists."** I decided that Bob Dylan's place in American folk music is something that is undefinable.

Next question (through the car window): "What do you think will happen to you as you grow older, and we grow older, and the upcoming generations (our children) find their own leaders?" Dylan replied, this time a little more seriously, **"I dig the new generation… Soon the new generation will rebel against me just like I rebelled against the older generation… Actually, there ain't no such thing as generation. There's just people. It's all one big contradiction… 'There's nothing so stable as change.' I think those are the words."**

Bob Dylan says he digs the Beatles, the Four Seasons, the Dave Clark Five, and numerous other groups. Concerning the Kingston Trio he says, **"I don't know. I haven't really heard them in the past couple of years. I guess they're OK. They're still playing and singing.**

**"I like everybody. I don't really dislike anybody," he continued. "If I really don't want to hear anybody, I don't have to stay. But I forget about it. I don't remember who I don't like."**

When asked if he might write a song about Marty Walker, he said, **"I don't write songs *about* things. I'd rather have the song *be* something… I don't know. It's weird."**

A fan asked him if he might appear on Hootenanny (Madison Avenue's answer to folk music) if Joan Baez and Pete Seeger appeared. He replied, **"No, I wouldn't even appear then. I just don't like that whole show… Oh, I guess it's a nice enough show if you like that kind of stuff. I like to hear something. Anything. I only saw it once, and I never heard anything."**

On the commercialization of folk music, he commented, **"There's nothing I could say against it. What good's going to become of my saying anything against it? If I would say to you that the commercialization of folk music is bad, that'd mean I was pretty tight with myself and was looking for something to pick on. Some kind of banner to fly. I'm not that happy to pick on folk music as some kind of battle ground.**

**"I try to think about my own life. The things that count in my own life. Important things, like my head. I worry about my head. Not the commercialization of folk music."**

I asked him if he really considered himself an "angry young folk singer," as *Life Magazine* contends. He replied, **"Not really. I'm just as angry as anybody else."**

One girl asked him what he considered the most important thing in his life. **"I told you,"** he answered, **"my own head. That's the most important thing in my life."** He wants never to lose it, and there is no reason to think he ever will.

In parting, I asked him if there was anything else he might like to say that had maybe been passed over in previous interviews. He said, "**Yeah: folksingers don't eat enough mushrooms."**

"And?"

**“I think that unless they get on the mushrooms, they’re all going to go to waste. They’re all going to turn into Harry Belefontes.”**

“Anything else?”

**“Also frog legs.”**

# 26 April 1964, Dave Gitelson and Dick Doherty

Source: *The Massachusetts Collegian*, US student newspaper, 1 May 1964. The text here is transcribed from a facsimile published in: *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 68, Winter 2020, page 34.

This interview took place in Curry Hicks Cage, University Of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts.

**Bob Dylan: Performance & The Show After The Show**

On Sunday evening more than thirteen hundred students sat on folding chairs and bleachers in the Cage to hear the highlight of the Civil Rights' Week program a concert by Bobby Dylan. To say that he was well received would be something of an understatement; even those who had approached the concert with a negative attitude came away impressed by the talent of this young man who has so often been described as one of the outstanding spokesmen of our generation.

The performance itself consisted exclusively of original compositions, ranging from tender love songs to protests against racial injustices, a nuclear holocaust, etc. What struck us most, as we sat and listened, was the sincerity of his words. They do not come from the mind, but from the heart.

After the concert we were fortunate to be able to briefly speak to Mr. Dylan. We were quite surprised at his congeniality, as he shook hands and signed autographs for as many of his admirers as was possible. Mobbed by a large number of inquisitive people, it was very difficult to get answers to our questions, but we were able to get some of the background on this remarkable artist.

Dylan attributes the start of his professional career to a Fizzie Young, at the Folklore Center in New York City. Without this man's help, he told us, he doubts that he could have achieved the popularity that he has. He is in the process of writing a novel, to which he devotes as much of his time as possible. It should be really something. When we asked him what he thought of the many popular recordings of his music released by other artists, he laughed and described them as **"wonderful – they've captured the real Dylan!"**

As several sidelights to the evening, as soon as he left the campus, Dylan and his troup of bodyguards went directly to the Drake, where they held a private party. Not a bad life. To try to clear up a widespread rumour, Joan Baez was not at the concert. That girl everyone thought was she turned out to be a waitress at the Club 47 in Boston.

We would like to extend our thanks to those people who were responsible for arranging Bobby Dylan's appearance here on campus, and hope that all of you enjoyed the evening as much as we did.

# 28 April 1964, Will Jones

Source: *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, US newspaper, 24 May 1964.

This interview was conducted by telephone with Dylan in Albert Grossman's office, New York City.

**A Runnin, Singin Man – Bob Dylan**

After a week of trying to see folk-singer Bob Dylan in New York recently, I finally reached him by telephone in his manager's office.

**"I'm leavin' for France in 15 minutes,"** he said. **"I'm doin' a concert in England in a coupla weeks, but first I'm gonna go to France and mess around with some friends. Just travel around."**

Could we talk on the way to the airport?

**"You mean answer questions about myself an' like that?"** he said. **"Oh, no, I couldn't do that."**

Dylan said he had been unreachable because he now lives in the country near Woodstock, N.Y., with his manager.

**"I got outta New York just awhile ago,"** he said. **"You know, the World's Fair is goin' on in New York now, I got out. We have kind of a community thing up in the country."**

So New York now joins Duluth and Hibbing and Minneapolis and Denver and a lot of other places on the list of those where the 22-year-old Dylan used to be from.

Dylan and fans got mad recently at a national magazine that printed the news that his real name is Bobby Zimmerman and that he's the son of a Hibbing appliance dealer named Abe Zimmerman.

He told the interviewer: **"I don't know my parents. They don't know me. I've lost contact with them for years."** The magazine located his parents in a motel a few blocks away, however, happily waiting to attend his Carnegie Hall concert. They said he'd paid their way east and sent them tickets.

Now that he's one of the hottest items in the folksong field, forever being mentioned in the same breath with his girl friend, the queen, Joan Baez, Dylan is pursued by magazines and newspaper reporters. And he's suspicious of them.

He took care of the magazines in some words he wrote for the cover of his newest record album, "The Times They Are A-Changin' ":

*Oh where were these magazines*
*when I bummin up an down*
*up an down the street?*
*is it that they too just sleep*
*in their high thrones…*
*openin their eyes when people pass*
*expectin each t bow as they go by*
*an say "thank you Mr. Magazine,*
*did I answer all my questions right?"*

I asked Dylan what he considered to be his home town.

**"My home town would be Hibbing. Or else Fargo,"** he said. **"It was off an' on an' around, y'know. They talk about me in Denver like it was supposed to be my home town. An' some place in Michigan."**

I said I had hoped to get some reminiscences of Hibbing from him.

**"I really have no cause to think about it,"** he said. But if Dylan will not reminisce about Duluth (where he was born) and Hibbing for a reporter, he will do it for his fans. The lines at the top of the page also come with the newest album.

Dylan said he does plan a visit this summer that will include Minneapolis. He visited here last summer.

**"I wanted to come and walk around the places I used to walk around, y'know, on the southeast side. I used to hang around there, but all the people I used to know are gone. They all went to Mexico."**

Dylan sang at the Purple Onion near Hamline University and attended the U. of M. Some months ago there was a rumor among his local friends that he planned to marry Miss Baez and settle in Minnesota once again. I asked him about that.

**"It hasn't happened yet,"** he said. **"It's a possibility."**

# 9-11 May 1964, Patrick Doncaster

Source: *Daily Mirror*, UK newspaper, 12 May 1964, page 23.

This interview was conducted in London. Some of the comments attributed to Dylan appear to come from press statements.

**ROAMIN' BOB IS WORRYIN' ... about singin' in the afternoon**

Like it's Tuesday and somebody might think I got out of bed two days too soon. But no.

We're on the two-columns-a-week kick now with a Stop Press Top Ten that saves you waiting until Thursday – when you'll get the full Pop Thirty.

And there is no better way to start a Tuesday column than to have an interview with America's Bob Dylan, who is a folk-singing rave over there and is about to take the Royal Festival Hall by storm next Sunday … and who told me he doesn't give interviews.

Mr. Dylan, who wrote the big hit "Blowin' in the Wind" for that folksie Peter, Paul and Mary, is slight and shaggy with bushy sideboards. He is twenty-two. And he is hailed as a folk genius. He sings, plays guitar and harmonica.

Billed

He is billed as "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan" and you will notice that at the school he went to they didn't have a G in the alphabet. When he writes his "folk-poems" he puts "climbin" and "blowin".

But what's all this freewheelin' bit?

**"They gotta think of somethin' to sell records,"** he said as if it were a disease. **"It's bull… I don't meet somebody an' say 'I'm the Freewheelin' Bob Dylan.' Just bull…"**

He was brought up in a small mining town called Hibbing, in Minnesota. **"But home,"** he said grimly, **"is a place to leave."**

He should know. He says he **"ran away when I was 10, 12, 13, 15, 15½, 17 an' 18.**

**"I been caught an' brought back all but once."**

He is not terribly concerned about money or ambition. **"Why should I worry about money?"** he said. **"I got friends who would never let me starve.**

**"Ambition? I suppose my ambition is to have no ambitions."**

Mr. Dylan, who went to university, arrived the rough way. Roamin' singin' and playin'.

'Jailed'

On the way, he will tell you, he **"got jailed for suspicion of armed robbery, got held four hours on a murder rap, got busted for lookin' like I do – an' I never done none a them things."**

He has one concern about his concert next Sunday

**"I've never sung in the afternoon,"** he said, **"sometimes I don't get up till that time."**

● CBS issue a new Dylan LP to make him feel more at home – "The Times They Are a-Changin'."

# 12 May 1964, Maureen Cleave

Source: *Evening Standard*, UK newspaper, 16 May 1964, page 7.

This interview took place in London, England.

**If Bob can't sing it, it must be a poem or a novel or something…**

Some say that Bob Dylan is a genius; others say he is a very moderate folk singer but not bad at the guitar. I say that he's wonderful, but that you should decide for yourself by listening to his three LPs, Bob Dylan, The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan and The Times They Are A-Changin', all on CBS.

He has a funny, elderly sort of voice and always sings as though he is going to run out of breath any minute. In between verses, he blows into a mouth organ screwed into a wire harness about his neck. This comes out as a terrible, discordant wail. I'm not saying he makes easy listening but I find the way he sings very moving.

Significant

The Americans are most excited about him and write great feature on him in their magazines. They think he is significant. Even folk singers, a choosy lot, are crazy about him. So are the Beatles. He sings at the Festival Hall tomorrow.

He writes most of his stuff himself and though many of the tunes – like Blowin' In The Wind – are lovely, he doesn't pay much attention to them. It's the words that count.

These may be violent and bitter, dealing with civil rights, boxers who get killed in the ring, the world after the atom bomb. Or they may be about love or they may be jokes with Bardot and Anita Ekberg slung in for good measure.

The songs may be conventional length or they may ramble on for a quarter-of-an-hour.

He says: **"If I can sing it, it's a song. If I can't sing it, it's a poem. If it's not a song or a poem, it's a novel."** The last thing he sees himself as is a folk singer.

Sensitive

He thinks the Beatles and Manfred Mann are more sensitive than a bunch of folk singers.

Mr. Dylan is 23 and a highly romantic figure. He comes from a small, dead mining town in Minnesota from which, as a child, he ran away roughly once a year.

**"I ran away with motorcycle gangs, carnivals, travelling druggists.**

**"Where I come from, it's not so special to run away; you can get out of town easy; you can see both ends of it from the one place.**

**"Everybody in the movies ran away from home, struck out, became cowboys, made a million dollars."**

Most of his time since has been spent on the move. He says he hasn't seen his parents in a bunch of years. He now seems to come from New York though he has nowhere special to live there.

**"I have millions and trillions of friends. They have me to stay, perhaps because they think I'm a waif or because they know I will never invite them to stay with me."** His only worldly possessions are the clothes he wears and a motorcycle. He isn't at all sure where the motorcycle is at this moment.

Old boots

When I saw him he was wearing enormous old suede boots. **"Funny I should be wearing boots,"** he said, regarding his feet with interest. **"Billy the Kid shot himself in the toe wearing these kind of boots."** His blue jeans had special inserts sewn by a girl friend to accommodate the tops of his boots. He wore a black polo-necked jersey and buttoned up ancient suede jacket. It was a very hot day but he said he hadn't noticed.

"I will tell you a secret," he said. "I don't wash many of my clothes. When they get dirty, I just leave them." He once owned a peaked, corduroy, Huck Finn cap but he gave that away.

When he describes himself as an angelic waif, he is accurate. He has a very young face and curly hair. He drinks quantities of red wine out of several different glasses at the same time and smokes lots of cigarettes. He laughs and giggles a great deal, usually at what he says himself.

He has absolutely no sense of time but says that he works about four months of the year and spends the other eight recuperating. **"I have millions and trillions of hobbies. You are dealing with a walking hobby."**

Woody Guthrie, the folk singer, used to be his god. He once travelled from New Orleans to New York to visit him in hospital. Mr. Guthrie was not expecting him.

**"He was very sick and he didn't say much. I wanted to sing his songs and I thought he was the best person to sing them to. He was very surprised but when I'd sung the first one he said 'Sing another' "**

So, with guitar, mouth organ and all, he did: and all the other patients listened too.

Most of his time is spent writing. He is working on three books of poems and photographs and a novel.

**"I'm only human and I can see many sides to the question. I don't associate myself with any creed. If I said I was a pacifist, I would be a liar. I'm conscious of what's going to happen when the bomb gets banned.**

'Phoney'

**"But I'm not worried about the bomb. I just dislike the way they surround my life with it.**

**"Politicians are phoney. Sometimes you get to the point where you say, 'This is insane.' Like Cuba. Who minds about Castro? Who really cares? I've got no interests there. I've got no hot dog stands or whore houses or clothes factories. Why should I be upset?**

**"You know there are people in the United States who want to declare war on England because you are selling buses to Cuba?"**

He laughed again, albeit drily. **"I wish,"** he said restlessly, "**somebody in our government had a beard. Just to be a little different."**

# 19 September 1964, Dick Pike

Source: *The Michigan Daily*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Volume 75, Number 19, 20 September 1964.

This interview was conducted at Michigan High School, Ann Arbor.

### Carrying the Weight of The World's Problems

That the many-sided personality that Is Bob Dylan remains an enigma – perhaps even to himself – was amply demonstrated last night when this uncommonly hung-up kid played guitar and harmonica and sang to an overflow crowd – estimated as being about half high school students at Ann Arbor High. Emphasizing that **"I don't write songs, y'know… just write verse and set it to music and a tempo I like…,"** Dylan dispensed liberal doses or his acidic and characteristic gripes against mid-twentieth century society to a highly receptive audience.

Nearly as random as some or his more esoteric "verses" was his delivery on this occasion – obvious to those who had heard the angry lad previously – certainly not at the peak of its potential. But somehow, the unabashedly monotonous guitar style – not always in tune, either – the unsophisticated and occasionally sloppy harmonica work, and the pinched nasal voice (that only Bob Dylan could get away with consistently and still remain a popular performer) only served to throw the weighty content of Dylan's musical polemics into shocking sharp relief.

Granted, most of us take issue with much in the course of recent history and contemporary social and other trends, it is only too clear that Bob Dylan has concerned himself with these problems to the extent that the burden may be about to knock him flat. Committed to his grand sense as deeply as he is at this point, Dylan conveyed the feeling through his material, his arrangements, his "technique," and his strangely worn and tired appearance that he is **"… tired of blowin' words at a stone wall…,"** that he is frustrated at the reception of his "message" and that he doesn't give a damn about that flat G-string, the missed chord, the monotonous chanting of familiar verses.

The "Talking, John Birch Blues," one of few up-tempo numbers – which Dylan does so well – was delivered with the intonation and timing of the expert satirist: the lyrical, if lengthy, unrecorded "Trambourine [*sic*] Man" was a pleasant and satisfying surprise; in "It's Alright Ma, It's Only Life," Dylan summarized his philosophy and attitudes; "Don't Think Twice" came out in a wild, even crude, whooping delivery which was so much more in the bittersweet spirit of the song than the usual pablum dished up by the commercial folkum artists; and who will ever forget "All I Want Is To Be Friends With You," about the message of which this reviewer will only say "… yeah."

# 19 September 1964, Robert Sheffield

Source: *The Michigan Daily*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Volume 75, Number 19, 20 September 1964, page 1. The text reproduced here is from *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 72, Spring 2022 (published May 2022), pages 69, 71, 72.

This interview was conducted at Michigan High School, Ann Arbor.

**The Inimitable Dylan**

Dylan before an audience is very different from the Bobby back stage. Last night, relaxing on a dressing table, he added a few more lines to the stories that one can never be sure of.

But as he said, **"If you can't get it from me, where can you get it?"**

He spoke of the evolution of his name. It went from Zimmerman, **"the last name of my first father"**, to Dillon, **"a family name"**, to Dylan.

With only a few personal engagements, he spends his time writing **"a book, a play, a movie, and an opera."** When pressed for a release date he said that when they come out it will be **"all at once, and I'll be very tired."** He has been working on his book for two years.

Every one of his albums has sold more copies than those before it. Dylan says with varifiable (*sic*) truth that his planned album with Joan Baez will outsell them all. But what about another little known recording on the Broadside label under the name of Blind Boy Grunt? We asked him and with the artistry of a diplomat he affirmed, **"Blind Boy Grunt? I've recorded under a lot of names. Hmmmm Yes."**

We offered the suggestion that perhaps he used the name because he was under contract to another company.

**"Well yes. That must have been my Blind Boy Grunt Contract."**

Answers? One can't be sure of them. But those of you who were there and marvelled at the autographs from Dylan's dark-haired female companion signed, 'Joan Baez,' perhaps have one answer. Her name was Sally.

# 6 & 7 November 1964, John Cocks

Source: *The Kenyon Collegian*, US student newspaper, 20 November 1964, pages 1, 3-4, 8.

This interview was conducted in Gambier and Columbus, Ohio.

**A Day with Bob Dylan**

Wearing high heel boots, a tailored pea-jacket without lapels, pegged dungarees of a kind of buffed azure, large sunglasses with squared edges, his dark, curly hair standing straight up on top and spilling over the upturned collar of his soiled white shirt, he caused a small stir when he got off the plane in Columbus. Businessmen nodded and smirked, the ground crew looked a little incredulous and a mother put a hand on her child's head and made him turn away. Bob Dylan came into the terminal taking long strides, walking hard on his heels and swaggering just a little. He saw us, smiled a nervous but friendly smile, and came over to introduce himself and his companion, a lanky, unshaven man named Victor who looked like a hip version of Abraham Lincoln. Dave Banks, who had organized the concert and who was Dylan's official reception committee, led Dylan and Victor to baggage claim. Along the way, Victor asked us how far we were from the school and where he and Dylan would be spending the night. Learning that Banks had reserved a room for them in a small motel seven miles from Kenyon, he smiled a little and said "Tryin' to keep us as far away from the school as you can, huh?"

The trip back from the airport was a quiet one. Both men seemed rather tired, Dylan especially, who was pale and nervous. He said he was right in the middle of a big concert tour which had been on for almost two months, and Victor reminisced about one memorable engagement in Cambridge. "They had this pep rally right before the concert," he said, "and they all came in sweaty and yellin'. Man, the audience was full of football players – *football* players." Banks mentioned that Kenyon hadn't won a single football game all year, and both men seemed enthusiastic. **"Yeah? No kidden'?"**, Dylan said, and Victor flashed a gratified smile. They asked a lot of questions about the college, the *Review*, and girls. Victor was astonished to find the college was so small and that the girls were so far away. "Outside Cleveland?", he commented, "man, that's a *far* away to go for a chick." Dylan nodded sympathetically.

We talked a bit more then about Kenyon. **"They really have to wear ties and stuff to the concert,"** Dylan asked, **"ties? Well, I'm gonna tell them they can take them off. That's what I'm gonna do. Rules – man, that's why I never lasted long in college. Too many *rules*."** He spoke quietly but with some animation, in an unmistakeably mid-western accent.

Entering Mt. Vernon, Dylan asked if there was a liquor store around. **"Nothin' strong – wine or somethin'. Beaujoulais (*sic*). Chainti's (*sic*) good. Yeah, or Almaden or anything just so it's red and dry."**

Banks stopped to get some wine. Dylan was talking faster now, more excitedly, fingering his sideburns and running his hand nervously over the top of his head.

As we came into Gambier, Dylan pressed his face up against the car window. **"Wow, great place for a school! Man, if I went here I'd be out in the woods all day gettin' drunk. Get me a chick,"** (and here he again smiled his nervous smile), **"settle down, raise some kids."** Banks drove the pair around the campus and stopped at Rosse Hall where the concert was to be given to show them the audio facilities. Victor didn't like the amplifier system ("Man, it's a *phonograph*") and Dylan was worried about making his entrance from the back of the hall and walking all the way to the stage in front. It was finally decided that he would use the classrooms in the basement for a dressing room and come in through the fire exit in front, facing the small College cemetery. **"Strange set-up,"** he kept saying, **"really strange set-up."** He was pacing up and down, taking quick drags on a Chesterfield. **"Look, try and get as many people in here as you can, O.K.? Let 'em sit on the floor, just try and let everybody in, O.K.?"** Victor mentioned that they were both pretty hungry, so Banks suggested driving back into Mt. Vernon where Dylan wouldn't be recognised: even if he was noticed, Banks, said, he would probably be taken for some crazy college student anyway, and the worst that could happen was someone trying to pick a fight. **" 'S'all right, man,"** Dylan said, shrugging his narrow shoulders, **"I'm ready for 'em."**

Back in Mt. Vernon, both Dylan and Victor were convulsed by the public square. **"Hey, man. look at that cat,"** Dylan said, pointing at a Civil War monument, **"Who's he?"** Victor leaned out the window and squinted: "Don't know – look's like General Custer from here." **"Fantastic,"** Dylan said.

When we finally got to the motel and into the room, Dylan turned on the television and began to tune his Gibson guitar and sing while watching *Wanted: Dead or Alive*. Dave Banks went to take care or the luggage while Victor and I walked to a public phone booth to call out for some food. Dylan only wanted a salad, but Victor told

me to order him something else. "Fish or somethin'. And some greens. He's gotta have some greens. Any kind, I don't know." The Rendezvous Restaurant, however, didn't have any greens. Victor smiled, shaking his head. "Wow – we'll just get him that fish plate or whatever it is. No greens – wow." The food would be ready in half-an-hour, so Banks and I left Dylan and Victor in the room watching Steve McQueen tackle some evil-looking Mexicans. Dylan was now completely absorbed in the program; Victor was trying to sleep.

When we returned with the food half-an-hour later. the television was still on, Victor sprawled on his bed, while Dylan clasped and unclasped his hands between his knees. The restaurant had cooked a good meal but had forgotten to include silverware. **"Don't make no difference,"** Dylan and Victor said in chorus, **"no difference,"** so we ate everything from home fried potatoes to salad with our fingers. Dylan poked around at his fried fish platter, but wolfed down the salad. **"Greek salad in ML. Vernon. Ohio,"** he said. **"Crazy,"** wiped his fingers on his azure dungarees, lit a cigarette, and poured himself some more of the Almaden wine. He was interested in the article I was planning to write about him. **"There's this one guy who writes for the *Post*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, you know, named Al Aronowitz. He was going to do this story on me for a year and a half but he couldn't do it. He's really a great guy. He knew it would be cut to shit by the *Post* and he wouldn't get to say what he'd want to be sayin', only what they wanted. And the guy really didn't want me to come out like that, you dig? But we tried to write it anyway, you know, together. I went up to his place one day and we sat down and began to write this story, about me meeting him in Central Park and everything. But we had to stop, because the thing was getting really weird, surrealistic, and the story never got written. The only other cat he won't do a story on is Paul Newman, because he don't want to ruin him by gettin' him all cut up."**

While talking he constantly flexed his fingers and crossed and uncrossed his legs. Mentioning Paul Newman got him on the subject of acting. **"For me, you know, acting is like the Marx Brothers, somethin' you can't learn. Like the Studio. In the early days it was good, before it became a big fad, but I went there and really got turned off. All these people – actors – they're all themselves, really, tryin' too hard to be someone else. You can't learn to be someone else. It's just gotta be inside. You dig what I'm tryin' to say?"**

"Hey, Bob," Victor interrupted, switching off the TV, "we better get movin'." Dylan had been talking for forty-five minutes, and he had wanted to get out to the College before the concert to tune up. On the way, Dylan asked us to lock the door to the classroom he would be using to rehearse. He was worried about people coming in for autographs and an over-enthusiastic group of fans. Banks complied by driving his car across a space of bumpy lawn and up to the side door of the hall, where Victor hustled Dylan out and through the door past three or four gaping couples on their way to collect some early front row seats. We made sure the door was locked, and Victor and I took turns standing guard until Victor decided it was time to rig up the special microphones they had brought along. He went upstairs carrying a suitcase full of tubes and wire, while Dylan, in the next room, tuned up for three minutes by pounding out a wild rock and roll song on a grand piano and singing some gibberish lyrics.

Dave Banks knocked on the door and told Dylan that two people who said they were friends of his were upstairs. They had given their names as Bob and John. **"Fantastic,"** said Dylan. **"Hey Victor, go up and bring 'em down quick. Fantastic."** I went back to join Dylan, who was pacing around in a circle.

All of a sudden the door crashed open and a soft-faced young man in black boots, trousers, coat and gloves came running into the room screaming "Hey Bobby – hiya, baby," his long hair flapping like banners behind him. **"Wow, fantastic,"** Dylan yelled, reeling backwards across the room, laughing and attempting to climb the wall, **"whatya doin' here, Bob?"**

"Driving out to the coast," said the newcomer, pumping Dylan's hand, "got this car and – hey, you know John. We're drivin' out together." He reintroduced Dylan to a tall, swallow-faced boy who had an expensive Japanese camera hanging around his neck. "Look at this place – I don't believe the set-up. Crazy."

**"Yeah, I know. Hey, man. what're ya *doin'*."**

"Man, like we have this car belongs to Al, you know, we're goin' out to the Coast. A Cobra – wow. We drove six hundred and fifty miles yesterday in ten hours. Took us thirty-five minutest to, get through Pennsylvania. VAROOM – wow!"

Everyone laughed. **"Hey listen, man, you gonna be out on the coast, give me a call. I'm gonna do some concert, Joanie and me, so call."**

"Yeah, yeah," Bob said. "What's happenin' out there?"

**"Oh, Joanie and me's gonna do these concerts. Fantastic number of songs: we'll be out there for a while, but after all this shit we took I don't think it's much use doubling up on the hotel bills any more, do you?"**

"Yeah, yeah," Bob said again. "Listen, did you see the pictures from New York?" Dylan said that he hadn't. "Hey, John I got 'em in the car. Go out and get 'em." John giggled and went running out. Victor returned from upstairs, reported that the microphones were all fixed and that the hall was about full, and greeted Bob, who

said “Hey, how about all the faggots they’ve got in this place?” John came back from the car holding some large photographs in his hand which he thrust at Dylan with a smile.

**“Hey, these are really great,”** he said, looking through them. **“This one’s a little *bizarre* maybe, but I like it.”** He handed it to me. It was a picture of Bob, his hair trimmed in bangs, standing in front of a feverish abstract mural dressed in a woman’s ensemble of matching pasly slacks and blouse, holding a tricycle in his left hand and turning the pedal. John grinned at me.

As the time for Dylan to go on approached, he became more animated, more nervous. He paced and sometimes danced around the room gulping down wine from a small dixie cup and making large gestures with his hands. Around eight-thirty, Victor handed him his guitar, Dylan placed a black-wire harmonica holder around his neck, played a few chords, blew a few quick notes, and said **“O.K. man, let’s go.” “Let’s go – I’m comin’ in through the graveyard, man.”**

We walked out and around the side of the auditorium, in front of the collage cemetary (*sic*) and up some wobbly iron stairs to a fire exit. Several of the people standing near the door caught a glimpse of Dylan and began to nudge one another; one rather pudgy girl wearing an army surplus raincoat and blue tennis shoes even began primping her hair. Victor put his arm on Dylan’s shoulder. Dylan nodded, straightened his shoulders, and walked into the hall to enthusiastic applause. He made no introductions, starting in immediately to play his first song. But something was wrong with the amplifier system, and the music sounded like mosquitoes caught in a net of Saran Wrap. Dylan finished the number and made a few sly comments while Victor replaced the microphone and someone from the college played with the amplifier system. Seemingly unfazed, Dylan proceeded, with better audio and the audience now completely with him. A predominantly conservative student body applauded at every derogatory mention of prejudice, injustice, segregation, or nuclear warfare. Dylan, who had intended to sing only six songs for the first half, was apparently enjoying himself and added two more to the set. At intermission, he got a big hand.

Downstairs during the intermission, Dylan talked a lot, and drank more wine. He only half-jokingly spoke about the speaker system in the hall, about the songs and about the audience. There; were a lot of people waiting to see him outside, but he was almost too wound up even to cope with friends who were already in the room with him. Victor said that except for the speaker system he thought it was going pretty well, although he was still worried about the crowds that would gather after the concert. “You’ll see, man,” he said, “you’ll see.”

For the second half of the concert, almost seventy-five people had left their seats and were sitting on the floor close to the stage. A path had to be cleared before Dylan could get on, but passing by one girl, he reached out, said **“Hi”** and touched her hair with his hand, which caused the people around her to laugh and applaud, while the girl herself simply – but audibly – sighed. For the rest or the concert she stared straight at Dylan, who by now was a little drunk, although he was performing as well as in the first half. After his last song Victor and I met him just as he got off the stage, and led him to the exit. He had gotten a sanding (*sic*) ovation, and while we were persuading him to do an encore he kept repeating **“They don’t have to do *that*,”** nodding at the audience. He had unfastened the leather shoulder strap or his guitar, and the pudgy girl in the surplus raincoat rushed up to him, asking tor “All I Really Want to Do,” fumbling with the leather strap attempting to help him refasten it. He grinned at her, and went back on stage for the encore. Victor sent Bob and John downstairs to guard the entrance to the dressing room, he posted himself by the exit to block the pudgy girl and her companions and detailed me to get Dylan off the stage and through the crowd in the front row. Dylan finished up and, smiling, walked down into the audience and through the exit, Victor and I on either side.

We got him inside just before. the crowd. Dylan was happy about the way the concert had gone, poured himself several congratulatory cups of wine and begun to wonder about getting out of the building through the crowd and into the car which was waiting outside. He decided finally to wait twenty minutes or so, then make a break for it. At the outside door, Bob. wearing a pair of dark leather gloves which he kept rubbing together and up and down his thighs, was talking to a tall blonde man who kept repeating “Listen, Bobby invited me afterwards to…” He bent down and began to whisper in Bob’s ear. Bob listened for a moment and pushed the man back

**“Listen, man, I don’t want to hear about it. Go away.”**

“But, Bobby…”

**“Listen, just go away, man. I don’t want to talk about it. I don’t want to hear about it. Just go away”** He turned his attentions to the crowd which now must have been a hundred strong.

Victor meantime was packing the remainder of Dylan’s clothes and equipment, and sticking the one surviving bottle or wine into his pocket. He looked tired; Dylan looked exhausted and drunk. **“O.K.,”** Dylan almost sighed, **“lead the way.”** We walked out of the classroom and towards the main door. When the crowd outside saw Dylan coming, many of them came forward to press their faces against the glass. As soon as I opened the door, Dylan stepped out and they all pressed forward.

“Bobby!”

“Hiya, Bobby!”

"Hey Bobby"

"Hiya, Mr. Dylan."

**"Hello kid,"** Dylan said to a girl who was squirming against the door **"long time no see."** In reply, she giggled and coughed. Walking through the crowd Dylan waved and shook a few hands. Another girl followed him all the way to the car, "I'm Billie Dylan's roommate from State," she announced. "Bob, you remember." Dylan said that he didn't remember. "Billie Dylan, From," the girl said, almost following him into the car. **"Oh yeah,"** Dylan said, not very convincingly, **"how is she?"** "Great," the girl replied, "she says to tell you hello." **"Fantastic,"** Dylan said. He slammed the door and we began pull away. "Hey, Bobby, wait a minute," someone said, running frantically along side the car, "wait a minute." Bob looked around, rubbing his black leather gloves together. It was the blonde man whom he had pushed away a little earlier at the door. **"Keep goin,"** he said, **"Keep drivin."**

* * *

The morning was cold. In the frost and dust covering Bank's car, which had been parked outside Dylan's improvised dressing room the night before, we could still see outlines of little inscriptions written by some of the girls all over the hood, roof and windows: "Bobby," "Bobby," "Bobby Dylan," "Dylan," "Dylan," "Bobby Dylan." No one spoke much during the trip to the airport. Victor looked still asleep, and Dylan a little fuzzy. About ten miles out of Mt. Vernon he folded his arms across his chest and, slinking down as much as he could in the Volkswagen, leaned his head back over the top of the seat and closed his eyes. All of a sudden, asleep, in that early morning he looked very young.

Victor checked his baggage at the airport and we went for something to eat. Dylan, who looked a little more refreshed, spoke easily and with humor about his upcoming concerts. **"Tomorrow we're goin' to Princeton, and Sunday to Bangor, Maine. Man. I don't know what's in Bangor, Maine. It's not a school or anything."** I told him I didn't think the Chamber of Commerce had booked him, and he threw back his head and laughed for a long time. **"Yeah, the Chamber or Commerce – wow!"** For the first time since we had met him the day before he seemed completely at ease. **"I'm gonna do these concerts out on the Coast, and Joanie's gonna be with me. Pretty soon we're gonna get billed together."** He smiled that friendly vulnerable smile or his, but this time without a trace of nervousness. **"I'm gonna be out there for a while."**

The flight to New York was announced, and Banks and I walked them to the gate. The businessmen were staring again. When one of them turned to his companion nudging him and pointing at us, Dylan looked over his shoulder and waved **"It's alright man,"** he said, **"I make more money than you do."**

Banks thanked them both, and apologised for any embarrassing incidents that might have happened the previous evening. **"That's O.K. man,"** Dylan replied, **"wasn't nothin'."**

"Look," Victor said, "we'll see you again, huh? If there's a concert somewhere, come back and see us."

We said we would if we could get past the crowds we hadn't thought would be around.

**"Well, so long,"** Dylan said, **"And thanks."**

Banks and I watched them get on the plane. On their way, they passed two T.W.A. groundcrewmen wearing coveralls and white crashhelmets who turned and stared. One of them came up to us. "Hey. wasn't that that folksinger?"

We said that it was.

"Which one? The short one?"

Banks nodded.

"What's his name?" he asked.

"Bob Dylan," I said.

"Hey," he said, turning to his friend, "That was Bob Dylan."

# 7 November 1964, Unknown Interviewer (The Daily Princetonian)

Source: *The Daily Princetonian*, US student newspaper, 9 November 1964. The text here is reproduced from a subseqent republication in *The Daily Princetonian*, US student newspaper, 8 November 2000.

This interview was conducted at the McCarter Theatre, Princeton, New Jersey.

**Bob Dylan Philosophizes on Folk Songs Backstage**

**"It doesn't matter whether the song has come down from a thousand years or you wrote it yesterday sitting on the toilet,"** explained the young man who had just enthralled a SRO audience Saturday night at McCarter.

Bob Dylan, part folk singer, part philosopher and a near prophet to some members of this generation makes a startling appearance when he first walks on the stage with his jeans and high-heeled desert boots, harmonica and high standing hair. His screechy voice and backwoods diction don't help much.

But Dylan kept his entire audience hushed, trying to catch all the words to his songs, songs that sound as if they were written yesterday.

After "changing" from his tan suede jacket to a papier mache top hat which he kept moving around on his head, Dylan commented on some of these songs.

His "Talking John Birch Society Paranoid Blues" ridiculed searching for communists. With the same twist of humor Dylan later explained that communists are **"awful, just awful, but don't worry, they're only a minority group – that's all."**

God on His Side

In one of his songs, the folk singer asked whether "Judas Iscariot had God on his side." Answering, he said, **"There must be some people somewhere that don't believe God is on their side. Do communists believe in God? How could He be on their side if they don't believe in Him?**

**"I can't put God over anyone's head, I can't force anyone to believe in God. If I did that I'd be a cop or a communist."**

The folk singer believes in **"every breath he breathes,"** and, as a second commandment he added, **"in every breath anyone else breathes too."** Themes of death and love recur throughout his songs. **"I only met death once, but the next time I'll be ready, yes, I'll be ready,"** and added, **"It's the same way with love."**

Although he is best known for his songs, Dylan said he would rather write **"those things without any form, whatever you want to call them, poetry if you like."**

This is the second year that Dylan has played to a sold-out audience at Princeton.

After the interview, Dylan and his friends left in search of a **"respectable bar, with nice wide booths, that looks like it's just out of Russia, you know, just right for us."**

# 14 November 1964, John Rothchild

Source: *Yale Daily News*, US college newspaper, 17 November 1964, pages 1, 3.

This interview was conducted at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

**A Discordant Dylan; 'I DON'T WANT TO KNOW ANYTHING'**

Folksinger Bob Dylan appeared at Woolsey Hall Saturday night. The following is a backstage interview with the unkempt prophet of a new generation.

Bob Dylan said it was all a big joke.

Just looking at his clothes, it was easy to see what he was talking about.

Bright dress cufflinks glittered ironically from the sleeves of his faded blue work shirt. He wore scuffed black boots, his hair was unkempt, and sideburns grew wild down his face.

His appearance on the stage was the second joke. The small folksinger looked like a cockroach feeling its way across the Woolsey Hall floor. And the glittering façade of the Woolsey organ punctuated the very ironies Dylan sang about.

His message was the biggest joke of all. Many in the capacity crowd came to find inspiration in the songs of a real man who like motorcycles and couches and rejects everything else, including gold paint. But according to Dylan, he offers no meanings.

**"It's all a joke,"** he said. **"I'm not attached to anything. I can't even talk to you, because all our definitions of words are different."**

Dylan's philosophy can be expressed in one word: Dylan. Values, standards, and even things are just self-made traps in a world that has become entrapped. **"I just am,"** he said. **"That's all I know. I don't know anything."**

Hung-Up And Cool

As the interview progressed, the previous ironies of the stage seemed less apparent. Dylan seemed more in his element in the little windowless backstage dressing room, occupied only by he and his manager, also wearing the blue-jean uniform of the Hung-Up and the Cool.

Dylan didn't talk of the past, except to correct the myth that he took his name from Dylan Thomas. **"I got it from my step-father, whose name was Dillon,"** he said.

As he spoke of the future, he leaned forward on a small wooden chair, and his volatile eyes seemed to ignite the room. **"What if… what if. What if everybody was a coward, then nobody would do a lot of things."**

He rejected meanings as strongly as he cast away the importance of the future.

**"What does anything mean? What does 'free' mean? I can't describe that in conversation."**

Weightlessness

In fact, the 23-year-old writer and singer rejected almost everything as meaningless to his life – everything except wine. When asked about money, he said **"I don't have any feeling about any of those things. I'm not gonna put all those weights on myself."**

He was equally un-affected by his image. He shrugged off the Civil Rights people, the hung-up people, and the dissatisfied people who look to Dylan as the spokesman of a new generation, and a new life.

**"It doesn't bother me to have people define me. If it can make someone happy I don't care. There are worse things possible."**

Dylan claims he can do anything he wants. He remarked that he wasn't tied down to books, study or classes. Yet when he turned to his manager and said **"I want some wine, man,"** his manager said "There's no time to buy wine. Besides, this is Woolsey Hall. You can have coffee."

Dylan took the coffee. When he was finished, the man without meanings grabbed his unadorned guitar, picked up the harmonica **"with the least spit on it,"** clumsily walked out onto the stage.

He was unprofessional and jerky as he switched from one microphone to another, but it was this lack of professionalism that made Dylan real. His individuality clashed with and nullified all the gilt and marble and extravagance that covered the walls behind him.

Dylan claims that he can't convey meanings. But the experience of his songs shouted out their meanings to the thunderous applause and the deep-quiet concentration of his audience.

He explained his resistance to meddling with personalities later. **"Some people try to cure everything. But like a cold, its just catching. Everybody else gets sick, too. Me, I'm not going to put anybody in prison. I like everybody."**

The ice was beginning to crack, and Dylan seemed to begin forgetting his dislike of the **"college student who trails me with a microphone and a tape machine."** He started to get impatient.

Then his tall Dylanesque manager came in. He told Dylan the time was up.

And with that, the boy that many have called the greatest folk composer of our century extended a limp hand and walked out.

# 29 November 1964, Dick Cruiser

Source: incomplete and reconstructed from two partially overlapping sources available on-line:

● the website Outlaw Archive: https://www.instagram.com/p/DDwL2CvRsEl/?igsh=eWF4b2E5cTdieWgw&img_index=1

● the website Cloud Forest Café: https://www.cloudforestcafe.com/gallery-and-art-corner?fbclid=IwY2xjawHTsvxleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHRQR8OKMOvKjaINSIHsbRQetbSt4zF7Ul8ctMfaB1jbQGLMZIMffxNBARg_aem_gPeKX9xJ6eLrUgJDMSmC7g

The interview took place at the Memorial Auditorium, Sacramento, California, and was filmed for KXTV (Channel 10), a television station in Sacramento. Bob Neuwirth was also present.

Cruiser: Do you consider the music you do or the lyrics that are in the music, the most important? What do you concentrate on the most?

**Dylan: Well, I concentrate on really… really somewhere between those two things. The lyrics… the lyrics, they are just a vehicle. The guitar is just a vehicle for the lyrics, I would think. A lot of lyrics can't be driven anywhere so they just don't ever get in the car to be driven. That's about all I can think of…**

Cruiser: What do you think about commercialism of folk music? Do you think it's a good thing, or do you think…

**Dylan: I think it's wonderful. I'm one hundred percent in favour of commercialism!**

Cruiser: Do you think that this has helped folk music by bringing it to the public eye so they can buy it then, and that therefore folk music has become a stronger art form… or do you think that it has been hurt by commercialism in any way at all?

**Dylan: Uh, I don't think anything is really hurt by anything, you know, if people…**

Neuwirth: It can't be hurt!

**Dylan: It can't be hurt, right. It can be uh,** [chuckle]… **it can be slapped** [chuckle]**. But you know, it can be uh, well you know, it can be dragged around a little bit, but I don't see how it** [commercialism] **could possibly hurt it.**

Cruiser: Don't you try to define these things in your lyrics?

**Dylan: I believe in liberalizing and human rights** [chuckle]**, whatever they are. No, I don't think I try to define it.**

Cruiser: You just comment in other words, on what you feel perhaps is wrong or unfair or…

**Dylan: Well, I just make a picture, you know, of what's there. If it's there, you know, if you want to call it human rights, well you can call it human rights I guess. But, I just comment on what's there.**

Cruiser: In other words then… you're telling a story and this is the essence of folk music to you, or… do you think you can create any good by telling in the story that people should be equalized for instance, just in human rights?

Neuwirth: People gotta make up their own mind!

**Dylan: Yeah.**

Cruiser: You wouldn't try to make up their own mind for them, you just talk about it.

Neuwirth: No – no.

**Dylan: For me to make up their minds… I couldn't do that; I would have to live their life. If I were to make up their mind, and you know, I would have to lead them somewhere… which I can't. The world is small enough as it is, you know. I can't uh… BARBARA SALES!**

[A commotion at the door. A young woman bursts into the room brandishing white chrysanthemums clutched in her hand. A local girl from Davis.]

Dylan: Barbara Sale! [laughter and chatter] Come here and give me a kiss.

**Dylan: Come in! Sit down. You're on television!**

Cruiser: Hello Barbara, I think we've met in Davis.

Dylan: She's next. Put it right on.

Cruiser: [addressed to Barbara] I think we have.

Migdell: [unitelligible] … same artist.

Dylan: Artist… right.

Cruiser: [addressed to Barbara] What is your name?

Migdell: Barbara. Barbara Migdell.

Dylan: There!

Cruiser: You said it was 'Sale'.

Migdell: Well, Barbara Sales-Migdell – hyphenated.

Cruiser: Did you ever write a song about Barbara, Bob?

**Dylan: Huh?**

Cruiser: Did you ever write a song about Barbara?

**Dylan: Barbara? Lot'a Barbaras… she was uh…**

Cruiser: Where do you go from here Bob? What do you do next?

Dylan: Oh, I go to San Mateo. I think they call it San Mateo.

Migdell: Yeah. Fort Mudge.

Dylan: Yeah, Fort Mudge after that.

Cruiser: Well, we wanna wish you lots of success… continuing success. And we hope that… you'll continue to fare well commercially in the sense you believe in that, and I hope that you'll stop and see us in Sacramento again.

Dylan: OK.

Cruiser: Thank you Bob.

Dylan: [to Barbara] I got the flowers?

[to Neuwirth] Did you get anything at all?

Neuwirth: I don't know. Yeah.

# 5 December 1964, Bob Blackmar

Source: Broadcast on KCSB radio, Santa Barbara, December 1964. Transcript published in *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 80, Winter 2024, pages 23-25, 27-29, 31-33, 35-37, 39-40. Transcribed by Mike Wyvill.

The interview took place at the High School Auditorium, Long Beach, California. Includes contributions from Victor Maimudes and Bob Neuwirth. Both the date and venue of this interview are disputed.

**BD: Just where exactly now is Santa Barbara?**

BB: Santa Barbara. It is a little northern community located approximately between Monterey and Los Angeles.

**BD: Is there any surfing going on there?**

BB: Quite a bit of surfing.

**BD: Is there anything like a hamburger…?**

BB: [talks over the top of Dylan] I even partake of it myself.

**BD: How about tacos? How's the taco industry?**

BB: There's quite a few Mexicans up there too. You're hip, aren't you?

BN: Has it got a Bohemian section? Very hip.

BB: No, no, there's just a few ethnic cats on campus.

**BD: What's your next question?**

BB: Next question. Should we start with the first?

**BD: No, let's bury the first question.**

BB: Who exactly influenced you in your blues before you actually got into topical folk music?

**BD: Victor Maymudes. Victor Maymudes is an old blues singer, I believe he comes out of, I believe he comes out of Chicken Farm, Chicago.**

VM: I come out of the egg.

BB: And there's a lot o' Rembrandt in that blue. Would you like to introduce yourself, the other guys?

**BD: This is Sparky, Sparky one of my friends, this is my next friend here Bogus.**

BN: Hi kids.

**BD: Bogus Wasp. And I'm James the gun.**

BB: Whadya think of…?

**BD:** [interrupts] **Look, there's a hundred extra chairs.**

BB: I saw this article in the last issue of Sing Out! [referring to Irwin Silber's Open Letter to Dylan.]

**BD: Groovy, groovy. Whatever it was, whatever it is.**

BB: Do you agree with what he said?

**BD: I certainly do.**

BB: You do?

**BD: Where would I be if I didn't?**

BB: What did he say?

**BD: Answer that. You answer that.**

BB: You want me to say?

**BD: I certainly do.**

BB: Did you read the article?

**BD: Most certainly did!**

BB: What did it say?

**BD: Well I'm askin' you to tell me.** [BN: talks over the top as a couple of people enter the room - Here they come.) **Haven't got the energy.**

ANO: Step right this way, step right this way. Here he is right now. You wanna introduce yourself?

**BD: You wanna introduce yourself?**

BN: You have any tubes of blues with you?

ANO: No, I don't have any at all.

BN: You have no blue tubes?

ANO: Mr Dylan, wanna shake your hand.

**BD: Thank you very much.**

ANO: Wanna take a picture with you.

**BD: OK you can take a picture right now with my** [talked over] **right here.**

ANO: Alright now, here's the camera.

**BD: Alright let's take a look at that camera.**

ANO: It's just an Instamatic.

ANO: I didn't even introduce myself.

**BD: Oh I thought you were Irwin Silber.**

ANO: No, he's my father.

**BD: Oh.**

ANO: He's back in New York. How can I be Irwin Silber? You know Sis Cunningham?

**BD: Sis ????? Sis Cunningham? I used to yeah. How's she doin'?**

ANO: How come you haven't had any songs in Broadside or Sing Out! lately?

**BD: Sing Out!. Hey, I don't… I have no idea. I don't even know what I'm doing here. What's this gotta do with Broadside and Sing Out!?**

ANO: We got our arms around each other.

BN: Taking some photographs. Can we have silence? Can we have a little silence now?

**BD: A little silence now.**

BN: Taking photographs. Silence please. Silence. One, two, three. Kiss him now. Oh no. No. Say something.

**BD: Say 'shit'. 'Shit' will do.**

ANO: Bob, don't say…

ANO: I'll fade it out over here.

ANO: Don't say…

**BD: You can fade it out.**

ANO: Alright. OK.

BN: Keep those people out of here.

ANO: It didn't flash.

**BD: It didn't go. It didn't flash.**

ANO: It didn't flash.

BN: Keep those people back. Keep those people back. [mock roar]

ANO: It's those lights back there

ANO: Yeah, you can't take it against the light. You got nothin' but lights.

ANO: Yeah.

ANO: Well, you don't dig.

ANO: Oh well.

BB: Back to Silber's article.

**BD: Back to Silber's article.**

BB: What's he sayin?

**BD: Who knows what he's sayin? Do you know? You're a better man than me.** [laughter] […after garbled noise…] **I think he said we're all equal.**

BN: I said that!

**BD: Oh, you said that?**

BN: I said that, yeah.

ANO: Well, I say we're all brothers.

BB: Do you know Tom Carvey?

**BD: Tom Carvey? I most certainly do know Tom Carvey. That's him right here.**

BB: No, no

**BD: If he's not here in the room I don't know him.**

BN: He grew up, he grew up. I don't know. I'll have to talk to him next time that I see him.

**BD: If he's not in the room…**

BB: He's lyin' then, isn't he?

**BD: He's not lying.**

ANO: What's the problem?

**BD: Tom, Tom come'er and tell these people who you are. This is Tom Carvey right here.**

BN: Tom Carvey, speaking to you there from Santa Barbara now ladies and gentlemen. You're on the [difficult to ascertain]. Bring it on in. Come on…

**BD:** [interrupts] **Now, I can't have him say too much, alright?**

BN: Go ahead.

BB: Let's see, I got…

BN: Move on to the second question.

BB: The second question.

**BD: Did I give you an answer to the first one?**

BB: Yeah. Irwin Silber. That's the answer. Is that right?

**BD: That's the answer. I don't know what the question was.**

ANO: You want 200 folding chairs.

BN: Has success spoiled you?

**BD: Oh, of course it has.** [laughter]

ANO: You're kidding.

BB: What're you drinking?

**BD: What am I drinking here?**

BB: Can I have a shot?

**BD: This is not something you'll probably like.**

ANO: Seven-Up with wine.

**BD: It's Moon juice. It's Moon juice mixed with a little yoghurt.**

BB: Oh, that's bitchin' stuff.

**BD: And some egg cream.**

BB: I dig.

**BD: From a plant.**

BB: I dig.

BN: We call it Dahi.

BN: We call it Dahi where we come from. No, you can't have any of my Dahi. Success has gone to my head. [laughter]

BB: What was the last song you wrote?

**BD: Last song I wrote?**

BB: Yeah.

**BD: Er, it was called Thee Song.**

BB: Thee Song?

**BD:** [spells out] **T, h, e, e.**

BB: Thee, oh thee.

**BD:** **Thee Song.**

BB: And where did you get the inspiration for this masterpiece?

**BD:** **I got it from Thee.**

BB?: [Next comment is unintelligible - Could be 'One of thee's left me']

**BD:** **Sorry.**

BB: Are you gonna sing 'I Shall Be Free No. 10'?

**BD:** **I don't know if I'll sing that.**

ANO: Why don't you then?

**BD:** **If I can remember it, I guess. What's the next question now?**

BB: I have to read it.

ANO: Yeah.Yeah.

**BD:** **What about that horse over there? Did you bring him in here?**

ANO: Hell, no.

**BD:** **You probably brought him in here for a prop.**

ANO: A horse is too ethnic for me.

BB: Are you a member of the Communist Party?

**BD:** **I most certainly am!**

BB: Good.

**BD:** **God I'm a…**

BB: [interrupts] Sshh, this is gonna be on the air…

**BD:** **I'm a Communist. I'm a Communist, I don't care. I don't care who knows it.**

BB: They're liable to blacklist you Bob.

**BD:** **They don't care if I'm a Communist.**

BN: You can't be on Hootenany.

**BD:** **I'm a Communist. I'm…** [guffaws] **Hey, if it's gonna put anybody uptight by me saying I'm a Communist then I gotta say I'm a Communist. I'm a John Bircher too.**

BN: And a Minuteman

**BD:** **'Course I'm a Minutmen.**

BB: Oh yeah? Where's your M1?

**BD:** **I've got it in my wallet.**

BB: How about the DAR?

**BD:** **DAR, I'm a member of DAR.**

BN: Hey, Tom Carvey's dad is President of the DAR.

**BD:** **Well he's a friend of mine.**

BN: Tom Carvey? A friend o' yours?

**BD:** **Yeah!**

BN: A friend of yours?

**BD:** **Yeah. We met at the DAR.**

BN: Right. His Dad's president of that.

**BD:** **Also…**

BB: Can we think about Joan Baez being in jail?

**BD:** **Yeah. I think I'm gonna tell some people about that.**

BB: Whadya think about Joan Baez?

Female: Would she'd'a been here tonight if…

**BD:** [interrupts] **I'm gonna get here out as soon as possible.**

Female: Would she have been here tonight if she wasn't in jail?
BN: We're crashing that jail. We're crashing that jail.
**BD: We're gonna go in there with machine guns an' get 'em all out.**
BN: We'll spring that girl. We'll spring that little honey.
ANO: Somebody in a wheelchair wants you to sign this picture.
BN: Sign it. Can I sign it?
ANO: Someone down here with a pencil…
BB: Let's see. We have to get another question Jim.
ANO: Any question will do.
**BD: I wanna say 'Hello' to George Lincoln Rockwell. I hear he's out around here.**
ANO: One day he'll pass you, I know.
BB: Is he a personal friend of yours?
**BD: I ran across him a few times.**
BB: D'you like him?
**BD: I got nothing against him.**
BB: He did alright.
**BD: … like to say hello. Can we come back?**
BB: To see you?
**BD: Well…**
[Background chatter]
BN: Where's Del anyway?
ANO: At school?
ANO: Confident [the rest is unitelligible]
**BD: Well, you know.**
ANO: [indistinct but sounds like 'Not confident?]
ANO: Oh is he?
[Background chatter including Bob]
BN: I just wanted to… if he was down here I was…
BB: Back to the interview, Bob.
**BD: What time is it? What time is it? Back to the interview?**
BB: Back to the interview.
**BD: How about that interview?**
BB: Alright. Let's see.
[Background alternative conversation taking place]
ANO: Beautiful.
ANO: Good, very good.
ANO: Thanks a lot, [unintelligible]
BB: Back to the interview. Why have you changed from album to album?
**BD: I have? Why have I changed from album to album?**
BB: Oh yes.
**BD: Well I guess I would… I don't know.**
BB: You've calmed down. Why?
**BD: Calmed down?**
BB: Oh, yes.
**BD: Is that the word?**
BB: Yes
**BD: I thought the word was 'change'.**

BB: Change. Well, calm, change, you have to change somehow. You can calm up or calm down.

**BD: Yeah, well I don't know.**

BB: You don't use your harmonica anymore.

**BD: I've been trying not to change, you know. But I just change. I guess I can't help it. I don't know.**

BB: Don't you use the harmonica, the blues and stuff.

ANO: [in background] What's he playing?

**BD: Aw groovy. I can't play one o' these.**

ANO: No, you need a Hohner.

[background shouting]

**BD: I can't play that. It's too big. You see it's got two things here. I don't play them like that. I don't know how to do it. Hohner reed. Similar reed.**

BB: You use Hohner's, right?

**BD: Right.**

BB: Do you cross-tune?

**BD: Yeah.**

BB: All the time?

**BD: Yeah.**

BB: Who do you use? Which harmonica?

**BD: I use four harmonicas.**

BB: I know but which one predominately?

**BD: I use G.**

BB: You do most of your stuff in G, yeah?

**BD: I use G harmonica or C harmonica.**

BB: That's what I thought. Some more questions?

**BD: Go ahead.**

BB: OK, let's see. God we've got some good ones here too.

**BD: Aw, I hope so.**

BB: How close are… actually, you do Woody Guthrie?

**BD: No.**

BB: I wouldn't imagine…

**BD: No relation, no relation at all to him!**

BB: Have you seen him lately?

**BD: Haven't seen him. No. No.**

BB: You seen Elliott lately?

**BD: Er, once in a while I see him on the street, that's all.**

BB: Did you see him at Newport this year?

**BD: Yes I did as a matter of fact.**

BB: Last time I saw him he said he did.

**BD: He said that?**

BB: He was half the concert talking to you.

**BD: Yeah, I was talking to him for a while.**

BB: Are you from New York.

**BD: No I'm from Minnesota.**

BB: Minnesota!

**BD: Yeah, I'm from Minnesota! Minnesota, get away from me!! [laughter]**

BN: Oh my God, man.

BB: Most of your fans are from New York.

**BD:** **Yeah well, I went there. I went there.**

BB: What is your relation to Baez now?

**BD:** **My relation?**

BB: Are you her brother?

**BD:** **We have relations? That's about all I can say about it.**

BB: Where are you going from here?

**BD:** **Aw, I imagine right back to New York City. I'm goin' to England as soon as I can.**

BB: Oh, are you really?

**BD:** **Yeah, back to England.**

BB: For how long?

**BD:** **Well…**

ANO: [interrupts] Is is true that you're taking guitar lessons from The Beatles?

**BD:** **Oh God, yes.**

BN: Is it true that you're the son of Jack Elliott?

**BD:** **Well, that's true. It's true that I'm taking guitar lessons.**

ANO: Is it? Is it? Or he is the son of Bob Dylan?

**BD:** **Oh no, that's not true at all. That's not true at all.**

ANO: Sometimes people get…

**BD:** **…** [unintelligible] **my child and it will always be so.**

ANO: Aren't we all? Hopefully.

BB: What are you tryin' to go, to do from here as far as your songwriting? Anything special that you draw from?

**BD:** **No nothing special. I don't even write songs anymore.**

BB: I'm beginning to wonder because you have nothing published anymore.

**BD:** **No, no. I don't write songs… I write songs for myself.**

BB: Hear you're writing a novel or a play or something.

**BD:** **Yeah a play. A big play. Long play.**

BB: On what?

**BD:** **On nothing.**

BB: On nothing?

**BD:** **Yeah.** [laughter all round]

BB: Is it gonna be on Broadway?

**BD:** **It's gonna be a big smash hit.**

BB: Big smash hit, yeah? What're gonna do from here as far as singin'…

**BD:** **Continue writing plays.**

BB: Where do you pick up these bitchin' names like Tedham Porterhouse and Blind Boy Grunt and all that crap? I mean do you sit and ponder this for hours and hours picking out…

**BD:** [interrupts] **Tedham Porterhouse happens to be a very good friend of mine.**

BB: That's not what I heard. How about Blind Boy Grunt?

**BD:** **Blind Boy Grunt happens to be a person that is blind. Yes.**

BB: [slight laugh]

**BD:** **You're makin' fun of him. You're makin' fun of him.**

BB: I wouldn't make fun of anyone that's blind.

**BD:** **Well the guy's a friend of mine and, you know, he's blind and he can't… he doesn't really have that much opportunity to get around and I don't want anybody makin' fun of him. If you wanna ask me about him that's fine but don't make fun of him.**

BB: Alright, I'm asking you about him.

**BD:** **Don't make fun of him and don't make fun of Tedham either.**

BB: Tedham?

**BD: Yeah.**

BB: He really whirled on that Jack Elliott album didn't he?

**BD: Hey, that's, you know, you know. He's good. Plays with his feet.**

BB: Plays with his feet, right?

**BD: Very good.**

BB: Right.

**BD: But, don't make fun of Blind Boy Grunt because he can't see too good. He can't see too good.**

BB: Well, if he's blind I imagine he couldn't. You gonna continue with Columbia?

**BD: I will certainly continue with Columbia. Columbia sell all my records.** [voices speak over at this point]

BN?: We only have five more minutes.

BB: Five more minutes?

**BD: Yeah we gotta shoot off now. Next time I'll ask you some questions…**

[At this point the interview disintegrates as everyone in the room decides to speak/shout loudly and it is difficult to make anything out.]

BB: Would you like to say goodbye to…

**BD: Goodbye.**

BB: Thank you Bob.

[Here follows a whole cacophony of people talking over one another. Perhaps Blackmar is underneath it all saying…]

BB: Hang on just one second. I'd really appreciate your autograph… you got a piece of paper?

**BD: Let's do it.**

# 10 February 1965, Sheryl Evans

Source: *The Jersey Journal*, Jersey City, 18 February 1965.

Interview at the concert at The State College, Rutgers Gymnasium, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

**Bob Dylan: Authentic Voice of Protest**

*Regarded as the "king" of protest music in esoteric circles, Bob Dylan appeared last week before a SRO audience of folk enthusiasts at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, in a one-man concert sponsored by Community Action Projects. Our girl, Sheryl, a Dylan fan and authority was there to cover the event.*

The lobby of the New Brunswick auditorium was mobbed. The majority of the crowd was in uniform: Beards, desert boots, long hair, sweaters, on the boys; straight hair, raincoats, shoulder bags, on the girls. They seemed to be going all out to look like individuals. Instead they looked like characters.

The program was to begin at 8 p.m. At 8:15 the backstage door opened and a scrawny young man clad in dungarees, light blue shirt, and brown jacket walked to the stage. He started singing the moment he reached the microphone despite the thunderous applause still coming from the audience. Within seconds not a sound could be heard except Dylan's off-beat voice proclaiming that "The Times They Are A'Changin' ".

Dylan is an "in-person-performer"; his voice and mood and meaning come across much clearer in person than on record. His wit seems sharper, his disappointments sadder, his protests stronger.

And protesting strongly is a thing Bob Dylan does often and well. During the 90-minute concert he protested against social injustice, senseless fear, nuclear war, discrimination, and phony morality. He defended freedom, individualism, change, reform, and truth.

To say that Bob Dylan is impressive would be an understatement; overwhelming is a better word. Close-up, he makes quite an appearance. His skin is too white, too pale. His hair is too long. It vaguely resembles the mane of a horse that's been out in a dust storm. But for all the extremeness in his guise, one still gets the feeling he is sincere, real, honest. (After consorting with that audience of wishful individualists all night, this was refreshing).

Our conversation was short and didn't amount to very much. I didn't learn anything about his feelings that I hadn't already discovered from reading his poetry and listening to his songs.

What I did learn, however, is that Bob Dylan is authentic. What he says, he's saying because he believes it; he's thought about it. Or, to put it in his words, **"I wouldn't waste my time writing about something I didn't believe in."**

# 17 or 18 March 1965, Marvin Zelkowitz

Source: *The Pitt News*, University of Pittsburgh student newspaper, 24 March 1965, page 3.

Interview at the concert at Syria Mosque, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**Dylan and Baez**

The times they are really changin' when a kid with a voice like Bob Dylan's can stand up before 5,000 people and sing through his nose about God and freedom, and get away with it. And that is just what Dylan did at Syria Mosque last Wednesday and Thursday evenings.

If it had not been for Joan Baez's melodic strains that broke the monotony of Dylan's droning, this reviewer would have left after the first song. Dylan was barely tolerable when he sang, but he had to prove that he had other talents besides singing.

So, resembling Howdy Doody's one man band, he played harmonica and guitar at the same time. We asked Dylan why he chose to become a folk singer. He ran his hand through his hair, a mop that makes the Beatles seem conservative. **"It's the only thing I'm good at,"** he said.

He says he started folk singing at the age of 11 and has been singing for the past 13 years. "**I even tried grave digging for a while,"** he explained, **"but I wasn't even good at that, so I decided to keep singing."**

Both Boy [*sic*] Dylan and Joan Baez say they sing to make people think. They both say their singing and writing serves no other purpose. When they sang at the Mosque, they sang to make the people think who were paying anywhere between $2.50 and $4.00 to see them.

When Miss Baez sings in the South, she sings for the same reasons. "I never sing in white schools anymore," she said. "The kids there listen to your songs, and they agree outwardly with what you say, but they don't practice what they say they agree with."

For that reason, Miss Baez now sings only in the Negro schools. "They can understand what I'm saying," she said. "I can communicate with them."

Many of the songs that both these people sing have been written by them. This is where Bob Dylan's true talent lies. He has the ability to put into words what is felt by so many popular folk singers. Dylan's songs would come across better if he would let Miss Baez, or a group like the Kingston Trio or Peter, Paul, and Mary sing them.

# 19 March 1965, Bebo White and David Berkowitz

Source: *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 196, 2018, pages 40-43, audio recording transcribed by Zac Dadic.

Interview at Reynolds Coliseum, Raleigh, North Carolina of Bob Dylan (BD) and Joan Baez (JB) by Bebo White (BW) and David Berkowitz (DB).

**Raleigh ’65 Revisited - a ‘lost’ interview**

BW: You’re on.

DB: Hello. Well, ladies and gentleman that was it.

BW: Hah, we’ve got Bob Dylan’s post nasal drugs. Seriously, if you were to classify yourself, socially and politically, how would you do it?

**BD: Well I’d say I was a mathematician more than anything else. A socialistic mathematician, I deal in numbers, actually. Numbers and nasal spray. I don’t know, what would you classify yourself as?**

(more nasal spray is applied)

**BD: God! My nose is terrible.**

JB: (in the background) Are you going to share that with anybody else?

**BD: Anything, what kind of thing can I pick from?**

BW: Ok, I’ll give ya, I’ll cue ya. I know this will be dear to your heart. The thing is a month ago in Carolina we had a drive for free speech… free speech movement and it was a complete flop. (Bob applies nasal spray again.)

BW: Did you hear anything about that?

**BD: No I didn’t. Sorry to say…**

BW: I got something along the same line. Are you familiar with the ‘Speaker Ban’ in North Carolina?

**BD: No. No I’m not.**

BW: No Communists or anybody that’s ever been a member of the Communist Party or anybody that’s ever plead the 5th amendment…

DB: Regarding his political beliefs…

BW: Yeah, can ever speak on a state supported campus.

**BD: You mean nobody can ever hear ’em?**

BW: That’s right.

DB: On a state supported campus.

BW: That includes, that includes… such as Pete Seeger.

**BD: Oh, well, too bad.**

BW: You think it’s good? (incredulous)

**BD: No, I said it’s too bad! (equally incredulous)**

(Joan laughs)

**BD: I don’t know, I don’t think anybody should be… I think people should be allowed to hear anything, anything that anybody or anything wants to talk. In itself, but you know, a lot of people don’t believe that. They have reasons to not let somebody hear something, you know.**

BW: Bobbo, the thing is… anybody can come here except those. I mean, before last Malcolm X came here you know, and George Lincoln Rockwell could come here, but not Pete Seeger. Something like that.

**BD: Well that’s more or less, I think maybe a… tradition thing. Maybe they don’t like folk music or something?**

BW: Alright, another example. It’s about two months ago, this cat was gonna come and speak in the biology ward. Somebody dug out…

**BD: I get, I know what you mean, I know what you mean. It's too bad, that's all I can say. I don't know anything else about it. That's the university's fault. That's the university's problem, you know. I don't know who can take care of that except the people who go to the university there. Somebody else…**

DB: Silly thing is, it's entirely in legislation.

**BD: Oh.**

BW: Virtually everybody at the University's against it. That's what this thing was…

**BD: Yeah.**

DB: I've got two questions. One, what do you think of college in general and two, what do you think of President Johnson? Are you disappointed with him for carrying on the war in Vietnam?

**BD: No, I didn't vote for him. (laughs)**

DB: Did you vote for Goldwater?

**BD: No, I didn't vote for him either. I didn't vote.**

DB: I can't say that I blame ya.

BW: You didn't answer his first question.

**BD: Yeah, what do I think of what?**

BW: College in general.

**BD: Anything to keep the people off the street… (laughter)**

**BD: …I like, you know.**

BW: It keeps you from being drafted too.

**BD: Well, whatever. If it keeps you off the street and out of trouble then it's good. If it doesn't, you know, then you got to find something else to occupy your interest, I think.**

DB: Are you going to be at the Newport Folk Festival this year?

**BD: I don't really know too much about that. I'm not sure if I'll be in the country. You know. If I'm in the country probably I will be. I like it.**

DB: Joanie, are you going to be at the Newport Folk Festival this summer?

JB: I think so, yeah.

BW: If you're not gonna be there…

DB: …they shouldn't call it a folk festival. They couldn't change that, it's a tradition. What do you think of college in general.

JB: Oh, for the most part I think it's pretty bad.

DB: What would you suggest as an alternative or an improvement?

JB: Oh, if it were possible for a real school to be in existence I think it would be good, but I don't think there's much to learn in a educational institute sort of as they stand.

DB: Are you familiar with the ethical culture prep school in New York?

JB: Nope.

BW: What do you mean, 'school as it stands'?

JB: Well, college is, you can't learn anything except how to be like everybody else is when they get turned out of college and go stumbling through life. I think it's very rare if you learn, pick up much in college. Unless you really know exactly what you want to do like be a doctor and then you know what you could stand you know, to go through to be it. You know what I mean?

**BD: People usually go to college to pick up experience, right. Now that would be the main teaching. And what type of experience do you really get in college?**

BW: Academic.

**BD: Yeah.**

JB: What do you think of academic experience?

BW: Well you got to have it in this world.

JB: Well, I don't think so. I mean I think that's probably one of the reasons that we're in the state we're in.

**BD: Everybody's smart. Everybody knows a lot. Everybody knows about rules and they know what's wrong and what's right. But you find that the people outside of it all and that couldn't be bothered with**

**it less are the people that you really want to know and who are unconnected with any kind of, any kind of party or thing like that, you know what I mean.**

BW: Do you think you're better off not being in college?

**BD: Oh, I'm not saying anybody should be better off not being in college. I'm saying it's something, everybody ought to find out where they're happiest. If somebody's happy in college, good, I'd suggest stay there.**

JB: For the next 20 years (laughter).

**BD: I'm not trying to fool anybody, you know. I'm not trying to fool… but like you've been through things that you haven't been through or as you know things that you just don't know. You know, there are a lot of things. There are a lot, there are a lot of… everybody can stick up for people's rights but you know, what are people's rights really? How do you look at uh, say how do you look at uh, somebody that murders ten people? You wanna execute 'em? How do you look at uh, homosexuals? How do you look at uh, freaks, midgets, you know. How do you look at those people? They have rights too, similar to anyone else. College doesn't teach you to be a…** (indecipherable)

DB: Uh Joan are you (indecipherable) with President Johnson for carrying on the war in Vietnam or do you think by and large his social legislation has compensated for this?

JB: No, I don't think anything can compensate for what's happening in Vietnam.

DB: Did you vote for President Johnson?

JB: No

BW: Did you vote at all?

JB: No

DB: Would you support the Socialist Party as it stands in New York?

JB: I really don't think I would support any Party as it stands.

DB: Or support their platform as it stood this year?

JB: When you start talking about parties and platforms, the conversation disintegrates to practically nothing because they're just words. I really think so.

DB: What would you, what do you advocate personally?

JB: Oh, life.

DB: Kind of abstract.

JB: No, I don't think it's abstract. Living…

**BD: It's not abstract at all.**

JB: Living, loving, moving, grooving, singing, stroking, loving.

DB: Twice!

BW: Come to Carolina for God sake (laughter). You were there three years ago.

JB: Pardon?

BW: You were in North Carolina.

JB: Yeah, I think so.

DB: Tell me…

BW: You had a three-year influence…

JB: Pardon?

BW: … and I've been waiting for three years for you to come back again. Three years!

DB: Any plans for you to return to the University of North Carolina?

JB: Oh probably. Not on this trip it won't be but… probably sometime around.

BW: What did you think; you were in the Bible belt last Friday night?

JB: Was I?

BW: At Wake.

JB: Where was I?

BW: At Wake… Wake Forest.

JB: Oh well, I was in a sort of unique…

BW: I know well, still…

JB: … set up so you can't judge. It was beautifully run, I think.

BW: You got to a picture if you want that Berkowitz.

DB: All right.

**BD: On the stick here? I don't, I don't, I don't photograph without Joan nowadays.**

DB: You don't?

**BD: No, not photograph…**

JB: He does it for the contrast 'cause we were immigration business.

**BD: We sent some pictures off to Japan emigrating United States. Show of brotherhood.**

JB: You're gonna stick that on my (indecipherable)?

**BD: (indecipherable) foot long. We make tape recorders and with mics. Soft like milk (indecipherable).**

JB: (indecipherable) God knows what.

**BD: Isn't that a nice blue light?**

JB: Watch this.

BW: Can we get a (indecipherable)? Take better than that other one.

(Camera noise, then waiting for the Polaroid image to appear.)

JB: Banana one, banana two, banana three…

DB: Sixty seconds.

**BD: What time is it?**

DB: Show him your watch.

BW: 20, 25 to.

**BD: Oh.**

JB: (laughs)

DB: That's the one problem with Polaroids over the regular press cameras. No degree of accuracy. Trial and error.

**BD: Where's this interview gonna run?**

BW: Where's it gonna run? It's not gonna run anywhere.

**BD: Oh, is this for yourself?**

BW: No, not really. See, what I did, what I did…

**BD: Who's gonna read it?**

DB: Everybody in Rocky Mount.

BW: No, the thing was Rocky Mount was just an excuse. I had to get back here. Anyway, to do it, anyway I could.

**BD: Why don't you come right on, say it! (laughs)**

BW: Oh well look. If I want to say anything you'd think I was out mind 'cause everybody in (indecipherable) probably had the same idea. So I, I wrote a friend at home…

JB: Are you gonna ask him not to quote what was going on?

**BD: Yeah, you can't record the concert.**

DB: I know that, I know that.

**BD: There's five guys in here or something, you would not believe it. If they see you with that recorder thing… (Bob whistles to indicate 'you're out' and Joan laughs.)**

BW: But the thing is I just work for the paper at home and it gave me a logical excuse to come in here and this is it.

**BD: Yeah. Don't drag us about it.**

DB: Oh this is better (in regards to the Polaroid that is developing), much better.

**BD: OK. How'd that come out, let's see that.**

DB: Very good. It's wet so don't touch it.

**BD: I won't… I won't look at it too hard.** (laughter)

**BD: Yeah, that's me on the left there.**

BW: Wait, hold, get a picture of me Berkowitz.

DB: I'm gonna just put it down so I can mount it.

JB: Oh good god.

BW: Get a picture, of me.

DB: He's a picture of himself with Lincoln Rockwell. It scared the hell out of me.

BW: No, I can't stand the idea.

DB: I got a problem with that.

BW: I didn't mean it the way it sounded, that was pretty poor.

**BD: You got him in it?**

DB: Uh huh.

JB: Sieg heil, Seig heil.

**BD: Then go. There's your picture man.**

# 27 April 1965, Charles Greville

Source: *Daily Mail*, UK newspaper, 28 April 1965.

This interview was conducted at The Savoy Hotel, London, England.

**The folk round Bob Dylan**

Outside Room 208 at the Savoy a blue-suited Independent Television man was shaking with frustration. "I'm throwing my film away. He's not being serious. It's all those camp followers of his." Inside, shaking his head, was the man who caused the upset. Bob Dylan, the American folk-singer who has become a cult that nearly rivals the Beatles.

He is thin, hunched, wearing stained jeans, hand-made boots and denim shirt.

His long hair curls upwards. He looks like an undernourished cockatoo.

A four-man American camera and sound team record his every move. They began in New York. All the way from London Airport to the hotel they sat in the car's front seat filming Dylan in the back.

Treatment

Don Pennebaker, the boss, has given the same hand-held camera treatment to the Aga Khan and Jane Fonda. "I'll shoot about six miles of film. It lasts about six hours," he says. He doesn't know what he'll do with it yet. But it'll sell.

The crowd thins, leaving Dylan with his immediate circle of manager, Press agents, and friends. Like Bob Neuwith [*sic*], a painter in a blue velvet coat ("I'm Taco Pronto, Bob's barber," he announces).

The dominating figure is manager Al Grossman, big with a great grey mane of hair, who "was in folk song before it became a business." He also handles Peter, Paul and Mary, and Odetta. He left the crush to talk in Dylan's bedroom.

"We're not here to sell rubber dolls, you know. We're not here to perform for newsmen. Reporters get annoyed at artists for their own stupidity.

"Pop music has aimed below the waist for so long. It's time it did something to the mind," he says. "Bob is one of the most important figures not just in pop, you know, but in American life."

We rejoin the Dylan group. He suddenly takes a dislike to two bird prints on the wall. **"I can't stand them,"** he says. **"They burn me right down."**

Mr. Grossman hesitates, then goes smoothly into action as – whirr – the cameras turn and – zoom – a large sausage-shaped mike is thrust towards him. He speaks into the phone.

**"Something more with the times. Maybe pictures of gorillas,"** says Dylan. **"Or we can paint our own right here on the wall."**

"There seems to be a jurisdictional problem," says Mr. Grossman. **"Let's move out,"** says Dylan. But no one does. Joan Baez, a friend also over for concerts, comes in and sings *Sally, Go Round The Roses* in the background.

Shielded

In the centre is Bob Dylan himself, shielded by thick green glasses. **"I have weak eyes,"** he says. **"Try them for yourself. See the world as Bob Dylan sees it."**

Facing hoards of reporters he adopts a defensive attitude of sharp wit and nonsense replies in the surrealistic Beatle manner. Away from them he sits quietly in the crowd, concerned but somehow unattached.

**"I'm alone up here,"** he says, tapping his head. **"I was over here three years back and on the streets. In two years I'll be gone and you'll be talking to someone else.**

**"I don't want to hurt anyone, you know. I don't want to put anyone down. I've no principles, no morals. I just go along. No one influences me any more. I'm on my own.**

**"I'm not going anywhere. But I'm changing. I can't listen to my old songs now."** Did he feel it was out of character to stay in the Savoy?

**“I can live in a shack. I don’t care if someone owns a bank. Why should they care if I make bread.”**

“If what he says depends on him not staying at the Savoy. If it’s that fragile – let it perish,” says Mr Grossman. The words are carefully recorded.

Someone mentions his British equivalent Donovan. **“Let’s put him on the wall and talk to him,”** says Dylan. A publicity man hustles me out of the room. “You got that?” he asks.

“That was a good bit about Donovan. We’re keeping them apart. He can’t do anything for us.”

Lunch time has come and gone by two hours, but no one has eaten. Dylan can’t go to the Savoy Grill because he won’t wear a tie. **“I eat and sleep when I like. That’s how I live.”**

Press conference time approaches, and he goes to change into someone’s blouse – gaudy puff-sleeved. He models it to cheers. “It’s too much, just snazzy,” says Joan Baez.

Cameramen hustle him out into the open with cries of “Bob, smile, Bob, this way, Bob.” A lady passes and asks; “Is that Matt Dillon?” Americans film the photographers photographing.

A swinging blond asks for his autograph. **“Hey, you are all right. Can I have yours?”** he asks.

I don’t know what the circus is going to be like. But it was great just watching the parade.

# 27 April 1965, Michael Hellicar

Source: *Daily Sketch*, UK newspaper, 28 April 1965, page 6.

This interview was conducted at The Savoy Hotel, London, England.

**The Mad, Mad World of Bob Dylan**

He has a shock of bushy hair, a pinched-up face like a bird and hands that don't stop moving. When he talks, his lips don't seem to move, which isn't surprising because he speaks in staccato syllables that only the practised ear can interpret.

This is Bob Dylan, the 24-year-old skinny figure, whose "freedom" folk songs like "Blowin' In The Wind" and "The Times They Are A' Changin'" are the rage of America and are tipped to boom here.

Dylan, who is in London for a tour, has the reputation of being controversial, scruffy, couldn't-care-less and forgetful.

So forgetful that sometimes he forgets to turn up for his own concerts.

An hour with Bob Dylan convinced me that he is all these things except authentic and great, which is what his publicity has called him.

On record, Dylan is practically incoherent. On stage or in the flesh he is a jumble of unfinished sentences.

CIRCUS

Yet the most fascinating thing about him is the travelling circus he has brought with him.

We talked in his suite at London's Savoy Hotel. A conventional setting for a man who likes to be regarded as outrageously unconventional.

Leaping round an admiring circle of managers and agents was a bespectacled youth wearing a light grey tweed monk's habit. Resting on his shoulder was a huge cine camera.

His function, Dylan explained to me, was **"to film the facts. The true facts. He's been down South filming the truth about the Ku Klux Klan."**

BOOTS

With monk habit's camera focussed on us, we chatted.

**"I want to get some thigh-length boots while I'm here,"** he said. **"No – better than that, waist length. Just like Robin Hood.**

**"I'm a bit fed up with these here boots I've got on. I call them my Damon Runyan boots."**

Dylan is 24, yet sings like a man of 75 who has the troubles of the world on his shoulders. He always sounds cross.

**"Yes, I guess I do get pretty cross about things," he said. "I hate injustice, that's why I sing about racial discrimination and freedom, and I preach for people to be able to do the things they want.**

**"On some of my earlier records, I sounded cross because I was poor. Lived on less than ten cents a day in those times. Now I'm cross because I'm rich."**

How rich? **"I don't know,"** he mumbled. **"I don't talk about money because I don't recognise it."**

I asked the allegedly unconventional Dylan to name the wildest task he had ever performed.

**"Well, see, there was this song I was writing once. I put all the words down in their correct order on the paper, then I tore it in four.**

JUMBLE

**"Then I rearranged the quarters to see if I got a better song out of the jumble."**

And did he? **"No, I guess the rhyming didn't work out right. But it was pretty wild wondering if I was going to get a great song out of it."**

Controversy pursues Dylan. It will be hard on his tail in this country, where his concerts are a sell-out.

**"Criticism doesn't bother me,"** said Dylan, his hands working overtime pushing his bushy sideburns into place.

ACTIONS

**"You gotta understand me. I sing when I feel like it. All my actions are motivated by my conscience. Like, I've just written this book that's being published in September.**

**"I've called it 'Tarantula.' It's a series of thoughts as they came to me. You know, not judgement, but comment, I guess."**

The man in the monk's habit was joined by a girl wielding a huge microphone. At every Dylan pronouncement they gasped and exchanged gleeful glances.

**"I don't talk much,"** Dylan apologised. **"I haven't a lot to say. I just don't want to upset people.**

**"You know, people set out to do something and they get so worked up about things that they get violent.**

**"Heck, I don't want to louse anyone up. I'm just me. I'm not spreading disillusionment by singing the truth.**

**"I guess listening to me is like reading a newspaper. I wanna be entertaining as well as truthful."**

# 27 April 1965, Unknown Interviewer (The Guardian)

Source: *The Guardian*, UK newspaper, 28 April 1965, page 10. The text reproduced here is from *The Dust of Rumour* edited by Dave Percival, 1985, X-ASITY, page 22.

This interview was conducted at The Savoy Hotel, London, England.

**Overcoming Dylan**

Monosyllabic, weary-eyed, the American folk-singer Bob Dylan appeared in London yesterday to start his tour of eight concerts up and down the country. Impatient about questions about his political interests and Civil Rights, he said: **'I just be – I exist. What people think about me doesn't affect me,'** with an Existentialist loftiness. His pale face stiffened at any mention of politics and even the word Negro – **'People talk about Negroes as if they were objects.'**

Happily, he had the dark, beautiful, straight-haired singer Joan Baez with him to straighten the record for the more middle aged and irritated reporters. He was a writer and a genius and put what he wanted to say in his songs, she explained. She, on the other hand, loves talking about the things she wants to change, at her concert at the Royal Albert Hall, she intends to say what she thinks about President Johnson and 'his disgusting policy in Vietnam' and dedicate ironically a Dylan song to him, called 'With God on Our Side.' Both confessed complete innocence about this country – apart from liking the Beatles. Joan Baez thought it might be 100% better in its social attitudes, but Bob Dylan thought everywhere was much the same.

# 29 April 1965, Pete Myers

Source: *Don't Look Back*, D.A. Pennebaker, 1968, Ballantine Books, New York, page 38. Transcript of the film.

Interview at Savoy Hotel, London, England. Brief extract.

**How Did It All Begin**

BBC REPORTER: this is for the African service of the BBC, Mr. Dylan, West African listeners, and it's going out this evening, and the questions are four in number for your approval before we ask them. The first one's a very general, journalistic one. Just how did it all begin for you? What started you off, what triggered it off? Just how do you see the art of the folk song in contemporary society? Has it a very real social impact? Something that will certainly interest our listeners in Africa, Bob, is your deeply humanitarian attitude to a number of public matters. For instance, you're quoted as saying. "People talk about Negros as if they were objects." Now, does this sort of compassion on your part present any problems for you in America?

**DYLAN: Okay.**

BBC REPORTER: Oh, by the way, you took part in a play in Britain some time ago written by a school friend of mine, Evan Jones.

**DYLAN: Oh, yeah?**

BBC REPORTER: Ev and I went to school in Jamaica together. "The Castle Street," wasn't it?

**DYLAN: "The Mad House on Castle Street."**

BBC REPORTER: Going ahead in, about say, five seconds from now with this interview with Mr. Bob Dylan for the African service of BBC. Pete Meyers and Colin Weild producing in approximately five seconds.

# 30 April 1965, Jenny De Yong and Peter Roche

Source: *Bob Dylan*, in: *Darts*, University of Sheffield student newspaper, UK, Number 235, 6 May 1965.

The interview took place at the Grand Hotel, Sheffield, England. The article was circulating among collectors as a poor quality scan with a some parts almost or entirely illegible. As a result, the version of the text included in *Every Mind Polluting Word* has a few errors and omissions. A completely legible scan is now available and a full version of the text is given below. The additions and corrections are highlighted in red font.

**Bob Dylan**

"I try to harmonise with songs the lonesome sparrow sings," sang Bob Dylan, alone on the stage at a packed City Hall last Friday. Dylan is himself sparrow-like – a thin, faded, ruffled sparrow – but one that sings to the tune of £2,000 per concert.

His dark-circled eyes seemed to peer above the conglomeration surrounding him (two microphones, a table with two glasses of much-needed water and a harmonica cradle round his polo-sweatered neck), while his penetrating songs convinced even the most cynical that Bob Dylan is worthy of the mound of superlatives which has been heaped upon him and under which his earlier followers feared he might suffocate.

An essential part of the popular image is the loneliness of Bob Dylan. He sings about it, in haunting symbols. He sings too about bitterness, of "The flesh-coloured Christs that glow in the dark". Make no mistakes though – Dylan can write in glowing images about war and violence but he can write with equal insight, and strictly for laughs, about the things that are reality to a greater part of his audience, like the boy trying to persuade his girl to stay for the night.

Dylan has been set up as everything from a blue-denim god to a guitar-playing Socrates, corrupting youth by opening the door on hooliganism, warning the universal parent: "Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command". It was for this reason that we approached him with some trepidation (and considerable difficulty, owing to positive festoons of red tape). We anticipated meeting the "sullen, bored Mr. Dylan" about whom so much has been written in the Press lately – and found instead an individual who was very tired but very willing to talk. He answered our questions in his room at the Grand Hotel, perched on the edge of a couch, a cup of black coffee in one hand, a cigarette (Player's, untipped) in the other. Around him his entourage: a tough, voluble manager with flowing grey hair; a hip-talking young man of about Dylan's age, in tinted glasses and blue velvet jacket; a tall negro with an engaging grin; a dark, chatty girl clutching a plastic iris.

Dylan talks rapidly, his voice very soft – even when discussing topics about which he obviously feels strongly (the Press, for example) his tone remains quiet, matter-of-fact. His thin, pale face has a fragile, almost transparent quality – although this was probably due in part to lack of sleep ("He's had no proper sleep for three days," Joan Baez had told us earlier). Miss Baez, who plans to tour Britain herself some time in the Autumn, sat quietly in a corner of the room, watching Dylan intently as he talked.

Q: To start with the obvious question: what do you think of Donovan and "Catch the Wind"?

**BD: Well, I quite like that song, and he sings it quite well. He's very young though, and people might try to make him into something that he isn't; that's something he'll have to watch. But the song is O.K.**

Q: Isn't the tune a lot like your "Chimes of Freedom"?

**BD: Oh, I don't care what he takes from me; I don't care what other singers do to my songs either, they can't hurt me any. Like with the Animals and "Baby Let Me Follow You Down", I didn't worry none about that. I met the Animals over in New York, and we all went out and got scoused. Is that what you say?** (Someone behind him suggests "sloshed".) **Oh yeah, that's it, sloshed. Anyway, the Animals are O.K., I liked their last one, "Don't Let Me be Misunderstood", that was a good one.**

Q: Coming on to your latest single, "Subterranean Homesick Blues", a lot of people seem worried about the electric guitars and drums.

**BD: Yeah, well we had a lot of swinging cats on that track, real hip musicians, not just some cats I picked up off the street, and we all got together and we just had a ball. Anyway, that's just one track off the album.**

Q: So why release it as a single?

**BD: That's not me, that's the Company. The Company says to me "It's time to do your next album", so I go along and record enough tracks for the album. What they do with the songs then, well that's up to them. But I record albums; I wouldn't record a single.**

Q: Aren't you afraid though that they'll turn you into a pop star?

**BD: They can't turn me into anything; I just write my songs and that's it. They can't change me any, and they can't change my songs. "Subterranean" sounds a bit different because of the backing, but I've had backing on my songs before, I had some backing on "Corrain"** [*sic, recte* Corrina]**.**

Q: What are your own favourite songs?

**BD: You mean the ones I've written? Well, it depends on how I'm feeling; I think to be really good a song has to hit you at the right moment. But I like most of the ones on my new album, and on my last album I guess the one I liked best was "I don't believe you".**

Q: Your songs have changed a lot over the last couple of years. Are you consciously trying to change your style, or would you say that this was a natural development?

**BD: Oh, it's a natural one, I think. The big difference is that the songs I was writing last year, songs like "Ballad in Plain D", they were what I call one-dimensional songs, but my new songs I'm trying to make more three-dimensional, you know, there's more symbolism, they're written on more than one level.**

Q: How long does it take you to write a song? Say a song like "Hard Rain"?

**BD: Well, I wrote "Hard Rain" while I was still on the streets, I guess that was the first three-dimension song I wrote. It took me about – oh, about two days.**

Q: Is that normal?

**BD: No, that was kind of long; usually I write them a lot quicker, sometimes in a couple of hours.**

Q: Would you say that your songs contain sufficient poetry to be able to stand by themselves, without music?

**BD: If they can't do that, then they're not what I want them to be. Basically, I guess I'm more interested in writing than in performing.**

Q: Does that explain all those poems on the backs of your albums?

**BD: Oh, those** (laughing) **– well they were kind of written out of terror, I used to get scared that I wouldn't be around much longer, so I'd write my poems down on anything I could find – the backs of my albums, the backs of Joan's albums, you know, anywhere I could find.**

Q: Why do you suppose that the national press tries to make you out to be angry and bored and all the rest?

**BD: That's because they ask the wrong questions, like, 'What did you have for breakfast', 'What's your favourite colour', stuff like that. Newspaper reporters, man, they're just hung-up writers, frustrated novelists, they don't hurt me none by putting fancy labels on me. They got all these preconceived ideas about me, so I just play up to them.**

Q: How do you feel about being labelled as the voice of your generation?

**BD: Well, I don't know. I mean, I'm 24, how can I speak for people of 17 or 18, I can't be anyone else's voice. If they can associate with me that's O.K., but I can't give a voice to people who have no voice. Would you say that I was your voice?**

Q: Well you manage to say a lot of things that I'd like to say, only I don't have the words.

**BD: Yeah, but that's not the same as being your voice.**

Q: No, but it's something.

* * *

Someone mentions food and at once Dylan and followers remember that they haven't eaten for hours. Not much is said but it becomes increasingly obvious that food has the edge on aesthetics… We took that as our cue to leave.

# 2 May 1965, Leicester Press Conference

Source: Article by 'J.G.' in: Leicester Mercury, UK newspaper, 3 May 1965.

At De Montfort Hall, Leicester, England.

**The Dylan Magic Is Here To Stay**

The booming upsurge of folk music throughout the Western world is largely represented by a frail, shaggy-haired 23-year-old American called Bob Dylan.

In the last few months his "sound" and the almost mystical lyrics which he writes himself – **"I reckon I've written about 70 songs, but many more words"** – have started off a new bandwagon in popular music, and have begun a fresh teenager cult on both sides of the Atlantic.

But Dylan's popularity does not entirely rest on the shifting shoulders of the teenagers.

His 100-minujte solo performance to a sell-out audience of more than 3,000 at Leicester's De Montfort Hall last night proved by its sincerity and sheer magic that he will outlive and probably outgrow any mere popularity boom.

Dylan's material is above all poetic and leaves the impression that the music has been added as an afterthought.

But this is something he denies. **"I write songs. I don't write poetry although I admit that some of the lyrics were written before the music."**

His songs are about people, feelings, events. It is always an emotional performance, often sad and sometimes sick.

There is no doubt about his growing popularity. As he left the hall he was treated to the inevitable back-slapping, coat-tugging hysteria by a crowd of about 200 youngsters.

This is perhaps sad because Dylan's music is no transient fly-by-night. It contains nothing to rave about but plenty to think about.

# 2 May 1965, Ray Coleman

Source: *A Beatle-size fever without the screams!*, by Ray Coleman in: Melody Maker, UK magazine, 8 May 1965. The text reproduced here is from *NME Originals: Bob Dylan and the Folk Rock Boom 1964-1974*, UK magazine, Volume 2, Issue 5, August 2003, page 18.

The interview took place in Dylan's dressing room, De Montfort Hall, Leicester, England.

**A Beatle-size fever without the screams!,**

Outside Leicester's De Montfort Hall last Sunday, a religious fanatic carried a banner saying "Prepare To Meet Thy Doom".

He walked among the 3,000 people pouring into the hall to see Bob Dylan's concert. It was a weird sight and an uncanny juxtaposition.

The man's message had a peculiar relevance. It was not doom the people were going to meet, however; it was something less final and more pertinent.

Dylan, the most important folk singer of today, was on parade through Britain for the first time. And a big percentage of the crowd were there to find out how commercial success had affected the man whose early fans had not expected hit records.

A Dylan fever is sweeping the country and only a British sentimentalist would deny that it is approaching Beatle-size proportions. But without the king-sized screamers.

It was a complicated fan scene at Leicester last Sunday. Some came in Dylan caps and jeans; others in suburban charcoal grey suits. Some extremists were barefoot and had haircuts that made The Beatles look bald. Students were out in force. Many had hitch-hiked hundreds of miles and arrived with haversacks featuring a flask poking out of the corner.

There were some untamed pop fans. But they were in the minority. Dylan commands a vast audience of thinkers.

Uproar

When this slight, serious faced and incredibly casual man walked onstage – with a guitar, seven harmonicas and two glasses of water his only company – there was silence. At the end of every song, the audience applauded – thunderously. No screams, no whistles, no talking. The audience almost switched off almost mechanically, like it was canned.

Only one aside by Dylan caused hilarious uproar. In the middle of his brilliant searing 'Talking World War III Blues', Bob half sang: "*I turned on my record player – it was Donovan*". The crowd booed their resentment of Donovan. Dylan came back with "whoever Donovan is".

His stage tactics are nil. He sips water – somebody must have forgotten the Beaujolais – and almost bows after each song.

He wore a black leather jacket over a grey jumper, blue trousers, brown suede shoes and a harmonica harness throughout. He looks like a hobo who has tried to smarten up.

Bob relies entirely on the words of his songs to get across. And his words are the very heart of reality.

They are stark, real, cunning and biting. Whimsical, brilliantly descriptive, subtly funny and often poetically romantic. Above all these things, the are important social commentaries.

Potent

In his dressing room afterwards, Dylan asked what impression he wanted the audience to leave with, said: **"No impression. I just hope they're happy and don't feel cheated".**

He brandished a shillelagh and evaded 300 young girls mobbing his car. He half smiled. One got the feeling he didn't quite dig that.

But let's forget all about cults: Dylan has caught the mood of this generation. And only foolish reactionaries will put him down.

# Early May 1965, Robin Denselow

Source: *The Cherwell*, Oxford University magazine, 5 May 1965. The text reproduced here is from *The Telegraph*, UK fanzine, Number 54, Spring 1996, pages 79-81, 83.

The interview took place in The Savoy Hotel, London, England.

**BOB DYLAN Freewheelin' at the Savoy grinds his ash into the carpet and talks to Robin Denselow**

He slouched into the Savoy with a cigarette stuck between his lips. **"Pleased to meet you,"** he said to no-one in particular' and with jerky, nervous movements began to shake hands with the assembled celebrities. Bob Dylan, American folksinger, and beginner of possibly the greatest mass cult since the Beatles, had arrived in Britain.

Two records in the current top twenty and some of the greatest modern folk songs to his credit... it hardly seemed possible that this nervous, almost comic figure could have achieved so much. To look at him, indeed, it seemed remarkable that he could have achieved anything at all.

Dylan is small, wiry, and scruffy. He has long curly black hair and sideboards which all but obscure a strange, sickly white face and hooked nose. He looks like an underfed, drugged cockatoo, and when he talks, it is almost impossible to understand the short staccato monosyllables of his shaky voice.

He dresses casually, and rather badly; conventional knee-length boots, blue jeans and dark blue jacket, worn with a patterned silk shirt that no self-respecting British bohemian would be seen dead in. The effect is neither beat nor hip, but rather that of a barrow boy who has suddenly struck it rich.

Talking to Dylan is a nightmare. He twitches his hands, puts on his dark glasses, takes them off again, and stares blankly ahead of him. He refuses to describe himself as anything, and says that he doesn't understand himself.

**"I'm afraid of losing my sanity sometimes,"** he mumbles, puffing on a cigarette and lighting another from the butt of the one before, **"but then my idea of sanity may be different from that of other people."** He begins to tremble, and a cameraman comes up to ask him how he's feeling.

He looks around and suddenly begins to talk again.

**"You know, I just can't think of myself as a star... man, in two years I'll be back where I was."** He grins sardonically, scowls at the press photographers and puts on and off his dark glasses. **"No, I have no message - my songs are just me talking, that's all, and I don't want to influence people either - it's other people who influence me."**

He is silent and then begins to tap his long curly hair. **"I'm alone up here,"** he says. Suddenly he sees an elderly reporter walking towards us across the room and spins round excitedly. **"Hey, who's that guy there - what's he doing? He's not a cop is he?"** I assure him that it's not, and Dylan turns back again. His hands are trembling and he reaches for a cigarette. He looks terrible.

Partly, of course, it's all a pose. The casual indifference, not knowing where he is going to perform, or what new songs he is going to sing, is part of his vital public image. But behind this there is an almost terrifying bitterness and vagueness that contrasts strikingly with the directness of attack in his songs.

He writes excellent political songs, yet unlike Joan Baez, he refuses to talk politics. He sings about Civil Rights (such as his bitter John Birch Society Blues) but he is not to be found on any Alabama march. He is aware of the contradiction, but can only begin to explain it.

**"Have you ever read a political speech in a newspaper? Well, next time you read one, cut it into little pieces. Yeah, cut it up, and then stick the pieces together in any order. You'll find it says the same thing. That's the way my mind works: you've got to re-piece it in the same way."**

He started to talk about British folk and pop music. Yeah, he bummed around England the first time he was here - played guest appearances in the London clubs. The Troubadour, that was one, and the Singers' Club - that was where who were? Ewan MacColl? Peggy Seeger? He made a face; no, he hadn't heard of them.

"Then what about Donovan?" I asked, and a slick thick chick beside me began to coo "I was his girlfriend until last night."

**"I never heard of Donovan,"** he growled. **"Who is this guy? Let's get him against the wall. But I know the Beatles - yeah, I'm having supper with John Lennon tonight."**

A bewildered BBC official tried to coax Dylan away for an interview, so I went to talk to Joan Baez, who sat brooding in a corner, watching him with an almost motherly concern. Smartly dressed, and with no folksy gimmicks except her raven black hair, she seemed almost absurdly older and more mature in comparison. What did she think of Dylan? She smiled and shrugged. “Well, I'm dumb about folk music - but as a songwriter, he's a genius.”

She smiled again, looked up with searching brown eyes, and began to talk quietly and earnestly about everything that Dylan refuses to say: “No, Bobby won't talk about politics. He's strange - he has few material possessions; I don't know what he does with all his money... Joan is intelligent and intense, delightful to talk to and always pleased to talk about her interests, about the pacifist school she is starting, about Civil Rights and Vietnam. “I just want to be called a human being,” she says, and the brown eyes once more look across to the twitching, curly-haired figure across the room.

The party was coming to an end. The genius put on his dark glasses, and walked uncertainly towards the door. A cigarette dropped from his twitching fingers. He stopped and stamped it firmly into the Savoy carpet.

# April / May 1965, Chris Lorenz

Source: *Record Collector*, UK Magazine, Number 272, April 2002, page 30.

Interview conducted by letter.

## I RECEIVED YOUR LETTER YESTERDAY

Dylan's contempt for the interview process, and the banality of most of his encounters with the media, are blatantly displayed in *Don't Look Back*. The *Disc* interview excerpted earlier in this piece reinforces that point. But Cambridge student Chris Lorenz knew none of that when he sent Dylan a questionnaire, hoping that the serious nature of the enquiries might entice Bob to respond.

And so he did – although sadly, having taken the time to scrawl all over Lorenz's letter, he forgot to send it back in the stamped addressed envelope that had thoughtfully been provided. So here, 37 years late, and courtesy of Christie's, is the verbatim interview that should have appeared in the Cambridge student journal *Varsity*.

Q Does it usually take you a long time to write your songs? Are you suddenly seized with inspiration or do you have to sit down for hours and work at them?

**A Songs come in ideas / people good bad indifferent, situations, anything / takes me short time to write it out / usually changes somewhat constantly**

Q You're quoted as saying "I can't listen to my old songs anymore". Why not?

**A Old songs tend to be motivated by private desires**

Q Which is your favourite of all the songs you've written?

**A NONE – ALL of them / I have no favourites, just some of them I like less**

Q You're also quoted as saying, "Nobody influences me anymore". What about Woody Guthrie?

**A Woody's language doesn't appeal to me anymore – his words are group words / his ideas are force (sic) / I have no faith in better world coming / I live now in this world**

Q What do you mean when you say that you don't write <u>about</u> anything?

**A I write inside out & sometimes the dimensions cross. I can't write <u>about</u> the tree I must inside <u>of</u> the tree (sic)**

Q What do you think as the function of your songs? Simply to entertain, or to make people think about what you've got to say?

**A Myself to satisfy**

Q Why don't you like being identified with Civil Rights movement, or with anything in particular?

**A Life is too big for any ONE thing – I would rather give anonymously than to sign my name**

Q Do you sometimes write words for their sound, rather than for what they say?

**A Sometimes Yes / but not just that simple**

Q Now that your records are reaching the hit parade, do you think you might change your way of writing and perhaps write more songs that will definitely have commercial appeal, rather than songs motivated by your conscience?

**A No**

Q Do you like the idea of people coming to your concerts and buying your records because you're fashionable, rather than because they appreciate your poetry?

**A It doesn't matter why**

Q Would you be annoyed if girls screamed at you like they do at the Beatles?

**A I would not play**

Q Did you have any say in having 'Times They Are A-Changin' and 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' released as singles aimed at the hit parade?

**A No say in Times They Are Changing – that was recorded three years ago for an Album / S.H.B. was taken off new album –**

# First half of 1965, Pete Goodman

Source: *Beat Instrumental*, UK magazine, Number 27, July 1965, page 5.

The location of this interview is unknown.

**Is Dylan Sincere?**

For all I know, Bob Dylan may be the most charming, intelligent, talented, inventive man in music. Certainly he is currently one of the most successful – having become (a) a cult, (b) a sell-out success and (c) a permanent resident in the LP, EP and single charts.

But he still baffles me. Talking to him has not eased the bafflement. Reading about him has not cleared away the clouds. And this is why…

Dylan was a highly-touted figure in folk music long before his records sold on a wide scale. He'd started making records in November, 1961… first album was "Village Voice" and raved about in the slightly hysterical way that folk devotees do rave. More albums followed and insiders spoke up for Dylan even more loudly.

At 16, Dylan had written his first song – a tribute to Brigitte Bardot. He became friendly with the ailing Woody Guthrie, who has probably influenced him more than anyone else. After his first professional job, Bob Dylan said: **"I never thought I would shoot lightning through the sky in the entertainment world".**

But, of course, he has done just that.

DONOVAN v. DYLAN

In Britain, his LPs sold steadily but not well enough to make the charts. Then appeared one Donovan, with a series of TV shots. "Isn't he like Dylan!" said the purists of folk. "In fact he's a downright copy". So Dylan's name was bandied around by the "in" folk folk – in an attempt to win over, or be one up on, the devotees of Donovan.

And suddenly it happened. Several Dylan LPs in the British Top Twenty in one week… "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan", "Another Side Of Bob Dylan", "Bob Dylan". They'd previously been out a long time. CBS brought out his first-ever British single, "Times They Are A'Changin' " from one of the albums… and up it hurtled.

Which is where I started getting baffled. Did all those people who had for so long ignored folk music suddenly get Dylan's "message" loud and clear? And what, exactly, WAS his message? And as Dylan is by way of being a singing mumbler, HOW was the message getting through?

Of course, the Beatles helped. John Lennon, specially, "dug" the Dylan sound. He said: "We were in Paris, back in January '64. Paul knew of Dylan. We cadged an LP of his, 'Freewheelin' – went potty over it. In America, we met him. He was great, once you got to know him. He has a Beatle sense of humour…"

This sort of praise must have helped. The publicity started: "Dylan is a deeply committed young man who conveys his concern for the world round him through unique and poetic imagery that makes explicit the human condition". And a long-hair (in the classical sense) critic said: "Dylan breaks all the rules of song writing, except that of having something to say and saying it stunningly".

First time I met Dylan, I thought he looked like a young Charlie Chaplin. Eventually he admitted: **"Chaplin DID influence me, believe it or not. I watched all of his silent movies, copied some of his movements"**. Which was a surprise statement which added to my bafflement.

When he started, Dylan cared nothing for money – he says he just needed to have enough to eat, that's all. His attitude now seems to have changed a lot. His recording manager, Tom Wilson, told me: "When Bob was first in the studio, he'd not have the words even finished. We'd hang around for ages, trying to get him organised. Maybe we'd be there five hours, get nothing. But he's different now. He keeps tabs on every single thing, even down to the sleeve design. He comes in with type-written scripts of the songs, everything tabulated. No time's wasted. He gets right on with the job".

WEIRDLY OFF-BEAT

It's easier talking about my bafflement with Dylan to those close to him… Dylan himself is so weirdly off-beat that he often just clans up, or speaks wildly irrelevant thoughts. Like telling an inquiring reporter that his next record was going to be: "I Lost My Love In San Francisco But She Appeared Again In Honduras And We Took

A Trip To Hong Kong And Stayed Awhile But I Lost Her Again In Oklahoma". That was studiously taken down in a notebook. Dylan didn't seem to be smiling…

Says Tom Wilson: "He is a fine piano player, you know. People don't know that. And hearing his songs for the first time is like a big emotional experience. You just know it's something beautiful whatever the subject. He's a poet."

And this, I suppose, is it. I'm sure that Dylan has tremendous qualities of poetry in his writing. He protests, yes, but he also smiles wryly at the troubles of the world. Racialism, intolerance, politics, anti-war stabs… these come into his songs. But I wonder how much of it really sinks in with the hundreds of thousands of British fans who are living rather remotely from these problems. Dylan has said: **"Oh to be a simple folk singer again"**. But he also agrees he likes being able to travel in comfort, surrounded by managers, hairdressers, admirers and technical advisers. He has an expensive home, a well stacked wardrobe – despite arriving in London in blue denim shirt, blue jeans and black leather boots.

He writes his songs fast – and many other star artists are glad to "cover" them. His song-writing ability is undeniable, though there are lapses from the normal output in things like "Subterranean Homesick Blues", which isn't really folk at all.

But is Dylan a good singer? Surely not. He enunciates much more clearly on stage, true, but many of his disc tracks are undecipherable – even to folk-fan Americans.

## PROJECTS ON STAGE

In appearance, Dylan is bird-like, very thin, surprisingly short. His hair is best described as ultra-tousled. Off-stage, he seems to shrink. On-stage, he projects astonishingly well. But his enormous appeal cannot come from his looks, surely. It must be from those songs.

I've talked with Dylan, tried hard to understand him. But he is hardly a journalist's dream. At his first Press conference, knots of highly experienced interviewers stood together muttering: "It's all a waste of time. He doesn't say anything."

Maybe that is another aspect of his success. He sings and writes more about events and trends than about himself. He says he wants people to like him. In "Maggie's Farm", his latest single, he says: "I tried my best to be just like I am, but everyone wants you to be just like them".

Perhaps he is really in an impossible position: a folk man of heart, inevitably caught up in riches. Many feel you can't ally the two. Dylan himself makes highly commercial gestures – like sending LPs to each of the Beatles, along with tickets for one of his shows. That sounds like a status thing… the concert was actually sold out well in advance.

Now it's a reedy, bewildered voice. The songs are mostly good. The "in-person" stage presence is unusual, confident, almost cocky.

But WHY did it all happen so fast for him? I have to admit I'm STILL BAFFLED.

# 16-17 September 1965, Bob McAdorey

Source: *Toronto Telegram, After Four Supplement*, 11 November, 1965. The text here is taken from the website *The Bobserve Series*: https://bobserve.substack.com, which also relates the interesting story of how this interview was eventually tracked down.

This interview took place in Friar's Tavern, 283 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

**The Creative Force They Call Bob Dylan**

*You are right john cohen--*
*quasimodo was right--*
*mozart was right...I*
*cannot say the word eye*
*anymore...when I speak*
*this word eye. it is as if I*
*am speaking of somebody's*
*eye that I faintly remember*
*---there is no eye--there*
*is only a series of mouths--*
*long live the mouths--your*
*rooftop--if you don't al-*
*ready know--has been de-*
*molished...*
By Bob Dylan, from his Columbia album notes.

No, I don't quite understand what he's trying to say. I don't think anybody understands Dylan, perhaps not even himself. But what everybody understands is that whatever it is he's saying, he's staying it honestly and with more power and communication than anyone before him.

At one time I had a sneaking suspicion in the back of my mind that maybe Bob Dylan was putting us all on. An out-and-out kook who really didn't have anything to say, but was having a ball putting bunches of words together and wailing them out in a kind of "you've hurt me so forget it" voice.

A voice that I frankly didn't dig too much on his earlier records, although I've always flipped for his song writing.

Then about a month ago he snuck into Toronto to rehearse with Levon and the Hawks. After a lot of badgering and begging, I was able to wangle an interview (or maybe an "audience" is a better word) with him.

In looking over the garbled notes I scratched down as we sipped coffee, smoked cigarettes and talked, there's one word written in big caps … HONEST. And I guess that sums up my impressions of Dylan that night in a back office at the Friars.

Here are a few of his comments:

- ON no longer being the darling of folkniks and social protesters: **"…my ideas change and my songs change. I don't think the way I did when I was 18 or 19, and I don't like being quoted on things I said or did then."**
- ON Folk-Rock music: **"I don't like the word folk-rock. It's rock 'n roll or it's blues. Rock bands do my songs better than folk singers. They get more out of the words. Folk singers are too wrapped up in themselves to really dig the lyrics."**
- ON his sympathy with college protest groups: **"…sympathy is a big word. I guess if that's what they've got to do I sympathize. But I have no beef, no great banner to carry."**
- ON colored voter registration in the southern States: **"…does it really make that much difference? The colored people may get the vote, but the politicians will be the same, won't they? THEY won't change."**

- ON song writing: **"Some of my stuff comes from personal experience. I write pretty fast. It kind of flows all at once. I guess my favorite song is It's All Over Now Baby Blue."**
- ON his favorite cities for concerts: **"Yes, cities are different, and audiences are. You can play Akron or Syracuse or Pittsburgh, but it's not the same. My favorites are Chicago, New York, of course, San Francisco and Toronto, too."**
- ON some violent reaction he once got from a New York audience because of his new R and R image: **"Audiences don't bug me. It never gets across the footlights to me. I mean, they've paid their money to come and do their thing; clapping or booing or cheering or hissing or whatever their thing is. I'm doing MY thing too. If they don't like it, fine. If they don't it really doesn't bug me."**

So much for talk. The club was by this time closed, the chairs piled up on the tables, the janitor sweeping up, and Levon and the Hawks and Bob Dylan (he took his last name from Dylan Thomas whom he admired) were all ready for an all night rehearsal.

Dylan doesn't like anyone other than the musicians at his rehearsals. And so I felt sort of like Mack the Knife, lurking in a dark corner till they got started.

Then!

I remember when I was in high school, hitch-hiking to Crystal Beach to stand in front of Stan Kenton's big, biting, rearing glorious band. And I would close my eyes and just be carried off right up to Cloud 9. Since then I've had the thrill of witnessing performances which could similarly move me, but not very often.

But that Dylan rehearsal was certainly one. (For the benefit of Phil MacKellar who at this point is probably tearing up his Telegram, may I say that we're not comparing Kenton and Dylan here. I'm talking about that rare combination of music and emotion and audience communication that produces electricity and excitement and magic.)

Nobody sings Dylan like the man himself. His slight body with the Dr. Zorba head sways and moves with his music. He's not exactly the lightening-fingers of the guitar, but even the chords that he thumps out seem to mean something different. His voice is almost a yell when he sings. It exudes honesty. And the phrases of his sad, bitter songs are punctuated by a moaning wail on his harmonica.

And, of course, the accompaniment of Levon and the Hawks is better than anything you've heard on record.

It he a pseudo-poet? A put-on? A kook? No. A genius?

Yes.

# 17 September 1965, Robert Fulford

Source: *Toronto Daily Star*, 18 September 1965, pages 17, 20.

This interview took place in Friar's Tavern, 283 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

**Dylan: Youth's hair-raising sensation**

Bob Dylan, a mousy little man who may be the most influential American entertainer of this generation, was sitting behind the manager's desk in a Yonge St. bar at two o'clock Friday morning. He looked worried. He always looks worried, as if he were afraid someone were about to hug him. Someone usually does.

Dylan's astonishing career has just moved to a new plateau. This time last year he was a success but now he is a sensation and any moment he may turn out to be the biggest thing since Elvis Presley. As both songwriter and performer he is the core of folk-rock, the new sound that crowding everything else off the teenagers' transistors.

"Bobby baby is definitely what's happening, baby."

At a concert in Forest Hills, N.Y., three weeks ago, the far-out disc jockey, Murray the K, introduced Dylan by saying: "There's a new swinging mood in the country, and Bobby baby is definitely what's happening, baby."

Precisely. Folk-rock began last March with the Byrds' big-beat version of Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man" and since then the American hit-parade performers have been stumbling over each other in their frantic rush to Dylan tunes and the Dylan style. In the last month alone, 48 of his songs were recorded. Not only the Byrds but also the Turtles and Sonny and Cher and almost everyone else in sight is caught up in Dylanism. The top song on the charts in the United States this week, "Eve of Destruction," is a thin Dylan imitation and Dylan's own folk-rock record of "Like a Rolling Stone" is running 1-2 with the Beatles' "Help" in Toronto.

The hero of the new rebellious generation of college students

Dylan is also the undisputed hero of the new rebellious generation of college students, the young people who riot at Berkeley and sit-in almost everywhere else. *Esquire* magazine recently suggested that only Malcolm X, John Kennedy and Fidel Castro are so revered by the feverish young revolutionaries on campus. Since the first two are dead and the third is a foreigner, Dylan emerges as the great American hero of the moment.

But folk-rock has now come between Dylan and some of his most fervent admirers. At this year's Newport Folk Festival, when he first appeared in public with his new rock-style electric guitar backing, Dylan was all but booed of the stage by folk purists who regarded his new music as a sell out to the top-40. At Forest Hills the controversy almost turned into a Mods-Rockers riot between old-Dylan and new-Dylan true believers. In the second half of the show, when he sang with electrified backing, old admirers expressed their disgust by shouting "We want Dylan." One fan described the evening as a total disaster.

Dylan flew to Toronto to work on his book of poems

The nervous 24-year-old at the centre of all this appears determined not to be affected by it all, not to become anybody's hero, not to be stuffed into any category.

Dylan was in Toronto this week to spend a few hours rehearsing with Levon and the Hawks, the group at the Friars (*sic*). Levon Helm, the leader, is a drummer from Arkansas; the other four musicians are Canadians, and their passionately rocking group was formed two years ago in Toronto. Levon and Robbie Robertson, the electric guitar player, accompanied Dylan in his recent concerts. Now the whole band will go with him on his new tour beginning Sept. 24 in Austin. They play Massey Hall Nov 14 and 15.

Dylan cam here from New York early Wednesday evening in his private plane. He checked into the Four Seasons and announced that he wanted to do some work on his book, "Tarantula," a collection of poetic pieces which Macmillan of New York will publish this season.

At midnight Dylan went to the Friars (*sic*) to hear Levon's group, and when they finished he rehearsed with them till six. The next night he repeated the process then went back to New York noon Friday.

Obtaining an interview with Bob Dylan is just a little more difficult than arranging a private chat with the Pope. Dylan answered questions in a held-back, suspicious style, the conversational opposite of the aggressive whine he uses on his records.

What about the controversy over the old-new Dylan?

"You can't keep on doing one thing, it bores me"

**"I haven't changed. If you listen to early records and the recent ones, you can see the band really makes no difference"**

The why change?

**"To get rid of some of the boredom – I mean, I might write a symphony next year. I don't know what I'm going to do."**

Is boredom a problem then?

**"Yeah, when that steps in, well… It's very easy to write songs about anything. When you get a certain power, so that you can do something, then you can just go on and do it. But it's not very satisfying. You get mad at yourself. You have to do something else. You can't keep on doing one thing – it bores me, it brings me down."**

What about his followers' indignation?

**"I don't feel anything about it whatsoever. I don't care what people do. They're there. And if they come to do their thing, whatever it is – if they come to boo, or clap, or cheer – well… I don't really come in contact with the audience. There's the lights there and all. They couldn't have a reaction in the world that would scare me."**

And when the booed him at Forest Hills?

**"That was just another concert."**

"Politicians are all the same. Is anything changed?"

How does he feel about the attitude of the rebellious students?

**"I guess it sells records but I have no idea what they're rebelling against. I can't imagine myself rebelling againast anything – if there's anything I don't like, I'm just not there. When you don't like something, you just gotta learn to just not need that something.**

**"If they don't likeanything to do with being a student, they should stop being students. No, I don't have my sympathy for them. But I don't have any contempt, either."**

But surely the author of "Blowin' in the Wind" and "A Hard Rain Will Fall" is concerned with public affairs?

**"Well, I don't know. Look, when the Negroes get the vote, for instance. They're just going to vote for another politician. Politicians are all the same. Is anything changed?"**

What does he think about the Dylan imitations – "Eve of Destruction," for instance?

**"I don't really care. There's not much happening there. All the words on one level – it's not very honest. But if anyone thinks there's anything happening there, I'm not about to tell them to stop listening…"**

Later, discussing the influences of his work, Dylan mentioned that at one period the founding father of modern American folk songs, Woody Guthrie, dominated his songs. But now, he said, there is no one like that.

**"It's all sort of formed in its own way now. It's not influenced by anyone. I know my thing, now, I know what it is. It's hard to describe. I don't know what to call it because I've never heard it before."**

Neither has anyone else. From a very good folk song writer and performer, Dylan has turned into an original. He fits no pattern, and perhaps it is this that makes him the most astonishing performer on the scene now. Consider this passage from a recent Dylan song, "Desolation Row" –

"All except Cain and Abel and the Hunchback of Notre Dame / everybody is either making love or waiting for the rain / Ophelia, she's beneath the window, for her I feel so afraid / on her 22nd birthday she's still an old maid…

"The Titanic sails at dawn / everyone is shouting 'which side are you on?' / Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot are fighting in the captain's tower / while calypso singers laugh at them below…"

# 23 to 24 September 1965, Unknown Interviewer (Texas Ranger)

Source: *Texas Ranger*, US newspaper, November 1965, pages 14-15, 31-32. The text reproduced here is from *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, pages 12-14.

This interview took place in the Villa Capri Motor Hotel, Austin, Texas.

**Message music and rock'n'roll Bob Dylan on concert tour**

I pulled up at the Villa Capri Motor Hotel. I parked my car by the swimming pool and set out in the general direction the grinning desk clerk had pointed. Somewhere in the north forty I looked up on a balcony and spotted a figure standing there, obviously a member of Dylan's group: the long hair, tight pants, elf boots, dark glasses, purple shirt. It was Dylan himself.

Hello, I said, is Bobby N… up there? (this Bobby being a friend of mine who was supposed to be travelling with Dylan's group). **"you mean Bobby N the FOLKSINGER?"** laughed Dylan, and out ran Bobby N, who was serving as a sort of aide-de-camp, and was running around frantically trying to locate, among other things, a set of drums for the band's drummer. You cannot even rent a set of drums in Austin, it seems, not to mention the fact that it being after ten o'clock, you cannot even buy *whiskey*. I apologised. Bobby threw around some introductions and headed back for the telephone. Dylan was engaged in a conversation about folksinging with someone wearing a red beard on the other couch, the red beard doing most of the talking. There were half-a-dozen copies of Dylan's latest Columbia album, *Highway 61 Revisited*, laying beside me on the couch. I picked one up, and inside was a reproduction of someone's arty portrait of Dylan, Suitable for Framing. It was pretty bad.

Dylan was beside me, looking at the picture. **"Man, that's not me. Does that look like me?"** I asked if they had any extra copies of the album, but Bobby N came back from the telephone saying they needed all those for promotion.

After a few minutes I thought of a place to borrow a set of drums and get a bottle of booze, and I headed back for the car. By this time Bobby N was sitting beside the swimming pool with two girls with day-glo blonde hair. Go-go girls they were, fresh from Dallas for the opening of another discotheque in Austin, and they had come to the Villa Capri hunting for Bob Dylan, and they had found Bobby N in HIS tight pants, elf boots, dark glasses, long hair and so on. They were about to bust their bouffants, they wanted to see Bob Dylan so much, and Bobby was teasing them. Bob Dylan the FOLKSINGER? In AUSTIN? No, I didn't know THAT! I'm just a pore cowboy on mah way through Austin on a trail drive! In their desperation they turned to me. You're with Bob Dylan aren't you? said one. I wasn't, I said. Are you sure this gentleman isn't Bob Dylan? (indicating Bobby N). They turned on Bobby again. ARE YOU BOB DYLAN?

The bass player and I got in the car and set off in search of drums and booze.

And so, back to the Villa, and the booze began to flow. A local beatnik showed up with three dollar-a-litre bottles of Mexican rum, room service managed to come up with some ice and some tumblers of the sort that they serve water in at the drug stores. Bobby came grinning in the door with the go-go girls. They were stricken. Bob Dylan actually *was there*. One of them tiptoes across the room and – Lord help me this is the truth – asked Bob Dylan if she could just *touch* him; this was alright, so she reached out and *touched* him with the tip of her finger, on the knee, I believe it was. She and her friend then fell into reverent silence.

I felt it was my duty, though I really couldn't think of many topics of Lasting Significance at the moment, to ask Bob Dylan a few questions so that I might have something to write about – after all, *The Ranger* had bought me two tickets to his concert, at no inconsiderable expense considering the financial status of *The Ranger*. But Dylan wasn't offering any philosophy that night – at least not in my direction. With half the bottle of bourbon in me, I was doing most of the talking by that time. We ended up talking about rock'n'roll music, which was getting back to my level. Another go-go girl came in and sat beside Dylan on the couch, saying her name was Maggie. She was the chief go-go girl. The bourbon was gone, and I had no stomach left to start in on the Mexican Bacardi. I got the addresses of the go-go girls, glommed one of the promotional albums, and left. Bobby N caught me out on the balcony and said there would be two free tickets waiting for me at the box office tomorrow night. I now had four tickets.

Friday night came a few hours later, and I caught a ride across the river to the Auditorium, went inside, and sprawled across my two seats (I had succeeded in giving only two of my tickets away, despite the fact that the concert was a near sell-out) and I looked at the people as they came.

And so I was disappointed when Austin offered up its audience to Bob Dylan. It wasn't weird at all. It was mostly high-school couples all dressed up for *church*, almost, and they applauded politely at the end of each of Dylan's numbers, and in the middle of some of them, at the appropriate places, of course, but there was no yelling, whistling nor, needless to say, dancing in the aisles, as I fondly remembered watching at my *last* rock and roll concert, in Houston, in 1957 or so. Dylan came on stage in a grey suit, white shirt and no tie, and without a preliminary word launched into his program of songs, and then the rock and roll band came out, and they played some really GOOD SOUNDS, and there this Austin audience sat like a bunch of toads, watching Bob Dylan roar back and shout, jump across the stage, sometimes walking right up to the soloist in the middle of their solos and grinning in their faces, waving around the Fender Jazzmaster electric guitar (one of a set of free instruments donated to the group by the Fender instrument company in exchange for a publicity photo of the group playing those instruments) and when the concert was over, the toads filed quietly out without so much as a riot. I might have described their attitude toward Dylan as *religious* if I didn't know that people in Austin still reserve much of their religious feeling for *religion*.

And after the concert, it was off to the Travis Rivers' Bohemian Union Party, the closest thing to a social gathering I could think of myself being welcomed to. And there was the Bohemian Union – hundreds of them – packed into six or eight rooms, listening to Bob Dylan records, waiting for Bob Dylan to show up after the concert, as they had expected him to. All the old beatnik crew was there (beatnik in the respectful sense) and the art students, and the motorcycle people, and whoever else you might expect at a gathering called the Bohemian Union, including the Austin vice squad, just a friendly social call to look for new faces. Everybody was there but Bob Dylan and friends, because they were back on the plane for tomorrow night's concert in Dallas, their lucre in their pockets.

# 25 September 1965, Don Safran

Source: *Dallas Times Herald*, US newspaper. The text reproduced here is from *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 69, Spring 2021 (published April 2021), page 76.

This interview took place in Dallas, Texas.

**Bob Dylan Not Against a Boo**

One of my favourite quotes of the year has to come from Bob Dylan, the controversial folk singer and composer, who performed here this weekend. Dylan, who has been antagonising folk purists by using a rock 'n' roll combo, was booed for it at the recent Newport Jazz Festival. I asked him about it. **"Boos can't be all bad,"** replied the mystical young man. **"There's a little bit of boo in all of us."**

Incidentally, his adoption by the preteen set and his climb up the pop record charts is no planned thing. **"I don't really play to an audience,"** he said. **"My stuff is the words– I think lyrics. I started using the electric guitars because I thought it would help the lyrics. I assume the audience understands my lyrics. At least, their reaction is very good."**

And mothers will be mothers, even in the case of the rebel folk-singer. Dylan's mother, Mrs. Abe Zimmerman, called Sunday from Minnesota to talk to a Dallas friend of hers, Jeanne Rovenger. She wanted to know if Bobby looked like he was taking care of himself. Then, Mr. Z. got on the phone. He wanted to know if the promoters, Angus Wynne III and Jack Calmes, came out well in the venture. Incidentally, Bobby's kid brother, David Zimmerman, will be coming here next fall. David, a prodigy as an arranger and composer, plans on entering NTSU as a music major.

# Before 10 October 1965, Unknown Interviewer (National Blast)

Source: *National Blast*, US magazine, Volume 1, Number 4, 10 October 1965, page 2.

This interview was conducted in Greenwich Village, New York City. The cover date could have been the "take it off display" date rather than the date of publication.

**A Word From Jay Levy, Blast Publisher**

It's our aim here at the Blast to present things as they are… or as we say… tell it like it is! It's with this in mind that I start the column this time.

You know, it's very disappointing to like and believe in something, and then find out that what you have been digging isn't really for real. Well, that very thing happened around here the other night.

A Blast reporter-photographer team went down to a special private party at a Greenwich Village bistro. It was called to spotlight a brand new recording group. Alert always to a good story, our people looked around to see who else was there.

Sure enough, over there in a corner of the room, our people spotted Bob Dylan, sitting by himself near a group of other people. The Blast newsteam, sitting at a nearby table, decided to have a little chat with Dylan.

The reporter, a gal, made her way over to Dylan. She made several polite efforts to speak to Dylan, but he stared at her with a blank expression flashing over his face. A pair of sun glasses hid his eyes. Again, she tried to speak to Dylan. She got nowhere. In fact, Dylan denied being Dylan!

Our photographer bounced into action. He began shooting pictures of the scene. Dylan asked our photographer to stop and he did.

It was getting late now… and the party was about to break up. Our gal reporter tried again to speak with Dylan.

On his feet now, Dylan was more open. He barked: **"I don't want to be interviewed. I'm not a rock 'n roll star."** (The other comments were unprintable.)

As he poured out these words, Dylan's eyes appeared to be glassy and his complexion pasty. He was unsteady on his feet.

Why you may ask did I go into such detail on this incident. Well, the answer is simple.

I have long been an ardent fan of Dylan. I thing (sic) his talent for writing about social problems is nothing short of genius. His effort at singing is pretty good too. All in all he's a great artist.

But off stage, Dylan is something else. In my opinion, he has no regard for understanding and compassion which he so eloquently writes about. Dylan is a Jeckle and Hyde personality.

I like rebels. But I don't like misfits. Dylan has to set an example. Not one of vicious disregard, but one of courteous and understanding behaviour.

For my money, Dylan can keep his double life. I won't support either one…

# 7 November 1965, Larry Patterson

Source: *University of Cincinnati News Record*, US student newspaper, 11 November 1965, page 16.

The interview took place in Music Hall, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio

**Dylan Discusses "New-Style Sound"**

This past Sunday night was a very special one that had been eagerly awaited by many here at UC. Bob Dylan was appearing at Music Hall, in concert. We overcame seemingly unsurmountable obstacles in order to gain a few minutes of conversation with Dylan, in an attempt to gain a bit of insight into what makes this unusual young man the hottest item in the music industry today.

While talking with Dylan, it is easy to get the feeling that you are surrounded by every form of outcast musician known to man. The fellows that accompany him on the road protect Dylan as though he were a tiny child, with the intensity of people who realize that their entire livelihood depends upon his every movement.

In trying to cast some light upon the new-style sound that is the top seller across the nation today, I asked him if he felt that this form of music was going to be accepted with as much enthusiasm by his followers as the old solo style was. He said, "**What we are doing now is what I was searching for in my second and fourth albums, but I never could really get. We don't sing anything really bad. I don't write songs for commercial reasons, I couldn't do that; they just sort of seemed to work out that way.**"

When I asked him what his response had been to the reception he received at the show he did in Forest Hills, New York, this summer, his reaction was interesting. "**The regular band that accompanies me wasn't with me that day, and it just wasn't coming off right. I don't know why they acted that way; maybe it was something that they weren't used to that will take awhile to catch on. But I don't let the booing and that bother me. As long as they paid their money, they're entitled to their own thinking. I know I wouldn't pay to hear something I wasn't going to like, though, and I would not pay money just to boo.**"

What would you call this new style then, I asked. "**It isn't rock n'roll or the hard driving rock that's coming across a lot now. It isn't even folk, or what they're calling folk-rock. I don't know if you can put a name on it, we just play it.**" Would you say that it is a style all your own, then, and do you think it will last longer than the usual trends? "**You could say that we originated the style. It's us and it's what we're here for. I try to tell it like they'll understand it, in the way that I think they want it. It's how I feel; you know. Now I can't say whether they'll like it enough to keep it around long, but I think it's what they're wanting. I'll play it until the majority don't want to hear me. But what is happening now is we're giving them a whole new way of looking at things – making them think – and a new reason for being here.**"

Getting this interview was a major task in itself, and the sight and thoughts of this interesting young man were experiences never before encountered that will not soon be forgotten. The audience, somewhat disappointed, to say the least, by a faulty sound system, was often noticeably disappointed by the second half of the show in which Dylan sang with a band. But seeing the unique and sometimes obviously exhibitionist types in individuals that attended was a treat in itself. However this must be recorded as one of Dylan's worst appearances vocally, and the capacity audience indicated openly their disappointment with their idol in his new capacity.

# 1 December 1965, Jules Siegel

Source: Unknown. The text reproduced here is from *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, page 14.

This interview took place in Seattle, Washington State.

Here is Bob Dylan talking about his fans in a motel outside of Seattle while waiting to leave for a concert which ten thousand persons have paid to hear. Dylan is half way through his tour. Hawaii and Australia lie ahead. He has been taking a lot of speed to keep going. He looks terrible, exhausted, wired. Sometimes he makes no sense at all, but at the moment, crossed leg chugging up and down, he is painfully lucid:

**"They want me to be their friend. They want to take me home with them. They can't so they buy my records instead. Where's that at, a piece of plastic? They sit around like lamps, waiting for me to turn them on."**

# 16 December 1965, Los Angeles Press Conference

Source: Transcript in *Dylan on Dylan: Interviews and Encounters*, edited by Jeff Burger, 2018, Chicago Review Press, Chicago, pages 116-131. Only a partial transcript is included in *Every Mind Polluting Word* taken from *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*, Robert Shelton, 1986, Harper Collins, New English Library, pages 284-286.

This press conference took place in Los Angels, California.

Facilitator: I'd like to welcome everybody here this afternoon. At the far left is Billy James of Columbia Records. And I'm here just to sort of point fingers at people who've got questions. And Bob tells me that he has no formal statement. He said he would prefer not to answer any questions about science or trigonometry, which sort of blew the first ten that I had, so I would, if I may, lead it off with one question and then let you take it from there. Bob, these days, an awful lot of people are recording your songs, and I just wondered if you had any feelings of pride or horror or anything else about having your material done by other artists.

**Dylan: No.**

MC: Anybody out there want to start off?

Reporter: Lately, in one of the national magazines, I read something about the protest singers, and I wonder if you could tell me, among the folksingers, how many would you say could be characterized as protest singers today?

**Dylan: I don't understand. Could you ask the question again?**

Reporter: Yeah. How many people who labour in the same musical vineyard in which you toil... how many are protest singers? That is, people who use their music and use the songs to protest the social state in which we live today… the matter of war, the matter of crime, or whatever it might be.

**Dylan: How many?**

Reporter: Yes. Are there many who...

**Dylan: Yeah. I think there's about 136.**

[Laughter]

Reporter: You say, "about 136"?

**Dylan: Yeah.**

Reporter: Or do you mean exactly 136?

**Dylan: It's either 136 or 142.**

Reporter: Are there, seriously? Can you name a few of them for me?

**Dylan: Protest? You just want singers?**

Reporter: How about Barry McGuire? Is he one? What is he?

**Dylan: He'd be sort of a mixture of country and western and seventeenth-century literature music… Robert Goulet is a protest singer. All the attention has been given to everybody that has long hair, but the truth of the matter is really that the protest singers are Eydie Gormé and Robert Goulet and Steve Lawrence. It's very obvious if you go beyond the word 'protest'.**

Reporter: What does the word 'protest' mean to you?

**Dylan: It means singing when you really don't want to sing.**

Reporter: Do you sing against your wishes?

**Dylan: No.**

Reporter: Do you sing protest songs?

**Dylan: No.**

Reporter: What do you sing?

**Dylan: I sing all love songs.**

Reporter: Is it true that you have changed your name? And if so, what was your real name?

**Dylan: My real name was Kunezevitch. I changed it to avoid all these relatives that come up to you in different parts of the country and want tickets for concerts and stuff like that.**

Reporter: Kunezevitch?

**Dylan:** **Kunezevitch, yes.**

Reporter: Was that your first or the last name?

**Dylan:** **That was my first name.** [Laughter and applause] **I don't really want to tell you what the last name was.** [Laughter]

Reporter: I've heard critics say that you have no real purpose in mind when you write a song except to shock people. Is that true?

**Dylan:** **You know that's not true. You've heard the songs, haven't you?**

Reporter: Yes.

**Dylan:** **Well, you know that's not true then.**

Reporter: I think 'Puff the Magic Dragon' and 'The [*sic*] Tambourine Man' were considered by some to be endorsements of marijuana smoking,

**Dylan:** **Well, I didn't write 'Puff the Magic Dragon.' That's horrible. Whatever that is, I didn't write that. And 'Mr. Tambourine Man,' there's no marijuana in that song. At least I never heard it before.**

Reporter: Do you have a music background? What is your education?

**Dylan:** **Same as everybody's. High school.**

Reporter: Bob, if you were to put a label upon yourself, how would you characterize yourself? What kind of singer *are* you?

**Dylan:** **I'm more of a mathematical singer. I use words like most people use numbers. That's about the best I can do.**

Reporter: Could you elaborate a little bit more on that? You're losing me there.

**Dylan:** **Oh, I hate to do that. I can't elaborate on it any more than that. I could at another time. You really got me at a bad moment here.**

Reporter: Bob, you and Joan Baez have become heroes of the new protest movement on college campuses.

**Dylan:** **Oh, Jesus!**

Reporter: I'd like to get your reaction to the student protest movement. A two-part question. The second part is whether you believe that there is a connection between the so-called New Left and the so-called New Music.

**Dylan:** **I don't know anything about the New Left or students very much at all. I don't really know any college students.**

Reporter: I have a complaint against your vocals and I hear others and I read criticisms…

**Dylan:** **Sorry.** [Giggles.]

Reporter: I find it hard to get your words. You kind of mumble or you sort of slur and in the old days, you know, Sinatra on his fiftieth birthday, was complaining also about the new modern singers' enunciation and diction…

**Dylan:** **Well, new modern singers are much too sick nowadays to…**

Reporter: How about yourself? Are you sick in the same way? In terms of not comprehending the words and lyrics?

**Dylan:** **I have a nervous disease. That keeps my words… if you want to pick on that, like you'd pick on a cripple… That's all I can say.**

Reporter: You're not the only one. It's modern style. I'm just curious…

**Dylan:** **It certainly isn't any style that's harmful to anybody. It's not gonna hurt anybody.**

Reporter: Well, if they don't understand the words so easily.

**Dylan:** **Well, it's not gonna hurt them not to understand the words.**

Reporter: Bob, why is there such a widespread use of drugs among singers today?

**Dylan:** **I don't know. Are you a singer?**

[Laughter]

Reporter: Am I wrong in assuming that or saying that?

**Dylan:** **I don't know many of the other singers. I really don't know.**

Reporter: Do you take drugs yourself?

**Dylan:** **I don't even know what a drug is. I have never even seen a drug. I wouldn't know probably what one looked like if I saw one.**

Reporter: Real way-out music and drugs seem to go together. Have any idea why that could be?

**Dylan:** **I have no idea.**

Reporter: Have you any intention of appearing at a Vietnam Day Committee benefit in San Francisco in a week or so?

**Dylan:** **No. I'll be busy.**

Reporter: Have you been asked?

**Dylan:** **No.**

Reporter: Bob, what'll be the next vogue in your opinion in the field of music in which you work?

**Dylan:** **The next thing I'm gonna do?**

Reporter: Anyone. What will catch on in your opinion?

**Dylan:** **Gee, I don't know.**

Reporter: What are you gonna do next? Something new and different?

**Dylan:** **Yeah. I'm gonna write a symphony with words. Different words and songs going at the same time. I don't know if it's gonna be vogue.**

Reporter: Can you explain a little bit more how you're gonna go about this? Will you have people reciting it all at once or what?

**Dylan:** **Yeah. All at once everything's gonna happen. One song'll be playing here in one key, another song'll be in another key. There'll be sounds from out this way, other sounds from another track. It all depends on how many tracks I decide to use. Use ten tracks, you can use ten different things going on at the same time, which is really a symphony.**

Reporter: Bob, what sort of technique do you use when you write songs? Or don't you call it any sort of technique? How do you do it? Do you play on the piano first or write the music down first or the lyrics? What do you do?

**Dylan:** **No, I just sit down and next thing I know, it's there.**

Reporter: How does it come there?

**Dylan:** **I don't know. I just sit down and I write. And the next thing I know, it's there.**

Reporter: Do you produce your own records and so forth?

**Dylan:** **No, I don't.**

Reporter: Who's your favourite producer? Do you have any?

**Dylan:** **You mean an A&Rs man?**

Reporter: Yeah, the one that does the whole job of background and music and instrumentation.

**Dylan:** **I don't know of too many people really that do that. Phil Spector.**

Reporter: Who does yours?

**Dylan:** **Oh, Columbia records. A fellow named Bob Johnson does it.**

Reporter: He's very good.

**Dylan:** **You know him?**

Reporter: No, I don't know him but he's very good.

Reporter: Bob, do you have any movie plans coming up?

**Dylan:** **Yeah.**

Reporter: What would you like to do?

**Dylan:** [Laughs.] **She's very excited. Just make a movie.**

Reporter: Would you play yourself or would you actually act?

**Dylan:** **No, I'm gonna play my mother.**

[Laughter]

Reporter: How would you do that?

**Dylan:** **That's very simple, really, if you think about it.**

Reporter: Would you think about it and tell us?

**Dylan:** **No, no. I just do things. I don't think it out.**

Reporter: What would you call the movie? Any idea?

**Dylan:** **No. Uh, *Mother Revisited*.**

[Laughter]

Reporter: Is there any chance you could be drafted? Or have you already been in the service?

**Dylan:** **I've already gone through that a long time ago.**

Reporter: Were you in the service?

**Dylan:** **No.**

Reporter: Why were you putting us, and the rest of the world, on so…?

**Dylan:** **I'm just trying to answer your questions as good as you can ask them.**

Reporter: How do you like being with Columbia Records?

**Dylan:** **I like being part of Columbia Records very much.**

Reporter: How many songs have you written for music publishers?

**Dylan:** **About 125.**

Reporter: I'm sure you must have been asked a thousand times, "What are you trying to say in your music?" I don't understand one of the songs.

**Dylan:** **Well, you shouldn't feel offended or anything. I'm not trying to say anything to you. If you don't get it, you don't have to really think about it, because it's not addressed to you.**

Reporter: Whom are you addressing?

**Dylan:** **They're not addressed to anybody.**

Reporter: Are you trying to say something when you write? Or are you just entertaining?

**Dylan:** **I'm just an entertainer. That's all.**

Reporter: But what are you trying to say in your songs? Can you take a couple of songs…

**Dylan:** **No, no. Obviously, I just can't try to tell you that.**

Reporter: Do you really feel that it's important for you to write and say?

**Dylan:** **What's there to feel? Name me something.**

Reporter: Did you feel "Mr. Jones" when you wrote that?

**Dylan:** **I guess so. I must have felt that.**

Reporter: I think we're talking about…

**Dylan:** **We're talking about two different things.**

Reporter: No, we're talking about standard emotions. We're talking about pain or remorse or love or…

**Dylan:** **I have none of those feelings at all.**

Reporter: What sort of feelings do you have when you write a song?

**Dylan:** **They're songs. I'm showing you my feelings. They're in the songs. I don't have to explain my feelings. I'm not on trial.**

[Laughter]

Reporter: Bob, do you feel the popularity of the English groups has helped to boost your own popularity?

**Dylan:** **I can't really answer that. Maybe it has, maybe it hasn't. Who am I to say?**

Reporter: What are some of the groups that you think are good and have a great future? Some of the popular groups.

**Dylan:** **The Fugs. Have you heard The Fugs?**

[Laughter]

Reporter: Is it true that you dedicated your first song to Brigitte Bardot?

**Dylan:** **Yes, it's true.**

Reporter: Why did you do that? Are you a fan of Miss Bardot?

**Dylan:** **Yes, of course.**

Reporter: Why?

**Dylan:** **Why? Do I have to answer *that*? [Laughter] You gotta think for yourself a little bit.**

Reporter: Are you here today voluntarily?

**Dylan: Yes.**

[Laughter]

Reporter: Bob, a personal question here, and I hope you'll forgive it. But you sound and you look very tired. Are you ill or is this your normal state?

[Laughter]

**Dylan: I take it as an insult. I don't like to hear that kind of thing.**

Reporter: I don't mean to offend you but we can hardly hear you and you look very…

**Dylan: Well, I'm from New York City. You're all from California. This health thing. I feel quite embarrassed about it the same way you do probably. But I have no explanation for it.**

Reporter: Bob, what about the nervous condition that you mentioned to us? Is that evident or…

**Dylan: I keep that very well concealed.**

[Laughter]

Reporter: Are you taking medication for it?

**Dylan: Oh, yes, medication. What do you mean – drugs? [Laughter] What kind of questions are those? Come on.**

Reporter: Bob, were you serious about the symphony?

**Dylan: Yes, to some degree.**

Reporter: Have you thought a lot…

**Dylan: I have some ideas, yeah.**

Reporter: What would be the influence of this symphony? You say you've heard Beethoven's Ninth, for example.

**Dylan: No, there wouldn't be any influence by Beethoven's Ninth. I know what he does, though. I know the forms, I know the musical…**

Reporter: What about the influences as a lyric writer or poet? You mentioned the influence by Guthrie but I don't hear the influence…

**Dylan: No, that was more the voice of a romantic latter James Dean kind of thing. If I wanted influences, I would read somebody or listen to somebody because I would dig them. That would be the only reason I would.**

Reporter: Who have you collected on records over the past ten years?

**Dylan: That I personally like? Oh, Lotte Lenye. Ma Rainey, all those people. Modern singers. Sir Douglas Quintet. The Staple Singers. Some of the French singers.**

Reporter: In the way of poetry, who have you collected?

**Dylan: I haven't collected anybody. I get books sent to me from City Lights. And from New York bookstores, they send them to me. And I read those. I like a lot of the older poets, though, more than anybody around now.**

Reporter: Bob, what is the reason for your visit to California?

**Dylan: Oh, I'm here looking for some donkeys. [Laughter] I am making a movie about Jesus.**

Reporter: Where are you making it?

**Dylan: Back East.**

Reporter: For whom or with whom?

**Dylan: It's an independent film.**

Reporter: What type of movie, Bob?

**Dylan: I don't really want to talk about it. I'm sure everybody understands. That's why I'm here in California. Besides that, I'll be playing a few times here and there. But I'm really here on business.**

Reporter: Do you prefer to live there than here?

**Dylan: Yeah.**

Reporter: Are the recording facilities better here than there?

**Dylan: No.**

Reporter: Where do you do most of your recording?

**Dylan: New York City.**

Reporter: Why do you like New York better than here?

**Dylan: I don't know. I guess it's just the closed-in feeling. You get used to being closed in after a while and you realize that it's really true. You go other places and it's closed in but it's not really. There's more to deal with.**

Reporter: Have you had interviews in New York similar to this?

**Dylan: Yeah. Not really though. I know all the reporters there.**

Reporter: I was wondering if you had the same questions there as here.

**Dylan: No.**

Reporter: What kind of friends are you attracted to? What type of people do you like the best and like to be surrounded with, if anybody?

**Dylan: Horrible people. I have a lot of friends which are thieves. I have a few.**

Reporter: Are you planning on visiting Joan Baez's School of Nonviolence?

**Dylan: No, no.**

Reporter: What are your feelings about this kind of involvement in political activities by singers?

**Dylan: You mean singers who are political?**

Reporter: Mm-hmm.

**Dylan: That's fine if they want to be political. It doesn't hurt anybody.**

Reporter: Are you going to be? Many students are saying that you were far more political a few years ago.

**Dylan: In the songs, you mean?**

Reporter: Mm-hmm.

**Dylan: Oh, if you know my history in New York City, you can see the reasons for a lot of that. It's not really political, anyway. It was just another thing from free writing. You see, I always wrote. I was on the East Side. When I came to make money, I just went over and sent folk songs that I wrote. So it was two different things. My attraction was to writing. Only lately, in the past two years, have I discovered that I could put them both together.**

Reporter: You have any intention of getting involved in protest politics, à la Joan Baez?

**Dylan: No. I have too many other things to do.**

Reporter: Bob, a lot of people have labeled you establishment-protesting and called you the father of the protest movement.

**Dylan: Well, I guess I am.**

Reporter: Do you think there's a legitimate protest movement in music now?

**Dylan: Yeah, but you know as well as anybody else what that means. Like what does it mean – protest? What are they protesting? People were protesting, writing those kind of songs, five years ago on the East Coast. Everybody out there was all about that. But I'm not really into what other people do that much.**

Reporter: Why do you think kids are listening to you now? Why do you think they want to hear what you have to say?

**Dylan: I really don't know. I just heard something a couple of days ago that amazed me on this tape outside a concert I played in San Jose. There's this fifteen-year-old girl out there and she's being interviewed and she knew of poets like William Blake. She knew his works. And she was hip to all kinds of different things which people are usually not acquainted with at that age. So maybe it's just a new kind of person, a fifteen-year-old person. I don't know. I do know that person was more free in the mind than a twenty-two-year-old college kid.**

Reporter: Well, there's a greater maturity among the very young nowadays. Why is that?

**Dylan: I don't know. Maturity is not what I mean at all. Maturity's just a phony word.**

Reporter: A special kind of maturity, though. A special kind of attitude is what you're saying?

**Dylan: Yeah, an attitude.**

Reporter: What is the attitude today among young people?

**Dylan: Oh, God. I don't even know any young people. I don't really know.**

Reporter: Well, when you said "attitude," what could that be.

**Dylan:** **Well, you have a certain attitude, right? I bet you have an attitude, like you can be personally insulted, can't you? All right, well, there's an attitude among a certain crowd of people that can't be personally insulted. And they know, without thinking…**

Reporter: Is that how you feel?

**Dylan:** **No, that's just one… term. I'm not talking about how I feel. I'm telling you the truth. Forget it comes from me.**

Reporter: Bob, I'd like to ask you about sexual freedom and so forth. This is a new bag today, and what's the reason for it?

**Dylan:** [Laughs] **This guy I thought was really hip when I looked at him. I don't know.**

Reporter: You don't know?

**Dylan:** **No.**

Reporter: Well, do you participate in the new scene?

**Dylan:** **I don't participate in anything. Nothing. I bet you couldn't name one thing that I participate in. Go ahead, I dare ya.**

[Laughter]

Reporter: Well, this press conference. No, that's what we're trying to find out.

**Dylan:** **Well, hope you do.**

Reporter: I imagine you get a lot of letters, a lot of reactions from people near you. Do you have a feeling that they do read you?

**Dylan:** **Yeah, yeah. Some of the younger ones, too. Yeah, they do.**

Reporter: I think you're more popular among the young crowd than you are among the older generation.

Reporter: Bob, you mentioned you sing mostly love songs. Is love important to you when you write your songs?

**Dylan:** **No.**

Reporter: Is it important to you when you sing songs?

**Dylan:** **No.**

Reporter: Do you enjoy performing as opposed to writing?

**Dylan:** **I like to sing and play, yeah.**

Reporter: I don't know whether you want to answer this, Bob. I work for *Variety* and we like to have dollars and cents in the paper. Can you tell me how much you make a month from your Columbia records alone.

**Dylan:** **I don't know how much I make.**

Reporter: You don't get a breakdown?

**Dylan:** **I have no idea what I make and I don't want to ever find out.**

Reporter: You spend a lot?

**Dylan:** **Yeah, I spend a lot, I guess.**

Reporter: Maybe Billy James can answer that.

**Dylan:** **No, he wouldn't answer that, either.**

Reporter: What do you spend your money on? You seem to live a very simple, uncomplicated life. you don't seem to be interested in motorcars, girls, yachts…

**Dylan:** **Well, that's the way it goes.**

[Laughter]

Reporter: So I'm trying to figure out what you spend your money on.

**Dylan:** **I spend money on whatever is there to spend money on that I want to buy.**

Reporter: Do you have any investments? Apartment houses?

**Dylan:** **I don't know what happens to my money. When I want money, I go ask for it and I get it. And I spend it. And when I want more, I ask for it and I get it. That's all. It's very simple really.**

Reporter: On the back of one of your albums, you said Dean Martin should apologise to The Rolling Stones. Why…

**Dylan:** **I don't know. How long ago was that?**

Reporter: I don't know. A year ago?

**Dylan:** **The Rolling Stones weren't heard of here yet. They were just in England and I saw a thing, some kind of a snobby thing. I don't know what it was. It had nothing to do with talent or anything.**

Reporter: What do you think of The Byrds?

**Dylan:** **I like The Byrds.**

Reporter: The Byrds and The Fugs, your two favourites?

**Dylan:** **The Byrds and The Fugs; you sure boil things down to simplicity. OK.**

Reporter: Your original association with Columbia – did it come about through John Hammond's son? Or just how did you sign with Columbia?

**Dylan:** **I made a record with Carolyn Hester, who at that time was signed, about five years ago…**

Reporter: Was Hammond…

**Dylan:** **Yeah, he A&Red it.**

Reporter: And he suggested cutting an album or did you request cutting…

**Dylan:** **No, he just heard me play the harmonica. He wanted to know if I wanted to make an album.**

Reporter: Do you know Hammond Jr.?

**Dylan:** **Yes.**

Reporter: Have you ever worked with him?

**Dylan:** **No.**

Facilitator: Thank you. Well, thank you very much. There's some more press information outside for anybody that needs it.

# Late 1965, Unknown Origin

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Source: A partial transcript of unknown origin embedded in excerpts from the Los Angeles Press Conference, 16 December 1965, quoted in *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan*, Robert Shelton, 1986, Harper Collins, New English Library, page 285. It does not occur in the audio recording of the press conference.

Reporter: Did your parents give you any special advice when you last saw them? Did they say 'good-bye' or 'good luck' or anything like that?

**Dylan: No, do your parents do that to you?**

Reporter: As a little boy, did you want to write songs and be a singer?

**Dylan: No, I wanted to be a movie usher. It's been my lifelong ambition to be a movie usher… and I have failed, as far as I am concerned.**

# 5 February 1966, El Kritzler

Source: *Westchester Reporter-Dispatch*, US newspaper, 7 February 1966. The text reproduced here is from *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, pages 16-17.

This is a (very) brief quote from Dylan during the interval of a concert at Westchester County Center, White Plains, New York. Perhaps 'El Kritzler' is a *nom de plume*.

**Dylan charms big audience**

The young audience wanted to scream when he came on. This was a Bob Dylan concert and you cool it with applause. It was 8.45 Saturday night. County Center was packed and Dylan walked from the wings. He is short, thin and pale. His brown hair sprouts from his head like turnip stalks. He was dressed in a brown and black checkered suit – the checks were four-inch squares.

He stood straight in his black suede boots, two inches taller because of the heels. Around his neck hung a harmonica holder. This was Bob Dylan. He looked more like the Mad Hatter from *Alice In Wonderland*.

After strumming a few chords on his guitar, he sang. Introductory words would have been extraneous. Dylan to today's youth is a guitar-wielding buddha, a James Joyce of a song, a Holden Caulfield of the 60s. One girl said: 'He seems to know the few essentials worth knowing and he goofs so beautifully on the rest.'

When the 24-year-old Dylan first came East in 1961, he was compared, by those who knew, with folk hall-of-famers – Leadbelly, Guthrie, Seeger. Apparently he wasn't listening. 'Times are a-changing,' he sang and he changed with them. His audience grew. Comparisons are made only on the way up; Bob Dylan is on top.

How does it feel? **"Open, very open,"** he said with deliberation, during intermission. No longer does he stand straight and give voice to the emotional causes of our time. His words are more personal. He sings of alienation, absurdity and unselfrighteous honesty.

You mob The Beatles; you sling the works at the Rolling Stones. When Dylan sings you listen silently and inwardly. Saturday night's audience was no different. One long-haired youth in tight jeans, boots and brown suede vest sat sucking his thumb. Another lay his head back, his eyes closed. Some rolled softly with the beat. All listened.

It has been said that the real Dylan fan never attends his concerts. Dylan's words are his essence. They can better be absorbed in the solitude of your room. His fans include primarily intellectual rebels of the late 50s and early 60s, young village hippies in their polo shirts and pea jackets and British mods who are into everything British.

# Early Feb 1966, “Lady Sandra Suffolk”

Source: Published on-line on the NSF News and Magazine website: https://www.needsomefun.net/the-curious-case-of-lady-suffolk.

The interview took place in Dakota Building, New York City, New York. The identity of “Lady Sandra Suffolk” and the circumstances of this interview are something of a mystery. Only the following snippet is available.

**The curious case of Lady Suffolk**

SS: Well, now that you’re famous, how much money do you want to make?

**BD: All of it.**

SS: No, I mean one million, two million?

**BD: No. All of it.**

SS: Do you believe in nature?

**BD: No, I don’t believe in any drugs.**

# 11 February 1966, Norman Rowe

Source: *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, US newspaper, 12 February 1966.

The interview took place in Richmond, Virginia.

**Folk Music**

Bob Dylan, an angry young man with a guitar and a variety of messages in his many folk songs, left some 3,000 Richmonders and Virginians delightfully happy with his collection of sad ballads at his one-night stand at the Mosque last night.

For the record, the local audience was 98 per cent of upper bracket teen-agers; Dylan is an idol in that area. In fact, one pretty young blonde was so elated with Dylan's performance that she staged quite a performance herself: Taking off from Row A, she cleared the orchestra pit in a one-stop leap (on a covered piano) and landed within three feet of her idol.

Not Too Surprised

Balladeer Dylan didn't appear too surprised. The occasion marked his first on-stage smile as he declared:

"**I don't know this girl… but I'm sure she's a very nice girl.**"

A back-stage worker quickly hustled the very nice girl off through the curtain wings, and Bob Dylan went on with his concert.

He was on "Desolation Row" and he was very sad. He was also very sad with "All Over Now Baby Blue" and "My Love She Speaks Like Silence."

He was a little hapiper [*sic*] when he closed the first half of his concert with "Mr. Tambourine Man." That particular tune, I'm told, has been his biggest money-maker over and above "Blowin' in the Wind."

Alone in First Half

Through the first half of his show, Bob Dylan was on stage alone, providing his own musical support with a non-amplified guitar and a harmonica (which he changed several times), held near his lips by a shiny, stiff-wire contraption.

He was dressed in a tightly cut coat and trousers of English design, in a baby-blue turtle-necked sweater, plus boots of a sort. His hair was a mass of ringlets, making a complete view of his face somewhat difficult.

He sings with what appears to be a built-in hoarseness which sort of spotlights the sadness of many of his songs.

Then Company

After intermission, Bob Dylan had company on stage. His support was from two more guitars (amplified), a swinging set of drums, a resounding piano and a swinging electric organ. Dylan himself made a change in instrumentation. His guitar was the plug-in electrical variety. The second half of the show was in the best rock 'n' roll tradition.

And Dylan turned on more lung power. At one time he was shouting a song with a title,·like "I See You've Got Your Brand New Leopard Skin Pill Box Hat." And his faithful fans were loud in their admiration.

Backstage, I had a few words with Bob Dylan (say it like Gunsmoke's Marshal Dillan). His real name is Robert Zimmerman but in 1962, the 24-year-old singer officially changed it to Bob Dylan, in honor of the late poet Dylan Thomas, whom he admired.

Understood in South

He's particular happy with the reception he gets in the South. **"They** (the Southern youngsters) **seem to know more about what I'm trying to do… they understand me."**

He denied the tag of a "social protest poet."

**“The word ‘poet’ is often used wrong… I just have thoughts in my head and I write them. I’m not trying to lead any causes for anyone… I don’t have any respect for the word poet.”**

He also announced, **“my success is accidental.”** He didn’t make that one quite clear. He’s·also working on an autobiographical book about which he’s rather excited.

Dylan has written about 200 songs, and **“Peter, Paul and Mary are about the only folk-singing group that do my songs real good.”** (The trio had a big hit in “Blowin’ in the Wind”' in ’63.)

Did Woody Guthrie’s music influence Dylan?

**“He was my inspiration only for a short while… that grew out of the James Dean thing.”**

Most of Bob Dylan’s fans know he’s a motorcycle enthusiast but I doubt if many know when he likes to ride.

**“Late at night, before I go to bed.”**

And last night, he left for a Norfolk show tonight. Thus, his bedtime appears to be uncertain and highly irregular.

# 25 February 1966, Stephen R. Allen

Source: *Courier-Post*, US newspaper, Camden, New Jersey, 19 March 1966. Republished in *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 230, May 2025.

The interview took place in Dylan's hotel room, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Allen: One of the things that bothers many people with your new folk-rock style is the difficulty – at least in concerts – in understanding the words against the heavy beat or the music.

**Dylan: Actually, what I'm doing is the only way I know how to do what I do, and I feel right about it.**

Allen: You're doing it actively rather than being pushed into it?

**Dylan: Oh, I was doing this a long time ago. I played rock 'n' roll before I played folk. But I got out of it when I was 18. It was just too hard to make it, you know?**

Allen: You intend to pursue this style?

**Dylan: Well, yeah. I have confidence in my language now, which I never had before – because of the material I was using.**

Allen: The "folk purists" are down on you because or your change to folk-rock. Do you ever intend a full return to the style you had before?

**Dylan: Well no, I was never with that crowd of people, you know? I never sang any "folk songs." I never took any song that was written and had the gall to sing it and expect somebody to listen. It's just that what I did was closest to them.**

Allen: How many songs do you estimate you've written?

**Dylan: Oh, I don't know. I've written many more parts of songs than I have songs. "Like a Rolling Stone" was originally 20 pages long, but I knew how it had to be done, you see? It's all there – in that song.**

Allen: You're a famous person now. Have you ever felt any longing for the old days, of obscurity and wandering around?

**Dylan: No, why? This is what I've strived for all my life.**

Allen: Where did you find your sidemen? (Dylan travels with five accompanists, all as strange-looking as he)

**Dylan: Oh. well, I was coming out of a dime store one day, and there comes another guy in the opposite direction carrying a sign... "Help Wanted."**

Allen: Do you think all the money you've made in the past couple of years has either helped or hurt you?

**Dylan: I don't see any way it could possibly hurt me. I know the money is there. but it really means nothing to me. I can't really explain that and expect you to believe me.**

Allen: Don't you think the fact that you're earning so much money is a pretty good indication that a lot of people out there are digging you?

**Dylan: Well, yeah, but it's going to have to drop off sometime. I'm not the Beatles, you know. What I play is not rock 'n' roll; it's not overdubbed, tested for sound. You have to give me credit for knowing what I do. This could be done, and we could get sounds where every space is filled. But I never looked for that. I know it would interfere with the texture of what I'm doing.**

Allen: What age group do you feel understands your music best?

**Dylan: Well, I can't really say any particular age group, but I know from experience there are a lot of people around my age – 24 – who are aware. There's not many music critics who are.**

**Audience reaction turns me on more in the South than I ever been turned on in the North. In all the songs I write, there's one heavy influence in terms of picture things and – where you are, and a lot of the stuff I write is "border" actually. You can feel the words and the music all over the Texas-Mexican border, and a lot of the songs come out of that. Even in Mexico, they would understand it a lot better than they would in let's say Ohio… or Virginia. They really feel the songs there, and they know what I'm talkin' about.**

Allen: Well, if you're not getting through to your critics, at least you're getting through to your audience.

**Dylan: Yeah, well, I can't say too much about the critics. They haven't been exactly "fair," you know.**

Allen: Do you think it's a matter of "fairness" or simply a matter of not understanding?

**Dylan: Oh, it's not impossible that they understand. It's just that when they don't understand, they get hostile.**

Allen: Do you think it's an age difference that causes this?

**Dylan: Naw, it's a fear difference. I think they're worried, and they see people not as worried as they are, and they think something's going on and they don't know what it is.**

Allen: Like your song "Ballad of a Thin Man" – "Something is happening, but you don't know what it is"?

**Dylan: No, that song is actually about an out-of-work truck driver… caught in a pinball machine. (He laughs)**

Allen: In the last year or two, we get the feeling that you're becoming more of a cynic, more pessimistic?

**Dylan: No, it's just that my time gets less and less, and I just don't have the time to be cute anymore, that's all. But I never hurt anybody; I'm not cynical toward anybody. I'm sure I don't shock anybody who really follows what's going on… I've never taken anything from anybody without giving something in return.**

**I'm not a protest song writer, I never was. You're hearing all those songs now, but when I recorded them, there was nothing like them at the time.**

**Also, I don't have any qualms about what I say about the critics, because they don't know. And I resent people who don't know and pretend that they do. I don't want to be bothered with them – I can't be bothered with them. They take up my time. They're not really good for anybody. You know what I mean?**

**Everyone uses this word "poet," but I'm not about to call myself a poet. If for no other reason than – look at all the fools who are called poets. That would just put me in a category with them. Have you ever really dug what words on paper are? There's only one person I know who exists now who can put something on paper and have it actually jump off, so he doesn't have to stand up there and sing it himself. Allen Ginsberg. Most of the stuff I put down on paper, it's easier for me to sing than write out. Because I become that piece of paper, you see? I'm those words.**

**It's a crime all the people who are recognized and respected as artists, and they're not – they just can't make it as ditch diggers, you know?**

# Early 1966, Unknown (Far Out)

Source: *The Beatles 'Revolver': The song that let down an otherwise perfect album, by Jordan Potter, in Far Out, UK on-line magazine, 5 August 2022: https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/revolver-the-beatles-song-let-down-otherwise-perfect-album/*.

This article containe a quote from an otherwise unknown interview. The location, interviewer and date are unknown but Potter states that the interview took place shortly after the release of The Beatles album *Rubber Soul*, on 3 December 1965.

**The Beatles 'Revolver': The song that let down an otherwise perfect album**

The Beatles undertook a dramatic transformation over their eight years of recorded output, and the most significant changes began to occur at the halfway point of the decade. This new page turned at a time when the Liverpool lads were increasingly interested in Indian teachings and a pursuit of spiritual enlightenment outside of hallucinogenic drugs.

When they finally visited the country as a group in 1968, the famed odyssey in India was underpinned by the mentorship of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who taught them the powers of Hindu beliefs and the benefits of transcendental meditation. When The Beatles returned to the UK, they brought with them a wave of Indian influence to western culture that became increasingly enveloped in the burgeoning psychedelic rock scene.

With 1965's Rubber Soul, The Beatles seemed to be pointing in a new direction and oozed with the influence of Bob Dylan, their rival across the Atlantic. The language of verse had departed that of love and welcomed a richer vocabulary with avant-garde stylings. In fact, Dylan himself saw so much of his own pioneering style in the album's second track, 'Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)', that he took issue with it.

Referring to the Rubber Soul cut in an interview shortly after its release, Dylan opined with a palpable tone of asperity: **"What is this? It's me, Bob. [John's] doing me! Even Sonny and Cher are doing me, but, fucking hell, I invented it."** Dylan later hid his retaliation within the 1966 parody track '4th Time Around', which famously took aim at Lennon with the lyrics: "I never asked for your crutch / Now don't ask for mine".

'Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)' was also notable for its inclusion of sitar courtesy of George Harrison. It marked one of the earliest examples of Indian instrumentation in western music. Harrison had never set foot in the country at the time of recording, but all that would change in 1966 when he visited on holiday with Pattie Boyd, and he became totally enamoured with the culture.

Following the triumph of Rubber Soul, The Beatles hit the studio with Harrison's influence of India in one ear and the psychedelic, countercultural outcry of the hippie movement in the other. Where Rubber Soul turned a corner, 1966's Revolver took a giant leap.

Considered by many as The Beatles' finest album, Revolver was home to a selection of truly absorbing and progressive tracks, from Harrison's anti-establishment opener, 'Taxman', to the mind-blowing sitar and tape loop-laden 'Tomorrow Never Knows'. In the thick of the album, we stumble across the mighty 'Eleanor Rigby' with its strange, morose tale of loneliness, the vibrant 'Good Day Sunshine' and the sublimely slumberous 'I'm Only Sleeping'.

Even oft-forgotten deep cuts like 'Dr. Robert' and 'I Want To Tell You' hold a valid place on the album, but there's a ghost at the feast, a fly in the ointment. Indeed, the rabbit dropping in the otherwise succulent granola that is Revolver, is 'Yellow Submarine'. How Beatles purists can revere 'Yellow Submarine' with such unwavering conviction and then dismiss Ringo Starr's valiant Abbey Road effort, 'Octopus's Garden', with such disdain is beyond me. My only guess is that the former is attributed to the most successful songwriting partnership of all time.

McCartney was the mastermind behind my Revolver sorrows. The genius octogenarian stumbled across the lyrics in a dreamlike state as he was falling asleep one night. The lyrics depict a convivial scene aboard a yellow submersible as the song bounces along with nursery rhyme innocence.

McCartney summed up the puerile ditty back in 1966, "It's a happy place, that's all. You know, it was just… We were trying to write a children's song. That was the basic idea. And there's nothing more to be read into it than there is in the lyrics of any children's song."

I'll concede that, as a children's song, it's up there with some of The Wombles' greatest hits and blows the Noddy theme tune right out of the water, but, for me, it has no tangible business appearing on perhaps the greatest album by the biggest band of all time.

# Early 1966, Sam Castan

Source: *Look*, US magazine, Volume 30, Number 5, 8 March 1966, pages 76, 78-79, 81-82.

The location of this interview is unknown. Daniel Kramer is sometimes cited as co-interviewer but, in the article, he was only credited as the photographer. Photo-captions are shown indented in the following text.

**Folk Rock's Tambourine Man**

Young America's newest sound is "folk rock," a clamor of topical folk music gushing through electric instruments, spread about mostly by a 24-year-old poet-songwriter named Bob Dylan. Before his *Mr. Tambourine Man*, *Subterranean Homesick Blues* and *Like a Rolling Stone* had hit the top of the lists, Dylan was already the center of a growing cult. Now that folk rock is in, and despite all his imitators, Dylan is unchallenged as the teen-and-college crowd's Absolute Hipster, their own "hung up" idol, the singing annalist of a jingle-jangle reality that makes more sense to them than any square, whitewashed American Dream.

His guitar crashes, his words tingle, and the gifted young man at left is being hailed as the most important pop-music personality of the sixties.

His new style shook up the purists, and started a new movement

Last year, Bob Dylan showed up for a folk concert backed by drums and amplified electronic accompaniment, and the audience stirred in bewilderment. When a writhing mass of electrical cable was hauled onstage, some of his earliest fans hooted. Most no longer hoot or are no longer heard. The fact is, Dylan has changed his style many times, bringing an increasingly larger segment of pop- and folk-music fans along with him each time. **"It's all music,"** he says. **"No more, no less. I couldn't go on singing *With God on Our Side* forever."** Such is the growth process of almost any artist; yet, as he now barely manages to carry his stinging lyrics over the din, many older fans bemoan the passing of early Dylan. They recall his sad, rock-earth ballads in a Woody Guthrie vein, accompanied only by his own country guitar and the sweetly-mournful wail of his mouth organ. That was the Dylan who wrote and sang *Girl of the North Country*, a song with the Elizabethan air of the Appalachian mountain country. And the Dylan singing of the struggles of a young folk singer in New York, when the Greenwich Village coffeehouse owner tells him to get away from that stage because he sings like a hillbilly, and it's folk singers who are wanted up there. That was the younger, purer, poorer, gone Dylan.

Even those who didn't take him seriously during his early stages now turn out to hear the Dylan sound. Here, an all-star audience at Forest Hills Stadium (including Sybil Burton Christopher, at extreme left) swings with Dylan singing *Positively 4th Street*, an acid outpouring of fake friendship.

A rub-a-dub-dub, and two hands in the scrub are balm in Gilead for the Hibbing, Minn., hotshot during a work stoppage.

**"You learn a lot about a town just by hanging around the pool hall,"** says Dylan, to prove that most of his songs come out of the knockabout life he took up in admiration of Guthrie, Leadbelly, Pete Seeger and other folk greats.

The Top Twenty reads like a Dylan Anthology

Inevitably, Bob Dylan's striking success has spawned imitators. Pop artists like the Byrds, the Turtles, Sonny and Cher, Donovan, even the Beatles (*Hey! You've got to hide your love A-way*), have all hit high on the money lists by forcing strong Dylanesque qualities into their numbers. A typical week on the pop parade shows the Top Twenty heavily weighted with Dylan material, and smart theatrical agents in this country and abroad are telling their singers to "get with the Dylan sound, sweetheart." Music appreciators a shade older than the current pop audience may recognise this sound as remarkably similar to that of Bill Haley and His Comets, of a decade ago. Others, before and since, have combined Negro blues and hillbilly twangs, but Dylan's own lyrics turn the blended form into something else again. His words run deep, are scary in their currency. Most of all, they resonate with the things young people feel today, as in his warning to parents that, "Your old road is / Rapidly agin' / Please get out of the new one / if you can't lend your hand / For the times they are a-changin'."

Like his fans, he was too young for hard times, so he made his "own depression"

Don't put down Bob Dylan's appearance or the hip manner of speech he uses. They overlie a clever, perceptive young man, and are, in any case, calculated ploys in the game that has made him a millionaire at 24. To young fans, the scruffy hair, wrinkled shirt and faded jeans means that he is one of their own. He's SUFFERED, man. He's hip to SHADES, BIKES, CIVIL RIGHTS, man, and Vietnam and squares who guard

their fallout shelters with shotguns. Dig his great put down while improvising during a studio recording session. He allowed he was a liberal, but not to the extent that "I'll let Barry Goldwater move in next door and marry my daughter."

Dylan says little about his early life. He admits to having grown up in Hibbing, Minn., but for reasons of his own will not admit that his real name was Bobby Zimmerman until he changed it legally to Dylan in 1962. Of his childhood, he wrote in *My Life in a Stolen Minute*, "I ran away when I was 10, 12, 13, 15, 15½, 17 an' 18. I been caught an' brought back all but once." Dylan spent one semester at the University of Minnesota and flunked out of science for "refusin' to watch a rabbit die." Beyond that, all he wants known is that he spent his late teens bumming around the country. "I made my own depression," he says. "Rode freight trains for kicks, got beat up for laughs, cut grass for quarters, met a waitress who picked me up and dropped me off in Washington." It's a good story the way he tells it.

Thumbing his way East, Dylan visited the hospital where his musical idol, Woody Guthrie, lay incurably ill. He began playing the songs he had written on the road in Greenwich Village joints and finally got a spot at Gerde's Folk City. He was good. A write-up in the New York *Times* led to a contract with Columbia Records. His first album started the cult.

Dylan works infrequently now, partly to keep his income in the lowest tax bracket possible, and partly to allow himself time for writing. "He really is a poet, you know, not a folk singer," says Alan Lomax, the folklorist. "I think that if he's given time, he'll go down as a great poet of his time,… unless he kills himself first."

Friends who have seen him tear around on a motorcycle worry about that. Meanwhile, Dylan is a show-business personality riding on top and enjoying it. He's occasionally to be seen in Greenwich Village, spends as much time at his New York office as strikes his fancy, cuts records at Columbia when the mood hits him and retires frequently to the upstate New York home of his manager, where he writes, shoots home movies or throws rocks at a can.

As a poet and musician, Dylan has only one principle: **"I define nothing. Not beauty, not patriotism. I take each thing as it is, without prior rules about what it should be."** That, finally, may be why today's kids dig him.

Recording a Bob Dylan Dream, he cracks up at one of his own lines. The *Dream* songs are Dylan at his lyric best, combining surrealistic images with the modern insanities we all have to live with.

# Before April 1966, Unknown Interviewer (quoted in Teen Scrapbook)

Source: quoted in *Teen Scrapbook*, US magazine, April 1966, pages 23-24.

The location of this interview is unknown. Possibly a quote from an earlier, unidentified interview 'no so long ago'.

**The Girl He Trusts To Share His Dream**

"Every young man must have someone to share his dreams, someone who shares his vision of the world," a poet once wrote.

But what if a young man is a wanderer, a leaf blown by the wind, who is there to share his dreams? Who is there to understand his vision of the world? Who can the wanderer turn to?

For years such questions have haunted Bob Dylan. On lonely highways in the night they arise to torment him as he waits for a hitch from a passing car. They are with him as he sits alone in skid row bars and Greenwich Village coffee houses in the small hours of the morning.

In the world through which Bob moves there is little room for trust, much less the sharing of dreams. It is a world of vagabonds and stoned street hustlers – the world of "Desolation Row." And, as in the jungle, one must be sharp, quick, and mean to survive in it.

Bob is the poet of this world – the one who gives form, substance, and meaning to its violence and misery. He allows us to glimpse through his music what it is really like to be out on the street on your own with nothing to fall back on. Yet, we cannot share his dreams or his vision of what the world could be like.

There is only one person in the world Bob Dylan trusts enough to share his dreams and deepest emotions – a darkly beautiful girl named Joan Baez.

Like Bob, Joan has voluntarily abandoned the deadening security and hypocrisy of the "supposedly" adult world to lead her own life on her own terms. Although she could make several million dollars a year as a commercial folk singer, she refuses to sing material which she considers junk and limits her appearances to places where she knows her music will be appreciated. Out of loyalty to her friend Pete Seeger, she refuses to appear on any big name television music show until they lift the ban that bars him from performing because of his political beliefs. And, as a pacifist, she risks going to jail by refusing to pay 60 per cent of her income tax because that is the proportion spent by the government on armaments.

While Joan is a rebel against society like Bob, on the surface she does not appear like the type of girl he would choose to share his deepest emotions. Unlike him, she withdraws from the harder and more cruel aspects of life. She has little or nothing to do with the bizarre collections beatniks, hustlers, and motorcycle riders who he hangs with. And she avoids the city, which is the source of his inspiration, as if it were the source of evil.

Yet, it is Joan who Bob turns to, and she who many people say he loves. Often he will travel thousands of miles just to be with her for a few short hours. And when they are together, one senses that he is a completely different person than usual.

In Joan Bob seems to find the gentleness that is necessary for the creation of beauty. The hardness and bitterness that is part of him gives way and the soft, fun side of him takes over.

Together they will spend hours just doing fun things – listening to old records of the Everly Brothers and Bob's hero, Woody Guthrie, reading poetry to each other, playacting that they're the heroes of old comic books they remember from their childhoods, and walking along the rocky coastline near Joan's house in Big Sur, California.

When Bob comes to Big Sur, he is always laden down with a wierd [*sic*] and exotic collection of gifts. Not expensive things, but the kind of small, funny gifts you give to a person you love because you know they will take pleasure in them. For instance, on Christmas he brought her a strangely shaped green rock he had found while hitching through Colorado, a brightly colored African scarf, an old Duncan yo-yo, an autoharp he had swapped from a woman in Maine, a sea shell he had picked up on the beach at Coney Island, a pogo stick, three Batman comics, a copy of Garcia Lorca's Gypsy Ballads, a record of Blind Lemon Jefferson singing Bed-bug Blues, an old chewing tobacco tin to keep buttons in, a coon skin cap, and two boxes or dried sunflower seeds. He also composed a special song for the occasion called *I Hate Christmas, But I Love Halloween*.

Many girls, or course, would reject anyone who gave them such a wierd [*sic*] collection of gifts. But not Joan. She understands that Bob spends more time and care in finding the right sea shell on a beach to give her than

if be were to bring her diamonds from Tiffany's. Therefore, she receives them with love, because she knows they are an extension of Bob and not just material things with which he has no involvement.

Basically, this is why Bob trusts Joan to share his dreams and deepest emotions. He knows that she appreciates his feelings and will not try to put him on or put him down. And he knows that in receiving something from him Joan Is also giving him something of herself in return.

Theirs is a mutual relationship. Unlike so many people who fool themselves into believing they are in love, Bob and Joan do not base their relationship on one partner doing all the taking and the other all the giving. Rather, each gives and receives equally.

Not so long ago Bob had something to say about his feelings about Joan: **"She gave me this book once called I And Thou. It was by a Jewish philosopher named Martin Buber. Well, in one place he describes how you can look at a tree or a stone sometimes and feel that that tree or stone is part of you and you're part or it. That's, I guess, the way I feel about Joanie sometimes. It's a good feeling."**

Strangely, however, neither Bob or Joan will say they are in love with each other.

"Love is not a word you can use lightly, unless you want it to lose all meaning," Joan says. "That's part of the problem with the world; people use words carelessly without thinking what they really should mean.

"Bob is my friend, which implies something different from and the same as love. That may sound contradictory, but it isn't when you really think about it."

Although they deny it, it is difficult to believe that Bob and Joan are not really in love, however. For what else is love, if it is not the coming together of two young people who trust each other enough to share their dreams?

# Before 10 April 1966, Unknown Interviewer (quoted in Sydney Telegraph)

Source: reported in *Sydney Telegraph*, Australian newspaper, 10 April 1966.

The origin of some of the quotes in this article is unknown. It's at least possible that some of the comments were made to the author of the article Leslie Wilson. It should be noted that this article was published before Dylan arrived in Australia in 1966.

**Scruffy but fluent poet with a guitar**

Bob Dylan, America's "poet with a guitar," once said of his hometown, Hibbing, in Minnesota: **"There weren't no need for that town to die. It was a perfectly valid town."**

So he put pen to paper and sang a song about a town like Hibbing tilted *North Country Blues* – a mother's lament.

It didn't make a mark in the charts, but Dylan had registered his protest about the decay of the once-prosperous mining town where his folks still live.

In fact, Dylan has been protesting about something or other ever since he ran away from home at the age of 10. He covered 900 miles before police caught up with him, put him on a train and returned him to his parents.

On Tuesday he is to reach Sydney with an entourage of 11 "handlers."

He is still protesting, but today he fills the pockets of his scruffy jeans with the proceeds, some say to such an extent that he is almost a millionaire.

Dylan will give two concerts here and appear on Thursday's Tonight Show on TCN9.

To millions of youngsters in America and Europe – and a growing number in Australia – Dylan is the voice of the tearaway and the under-privileged.

His real name is Robert Zimmerman and at 24 he has been hailed as America's "Public Writer No. 1," a "kind of 20th-century Homer," the "most widely imitated singer-guitarist-songwriter in the world," a "ragamuffin minstrel" and at one stage when he changed his style a "trator" [*sic*] by his own followers.

Natural "ear"

Dylan – who took his name from an idol, the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, in 1962 – early found that he had a good ear for music and by the age of [unreadable] could twang the guitar and knock out a tune on the harmonica.

He ran away again two years later and five times after that. He was "walloped good" each time; but when he was 18 he ran away for good.

By that time he had learned to play the autoharp, was a polished "harmonicat," had written a ballad dedicated to Brigitte Bardot, and managed to fit in a secondary school education.

Dylan in 1960 entered the University of Minnesota on a scholarship, and "dropped out" after refusing to watch a rabbit die in his science class.

He tried all sorts of jobs and told stories to anyone who would listen and buy [unreadable] ill idol, Woody Guthrie, famed folk-singer of the '30s. Dylan still claims Guthrie had a profound influence on his later writing.

Dylan, the nomad, slept in subway stations and haunted the coffee houses of Greenwich Village, singing and playing for coins passersby dropped in the community collection boxes.

With other folk singers he got himself small jobs in Greenwich Village clubs – his first netted only two dollars a night, but a newspaper critic wrote: "This artist is one of the most distinctive stylists to play Manhattan cabaret for months." Dylan was on the way.

Some folk enthusiasts, used to the simple and uncomplicated, are confused by Dylan's songs. But he claims folk songs have always been difficult to comprehend.

"Weird, man!"

**"It's never been simple,"** he insisted in one of the rare times he has spoken to a writer. "**It's weird, man, full of legend, myth, bible and ghosts. And – yeah chaos, water melons, clocks – everything, man."**

The use of the "in-out-in again" slang is typical of Dylan, for he is very much the motor-cycle hipster. This surface, say those closest to him, masks an extraordinarily intelligent, sensitive, concerned and surprisingly well-read young man.

Dylan is big business. In outdoor concerts the crowds he pulls compare favorably with those of Frank Sinatra and Barbara Streisand.

In Sydney six of 10 people I questioned had never heard of him. One young lady thought he was the star of the TV western *Gunsmoke*.

On his two trips to Europe he received a mixed reception from the critics. One frustrated London interviewer could not understand his hip talk. However, he has received accolades from The Beatles for his work.

Not long ago I visited "Dylan headquarters" in New York to confirm a report that he had secretly married a Sara Shirley Lounds, of up-state New York.

Flunkeys and assistants denied such a thing. His manager, Albert Grossman, who allegedly had been a witness at the ceremony, said it was a lot of rubbish, and Dylan refused to talk about his private life to anyone.

The reason for silence may have something to do with a recent article in an American magazine which quoted Dylan as saying: **"I want my woman dirty-looking, as though I'd just found her in some dark alley. Dirt is very attractive. It triggers the animal emotion.**

**"I want dirty long hair hanging all over the place. I hate cleansing and astringent lotions because those antiseptic smells revolt me. I hate girls who like Rock Hudson."**

Unlike most entertainers Dylan shuns personal publicity. He rarely has a crowd to meet him at airports, because his arrival times are not always made public. He dislikes Press interviews.

Dylan was shouted down as a "traitor" at a jazz festival last year when he introduced something he called "folk-rock" – folk songs sung to a big-beat background.

This, his purist followers decided, was the worst sort of heresy. But Dylan was not moved by their outburst. He drawled: **"It's all music, man. No more, no less."**

# 12 April 1966, Sydney Hotel Press Conference

Source: reported in *The Australian*, Australian newspaper, 13 April 1966, facsimile in: *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, page 31.

This press conference was conducted at the Town House Hotel, King's Cross, Sydney, Australia.

**Bob Dylan's many hates come to town**

Bob Dylan, the American protest folk-singer, arrived in Sydney yesterday with a protest about Australia.

**"It's not a very nice place,"** he said, at his King's Cross hotel.

**"It's about the same size as America, but there are only 11 million people.**

**"There must be something wrong… the Negroes, the Orientals."**

Dylan, pictured above on his arrival, gave two Press conferences.

**"How do you describe me?"** he said at his second Press conference. **"Write what you like. I am a tree surgeon."**

Dylan was emphatic that he was not a popular hero: he was not a protest singer: he was not against war: his songs were not against war, and he was not a poet.

He denied he was a supporter of Negro equality.

**"I'm not pro-Negro. I'm not anti-Negro."**

Dylan said American pressmen thought of him as beautiful, loving, charming and clean. **"I'm only obscene when I get mad,"** he said.

And a final word why he did not like Australia: **"You don't play baseball."**

# 12-14 Apr 1966, Dale Plummer

Source: *The Sun-Herald*, Australian newspaper (Sydney), 17 April 1966, page 93. Facsimile in *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, page 31.

The interview took place in Sydney, Australia.

**Dylan: not here to win hearts**

Those close to him are sure Bob Dylan is intelligent, sensitive, concerned and well read.

He didn't look like that when I met him.

With one half of his mind on the questions being asked him and the other half on the children's shows on TV, Dylan conversed in a series of grunts, huhs, slurred sentences and long silences.

Only occasionally did he emerge from his boredom and show some animation.

One of these occasions was when he felt someone was **"getting at him."**

**"If you're trying to make me look silly, you're not being honest,"** he snapped.

But Dylan wasn't out to win any hearts. He came here to do two Stadium shows and that was it.

He's been touring since September and when he slows down he has no special place to go. His mother is in Minnesota, where Dylan was born 25 years ago. His father is in Texas.

He spent most of his first 18 years in the small Minnesota mining town of Hibbing. His name then was Robert Zimmerman.

By the age of 15 Dylan had taught himself to play the guitar, autoharp, piano and harmonica and had become "hooked" on singing folksongs.

After graduating from high school he struck out on a hitch-hiking career as an itinerant folksinger and made his New York debut in early 1961.

He had tremendous success, bowling over people like Pete Seeger and Joan Baez.

His first album, recorded about the same time, enjoyed tremendous sales and after the success of "Blowin' in the Wind" in 1962 Dylan was well and truly in.

As he's known for his "protest" songs, perhaps he takes part in civil rights marches?

This idea was dismissed very rapidly. **"It's very fashionable to participate in the civil rights movement,"** he said, accenting the word "fashionable."

Then: **"I don't want to hear no more about Negros."**

He enjoys the adulation he receives as the cult hero of the "folkies" but **"I'm not my own hero,"** he explained. **"I'm just like anybody else."**

Unlike anybody else he shows no visible signs of his affluence. It's estimated he must be a near-millionaire and he employs people just to look after his money.

He claims he doesn't know anything about the hows, whys and wherefors of his finances. The money certainly doesn't go into palatial mansions, flashy cars, exotic holidays or expensive women.

It does allow him freedom of movement and it's for this one reason that Dylan could grow rather fond of it.

Unfortunately, it doesn't allow him freedom from the Press, a collection of people he doesn't like because **"they misquote me."**

He might have been thinking of us when he wrote a savage number called "Positively 4th Street." –

*I wish that for just one time*
*You could stand inside my shoes*
*And just for that one moment*
*I could be you.*
*Yes I wish that for just one time*
*You could stand inside my shoes*
*You'd know what a drag it is*
*To see you.*

# 15 April 1966, Brisbane Press Conference

Source: reported in an article by Erica Parker in: *Brisbane Telegraph*, 15 April 1966. The text reproduced here is from *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, pages 51-52.

This press conference was conducted at Brisbane Airport, Australia.

**No fanfare to greet folk singer**

If you fancy the ultimate in beat garb, fingernails like talons and a curly girlie hairdo on a grown man, then Mr. Bob Dylan should be your idea of The Most.

American-born, 24, and around 5ft 2in, he arrived at Brisbane Airport today wearing ankle-swathing fawn kid boots, grey chalk-striped skinny pants, a black-and-white striped pullover and a black corduroy velvet jacket.

On the way across the tarmac with other members of the party, he ducked his golliwog-like frizz of 10-inch hair in a mock effort to dodge the camera.

He pushed others ahead of him into the airport lounge – but he need not have bothered. There was no fanfare, no autograph-hunting fans.

In the VIP lounge which had been reserved for him to meet press, TV and radio interviewers, the skinny young man who has described himself as the Voice of the True Lost Generation answered questions in a soft, husky voice.

He described himself as a folk-message singer. His songs, he said, had a message but he couldn't say what that message was – people might be offended. He dressed as he did because an artist must have a gimmick and, anyway, he liked looking like that.

Australia? It was fine. Australians? They were fine.

And Bob Dylan went off into a gale of giggling behind a hand graced by a flashing turquoise and gold ring…

# 23 April 1966, Rosemary Gerette

Source: *The Canberra Times*, Australian newspaper, 7 May 1966. The text reproduced here is from *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, pages 82-83.

The interview took place in Riverside Lodge Hotel, Perth, Australia.

**Dylan – Man in a Mask**

I sat for six hours while Dylan played me his music, a pile of unreleased acetate cuttings, which he carries around with him. **"Like, I've been living music for ever."** But the words seemed to mean more to him than the music because he made me ask at once if I missed a word or its meaning. And although I can forget what somebody said to me yesterday, he knew every word through something like 40 songs.

He loved those songs. And to me it was six hours of throbbing poetry.

Critics here accused him of an unprofessional manner. On stage he didn't seem to be trying. Yet he asked me eagerly what I thought of his concert, did it go well? An afterthought then: **"Like, I don't usually ask people that."**

He cared.

* * *

I sat up with the group until dawn. After four days in Perth [sic] they were leaving for Stockholm for concerts. They were trying to get tired so they could sleep through the 27 hour flight and I was able to listen to a composing session. Countless cups of tea; none of the group drinks. Thing happened, and six new songs were born.

The poetry seemed already to have been written. Dylan says **"picture one of these cats with a horn, coming over the hill at daybreak. Very Elizabethan, you dig? Wearing garters."** And out of the imagery, he and the lead guitarist work on a tune and Dylan's leg beats time with the rhythm, continuously, even when the rhythm is in his own mind.

Six a.m. and he asks am I tired?

Later he plays a melody to us, a very special one. **"I'll never have it published, recorded. I wrote it for this way-out moon chick. We just sat on the floor on these mattresses… and like for two hours I spoke to her with my guitar. And she understood. She'd just say yes, or no, or yes. And I never spoke a word, you dig? Only of course, this isn't quite like I played it, because it meant something to me at the time, but now it doesn't."** It was beautiful, I thought.

Later he spoke of obscurity, of the going down, when the good times will be over.

**"People don't value their obscurity. They don't know what it's like to have it taken away. Not to be able to walk down the street or sit in the park or dare to go out of your hotel room. The money I've made means only that when I'm off this kick I'll be able to protect myself, because I know cats who'll want to tear me to pieces and I'll have to kill myself. And I don't want to do this."**

Dylan on materialism: how he spent a weekend at John Lennon's 21-room house in London; how he went back to the States and bought himself a 21-room house just to see how it felt.

Last year he gave away $4,000 to a friend who was down. Yet he says he never has given a present, just a little present, to anybody, and that nobody has given him one either.

Dylan on Paul McCartney: **"Like, man, he's a great actor, interested in everything. He writes most of the Beatles' songs."**

On fans: **"It's an insult to call anyone a fan."**

At 7am he reads us pieces from the book he is writing. It was unintelligible, avant-garde, like the backs of his record covers. The boys all thought it was really groovy. I couldn't see why. Then there was talk about the film he is going to make – about himself. Dylan the egotist – yet everyone is silent when he speaks. Early in the piece he said to me: **"I could tell you about Allen Ginsberg, Jean Genet, but I don't know what sort of a reporter you are, and they're my friends. Anyway, Genet wrote all his stuff thirty years ago, and now all he does is make a few bad movies… and man, anyone can do that."** Unexplainable contradiction.

Books were strewn around the room. The poetry of Baudelaire, Durrell, Australian Poetry 1965, Mackaness' *The Wide Brown Land*, a couple of newer-type Australian 'magazines', the inevitable *Newsweek* (Dylan story

inside, of course). He keeps a very close eye on publicity about himself. He told me a story printed during his visit was three years old.

A phone call comes from Melbourne and he gives instructions to a Sydney journalist whom he wants to get to America because he likes him.

A telegram arrived from someone who says: “Dylan, be free always”. Free? No. It seems the pressure of his own mind is a force which has harnessed his so-called freedom completely, and that it must paradoxically bring about his destruction.

He asks me to describe him in one word. I cannot. **“That’s groovy,”** he tells me.

# 17-19 April 1966, Adrian Rawlins

Source: *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, pages 57-65.

The interview took place in Melbourne, Australia.

**Adrian Rawlins**

On April 17th 1966, Adrian Rawlins had gone down to the airport at Melbourne for Dylan's arrival there:

> I went along… loudly attired in a polka dot shirt, mustard yellow tie and a borrowed corduroy jacket. I didn't really look like a mod. I'm a teensy bit old for that. My intention was to send myself up, thereby revealing myself as a fellow of infinite profundity. Secretly I hoped to amuse Dylan thereby. I didn't. But I did succeed in embarrassing a nasty-tempered official.

Rawlins attended the press conference, and was stunned by what he saw and heard – ignorant press vultures and a witty and wise Bob Dylan who made no sense to those who had supposedly come to hear what he had to say:

> Questions, questions, breathless questions. Questions needing no asking: the answers were self-evident; or questions that sprang from assumptions, ignoring what was self-evident. If they asked an answerable question, he replied with beauty, graciousness and a flamenco's wit. He turned insults into harmless jokes. They didn't laugh; they ignored his answers. It was finally obvious that all they wanted was some sort of easy sound. The truth didn't enter into it.
>
> While the uncommunication continued, I turned my attention to the members of Dylan's band… My attention became rivetted [*sic*] on one man, whose face was gentle, peaceful, gracious and who, at times, showed the slightest signs of annoyance at the decidedly ungroovy trend of the interview. He finally seated himself away from the main crowd. I sat beside him, offered him a cigarette, which he graciously accepted, told him who I was and asked if I could speak with the leader of the band. I had instinctively chosen the right man. He introduced himself to me as Robbie Robertson and asked me to ring him at the hotel later in the afternoon. By this time the management were clearing people out.

Before he left, Rawlins gave a copy of his poem-article to Albert Grossman, who said he would show the piece to Dylan. A couple of hours later, Rawlins phoned Robertson at the hotel. Robertson was apparently pleased to hear from him. He asked Rawlins if he had written the 'little article about Bob':

> "Did you really write that stuff?" he said' "Oh… er, yeah," ! said, because we were all a bit paranoid about everything in those days. "Well," said Robbie, "we all read it and let me tell you we never expected to see anything like that in Australia."

Robbie invited Rawlins to come to the hotel the following lunchtime. They met in the hotel lounge:

> When I arrived he was sitting with two other members of the retinue, whom he introduced as Ricky Danko, the bass guitar player, and Victor, who turned out to be the waterboy and stage-hand… Robbie told me a little about the band – our interview was not too formal – they felt like clowning and I enjoyed their sense of humour.

Soon would come Rawlins' first close encounter:

> After we had been talking and clowning for half an hour or so, Bob Dylan and Albert came in from the street. Albert went straight upstairs. Bob came over and spoke with Robbie. After a little, Robbie introduced me to Bob. I was nervous, because Bob's manner was a shade apprehensive.
>
> **"Hi!"** he said, **"that's a nice shirt you're wearing. Where'd you buy it? In Sydney?"**
>
> (I had anticipated an opening of this sort – the exchange of formal though seriously-meant courtesies of this nature is a charming trait among American musicians – and had worn a nice small plaid green shirt with my brown pin-stripe suit.) However, the abruptness of the question threw me. I fumbled my answer:
>
> "N-no," I said, "in Melbourne. I think the name of the store is… Foy's. It's… er… on the corner of Bourke and Swanston Streets."
>
> **"Uh-huh,"** said Bob, and turned his attention elsewhere.

Dylan, however, suddenly thought of a way to spend the afternoon. He wanted to drive around Melbourne and look at the slums.

**“Where is that place?”** he asked no-one in particular. **“Fitzroyal?”**

“Fitzroy,” I said quietly. Robbie smiled.

**“Oh yeah?”** said Bob, **“that's right. Is that far from here?”**

“About a mile,” I replied.

We all got up and stood vaguely around the lobby. There were rather more people than the cab could accommodate, and no-one wanted to tell people not to come. Finally it was decided that we would not call another cab and Bob, Robbie, Victor and Richard, the sound-man, would take the ride, with myself acting as a sort of Arab guide.

The cabbie was a large, burly, jovial man, of good humour and a willing disposition. He had a pair of long leather gloves, which Bob dug, and was only too happy to let the singer wear them throughout the journey. As it so happened, he had been born in Fitroy and knew the place backwards.

We went down a small street running off Gertrude street and passed small, neat houses, some a little grubby, but none very ramshackle. Most had next to no yard space. In the doorways of a few I noticed women whose broad noses and olive skin told me they were half or quarter-caste Aborigines.

**“Half-caste,”** said Bob, with the slightest note of scorn in his voice, **“that's a word Alfred Hitchcock used about thirty years ago.”**

No-one else said anything.

After a short pause Robbie spoke.

“Are there Spades here? Is there a Spade sector?”

This took Bob’s interest and he began asking questions eagerly, almost fiercely: were the Aboriginals like Spades? Were they groovy? What sort of a scene did they have?

I answered that they were a pretty depressed people, more like the American Indian than the Negro, that when the land had been taken from them, their culture was destroyed and they became more or less derelict.

He bit his lip at this and obviously thought his own thoughts.

We cruised around a few more streets. All the boys were surprised at the lack of what they thought of as real slum conditions.

**“I guess everyone has something in this country; they mightn’t have it all but it looks like not many people got nothin’,”** Bob said, almost to himself.

We drove along a narrow main street, with small stone and brick cottages, some of which would have been built in the sixties and seventies of last century. I mentioned this fact. It was received thoughtfully but without comment. Then we saw a line of very young schoolchildren, aged, at a guess, between five and eight, a long double column, a variety of faces and hair colours, some holding hands, some quiet, others animated, all ignoring the teacher up front. This sight pleased Bob more than anything else.

**“Are these kids Australian?”** he asked, scanning the variety.

The cabbie and myself answered more or less at once and, with pauses while the other spoke, managed to communicate that many of them were the children of recently arrived migrants, mainly from Southern Europe.

This too pleased Bob. He leaned out of the back window the better to observe.

**“Yeah,”** he said as he settled himself again, **“I bet they speak maybe two, three languages eh?”**

The houses still impressed the other boys. “Look’t that one,” said Richard, pointing to a neat terrace house built about 1880. “That looks just like the house I live in in New York.”

Bob liked some of the more attractive terraces, particularly the ones with cast iron. Also significant, I think, is the fact that Fitzroy is one of the few areas in Melbourne which has brownstone houses that must be similar to the brownstone houses around Greenwich Village.

**“Are you sure that this is the worst district?”** Bob asked the cabbie.

The man, almost happy, replied in the affirmative, then added, “It has the worst crime record; all the bad boys came from here, and this used to be the place for brothels and dives.”

**“Oh?”** said Bob. His tone was both mocking and genuinely interested.

I hastily explained that the dives, and possibly much of the district, had been ‘cleaned-up’ recently and added a few words about the restrictive and moralistic tones of our civic authorities then, as an afterthought, mentioned that in its heyday the place would have looked quite a bit like New Orleans, with its cast iron balconies.

Bob said **"um"** in a way which indicated he had realised that there was a jocular intention in what I'd said, as well as an informative. He didn't bother to laugh though.

Our tour was becoming a little pointless by this stage and Victor, expressing the note of boredom that everyone felt, said, apropos of nothing, "Hey, how would you like to play pinball? Yeah, a Gottlieb pinball machine would be a gas."

I'm sure he said this to bring a laugh from the others, which it did – well, a smile at least, the delight of fond remembrance perhaps. And I think I surprised him when I said, "I know where there is one!"

**"No kidding?"** said Bob. **"Yeah, that's a good idea."** Then, an afterthought, he asked: **"Is it far from here?"**

It wasn't, so we agreed to go to the little milk bar where the machine was. On the way we passed the house where, he told us with charming natural pride, the cabbie had been born.

**"Oh, yes,"** said Bob, expressing genuine interest, as he obviously liked the driver.

"Yes," said the man. "It was a private hospital then, later it became a brothel."

"Hey," said Richard, "could we see a brothel? Maybe we could hire one. That'd be groovy."

The cabbie and I reminded him that most had been closed and what there were were not very charming, so that subject was dropped.

The milk bar which houses the pinball machine is in Elgin Street, Carlton. Run by a sweet Polish couple, who have been there a little over a year, it is one of my favourite places. Mrs. Bialilew makes a special milkshake with about six flavours judiciously mixed. I mentioned this.

**"Oh, are they good?"** said Bob.

"You bet," I said.

The large cab pulled up outside the small, old shop, with its sweet but slightly pathetic coat of white paint over the earlier grey, and its small, old-fashioned display windows. It was about three in the afternoon by now, a sunny day, and the car seemed terribly swank compared with the variegated collection of mainly informal characters who lethargically piled out. Only Bob Dylan, in black cord jacket, groovy grey pinstripe slacks, black boots, his magnificent hair and shades, moving with energetic dynamism and an almost dancing grace, looked as though he belonged.

While we dawdled, he strode into the shop, examined the machine, greeting it with joy, almost pirouetted as he whirled around, taking the shop in at a glance, and obviously enjoying its homey – dare I say it – folky charm. He also seemed to like the look of Mr. and Mrs. Bialilew, who had recognised him and seemed just a trifle overawed.

**"Hey,"** he said to them, with a friendly smile, obviously wanting to break down their apprehension and establish cordial relations, **"does Mr. Gottlieb know you have this machine?"** Unfortunately, the joke somewhat bamboozled the shopkeepers, who apologised for not speaking good English.

The others were equally delighted with the machine, and Victor and Richard began to play. Bob noticed a plastic container under which Mrs. Bialilew keeps some hamburgers she makes to an old Polish recipe. He picked up the cover, took a rissole, and took a mouthful.

**"Yeah, it's real good,"** he said to me, took a few more bites and handed the meat to Robbie, who tasted it and then handed it to Victor who took two mouthfuls and handed it to Bob, who took another bite and handed it to me. Richard was playing the machine. Outside the sun was shining, a small crowd of neighbours was gathering. For that matter, somewhere someone was being born, and someone dying and, to complete the truistic picture everything was happening.

Bob remembered the milkshakes and asked for one. "The special," I said to Mrs. Bialilew, over his shoulder. Now Victor was playing the machine. Bob walked around to where some sausages were hanging – Cubana, Hungarian Salami, things like that. He tried some Cubana and liked it, and ordered some to take away, as well as some slices of salami.

The milkshake had been prepared. Victor sampled it, and passed it around. Bob asked for another. Everyone was enjoying himself in his own simple way. As the others had finished their game, Bob played the machine. The highest previous score had been two king-hits. Bob hit three. (The 'genius' light did not flash on, however.)

As we had driven from Fitzroy, Bob had spoken about a girl who had been thrown out of the press conference the day before, and I had said I thought she was a university student. I now suggested, as we were only two minutes from the university, that we drive there. This would enable us to possibly kill… oops, correction, fondle… two birds with the one caress (you will remember that new metaphors are needed these days). We could maybe find the girl and see the campus. Everyone agreed.

I took the front seat again. I thought I might have to pull a bit of a con act – you know, 'Official SRC guests' or something like that – but the driver forestalled me. He simply waved, gave an official, conspiratorial nod to the white-coated Cerberuses at the gate, and in we rolled. Bob was all eyes. He was amazed, even disturbed, at how young everyone looked.

I left the car at what remains of the Union building, raced upstairs to the Farrago office, described the girl as best I could, and asked, breathless, for "a photographer, quick". They hadn't even a slow one. "Well, you're the loser," I said, as compassionately as the shoulder over which I threw the comment would allow. I raced down the stairs.

I waited for a few moments and. the car came slowly along the drive, having gone round the back of the Union, by the Beaurepaire, along the back drive round past the library, the Lawn, Wilson Hall and the Science School. As the cab slowed to pick me up, Bob noticed a sign chalked to a tree which read: 'SAENGER loves trees'. This tickled his fancy.

**"Who's Saenger?"** he asked, not directing his enquiry at anyone, and chuckling quietly.

We drove up Tin Alley to the North Building and turned into the drive that ends in a series of posts – or maybe it was parked cars, I'm not quite sure. Here we paused. Bob kept leaning out of the window asking people, mainly girls who happened to be passing, who Saenger was and did he really LOVE trees? and none of them knew, or hurried away in a state of flap. One girl tried to avoid us and I kept beckoning her over in my most cajolatory manner. I was, may I remind you, sitting at the front left-hand window, Bob at the rear right. At the same time I beckoned, so did he. Perhaps his appearance startled or overawed her, anyway, she came towards my side of the car. Bob wanted her, naturally, to come to his, and leant further and further out, waving over the roof, till he almost climbed right out, laughing the while. The poor girl was quite alarmed, and tried to answer both of us at once. She could only assume that it was some kind of electioneering stunt.

Bob was having a whale of a time clinging to the roof and waving wildly, perhaps he was playing 'the conquering hero returns'. Anyway, he laughed and shouted and waved, and kept doing so as the cabbie backed carefully.

This brought us in line with the Architecture School, and I noticed that the windows were filled with (largely male) faces, waving, gawking, laughing, inviting Bob to come up and talk with them. He continued to wave till it bored him. Someone yelled an insult which stung Bob, and Victor, assuming the role of a youthful dean, leant out and wagged a finger as the offender faded from view.

"Now, now," he said, "don't get fresh."

It was getting late so we headed back to town. Victor felt like playing ball so Bob suggested we buy a basketball. I suggested a sports store in Little Collins Street. Victor and I went in to make the purchase. We returned to find Bob signing autographs for schoolgirls. We drove off and caught a red light at Elizabeth Street. We were mobbed by autograph hunters, most of whom had no writing implement. Naturally, I produced a biro. One young chap produced a matchbox. We sped off and soon disgorged in Spring Street. The cabbie asked for an autograph for his daughter and Bob obliged willingly and charmingly, asking the girl's name. As he got out, the cabbie reminded him about the gloves. He smilingly apologised for forgetting and bade the man farewell most genuinely.

During the trip back to the hotel, Bob, and occasionally one of the others, had passed a comment about the city. All thought Melbourne a better looking place than Sydney. Bob thought Sydney vulgar. All were amused by the number of drivers strapped to their seats. They all liked the trees in the park opposite the hotel.

Bob had an engagement that night, so I saw no more of him. I spent some time with the boys, mainly Robbie, Beak, Ricky Danko and Richard (sic) watching television. 'Go' and 'Kommotion' caused gasps of disbelief. Richard made the observation that if John Hammond Jr. were to come out here to live, he'd be on top of the charts within six months. I didn't like to tell them that it might not work out that way, that tunes and groups got on in Australia for being commercial, rather than by being good…

I left early in the piece, as I had not been able to lift the prevailing despondency as much as I should have liked. I discovered next day that another local took a number of the boys on a tour of the town, the highlight of which was a stay at the Thumpin' Tub till it closed, around three.

I was busy during Tuesday, but Robbie agreed to leave tickets for me at the box, so I could catch the concert. Something went wrong and I had to buy a ticket. I got one in the top price range, but the seat was in the second back row under the balcony and I could scarce hear more than a rumble.

On another occasion, Rawlins was to recall something more of the show – though perhaps imperfectly:

The first half was Bob alone and then when he came back for the second half with The Band about a fifth of the audience stood up, waved placards, screamed he was a traitor to folk, and walked out. A lot of the material was from *Blonde On Blonde* which hadn't been released then, but I remember catching

> some of the images from *Gates of Eden* which impressed me profoundly. Most of the concert actually was over-amplified; the sound was bouncing off the walls and the mix was awful.

After the show, the rendezvous was a disco-club called Pinnochio's:

> I met Bill Avis, the tour manager. He was at a table filled with 16-year-old girls and finally we all ended up back at Bill's hotel room where a guy was rolling huge hash joints. About an hour later Bob Dylan came into the room. His entrances at that time were very choreographed, athletic events. He danced everywhere and couldn't keep still – head moving, feet shuffling.

With Dylan was the girl they had been searching for the day before, at the University, and to Rawlins surprise and delight, Dylan called out to him:

> Amazingly, he said he and Robbie Robertson had been driving around Melbourne looking for me. **"Where have you been, you cunt,"** he said, **"come up and talk."** Then he twirled around and said: **"You, you, you and you can come too."** It was very much a power situation. Whoever Dylan chose felt honoured. The people he didn't choose were downcast but still very overawed. We went up to his suite, ordered cokes and pots of tea and sat there talking from 2.00am till about 7.30 the next morning.

Rawlins had been feeling a little sorry for himself – "a bit depressed by the concert, and embarrassed by not finding the tickets. Now I was simply flabbergasted, knocked out as they say." Not only was Rawlins one of those invited, it seems that he was the one Dylan really wanted to talk to. Another of those present through those hours observed later:

> They were locked into some private world. Nobody could keep up with them. After a while nobody could even keep up listening, the whole thing was that intense. Of course, Adrian was really laying on the bullshit. He was flattering Dylan at every opportunity. But then, everyone around Dylan always was.

So what passed between Bob Dylan and Adrian Rawlins on 19th April 1966? What was Dylan talking about?

> He told me a lot about his college experiments and his childhood experiments in living. I got the feeling that he had, from the age of eight or nine, striven to understand every nuance of human feeling so he could empathise with everyone… gaining an intuitive relationship with people that even on first meeting he could turn a person more fully on to themself (sic), or conversely, rip open the underlying conflicts so forcefully they would metaphorically bleed to death all over the carpet.
>
> I told him I considered him the greatest poet of the twentieth century, because he did it in the marketplace and not some dusty back-room, and he used the full extent of his poetic gifts – he didn't compromise to a mass market.
>
> He was very humble when I said that, and took out the piece I'd written for *The Age*; it was crumpled and tattered, it had been passed through so many hands. He looked at it and said: **"Do you realise, man, this is the first thing that's been written about me. How could you see me this clearly in Australia?"**

Dylan spoke of early days - said that his mother was a Red Indian named Dillon, that Zimmerman wasn't his father, that he'd been a hustler on the streets of New York in 1960 (a yarn spun to Robert Shelton at about the same time), and that what he had done in the beginning in Greenwich Village was 'half fake'. Rawlins commented then, as now, that even if much of this wasn't true, it didn't matter:

> Everyone has the right to change their own reality and I told him that. He grabbed me by the arm and said: **"Allen Ginsberg and you are the only people who understand me."**

They were smoking hash that night, smoking from a piece of silver foil placed over a glass of water. It got everyone incredibly high:

> He picked up his guitar and sang *Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands*, which, in the context, was just so fuckin' cosmic. He said: **"Whaddya think of that?"** and I said "It's a hymn of salvation… it relates to man's primal fear of being born." Dylan liked that; he half-remembered it the next day. In a letter he later sent me, he said: "You speak out of context when you speak of my doings, which is good." I wrote back: "Nothing you do is out of context."

# 28 to 29 April 1966, Carsten Grolin

Source: *Ekstrabladet*, Danish newspaper, 30 April 1966. The text reproduced here is from *The Ghost of Electricity*, edited by John Bauldie, 1988, privately published, pages 98-99.

The interview took place in Hotel Flamingo, Solna, Stockholm, Sweden.

We sit down at the edge of the table. It's dancing night at the Flamingo Hotel and in the bar, hidden in a corner, sits Bob Dylan and his friends – some of the musicians, sound engineers, groupies, his personal manager. **"Let's go upstairs,"** he says. His suite is on the top floor: a living room, a bedroom, a small kitchen. In an armchair, a pile of records in paper sleeves. He plays them one by one. We listen to Bob Dylan singing for an hour, for two hours. When he has played the last one, he turns off the record player.

When he was told that it can sometimes be very difficult to hear or understand what he's singing on the records, he looked very thoughtful and worried. **"I don't really understand it, but a lot of people say that. Maybe they're right, but I can't do anything about it. I don't mix these records you know."**

The room, filled with teacups, sugarbowls, ashtrays, rolls of film, fruitbaskets, people, girls, managers. Dylan talks. Short punchlines keep him going. Chunks of words flow out of his mouth. A stream of consciousness verbalised. We sit there listening to these drunken messages on film, people, New York – mostly film. Messages: a way of testing his creative imagination, a sort of writing. At the same time a way of meeting his need to express himself. The fascination of the free association of ideas.

He won't discuss the subject of protest songs and message songs, and the question of whether he feels he's sold out to commercialism just makes him shrug. **"It's as simple as this: either people understand what I do or they don't."** He doesn't feel any responsibility to his fans. **"I don't see myself as an actor. It's simple enough: I'd still be doing what I'm doing whether people were taking notice of it or not. I'm happier now than in the old days, even though those times were healthier, cleaner times."**

Everyone in the inner circle has long since got used to not contradicting Dylan, or coming up with comments which are out of line. Way past midnight we're still sitting in the room in the Flamingo Hotel, listening to Dylan voicing his thoughts and feelings. The sky's turning grey. It will soon be light.

**"Burning a draft card won't stop the war, won't even save a single life, but if it makes someone feel as if he's acting more honestly, it's OK. If he does it simply to feel more self-important, then it's irrelevant. Then again I shouldn't say too much – I once burned my birth certificate in public."**

The camera crew, filming Dylan for ABC TV, come in with their equipment. It's 3.30 in the morning. They shoot a scene in the bathroom. The water is turned on. We can hear it running as we head towards the elevator. Around 7am Dylan is finally alone. The last person to leave his hotel room sees him take out his typewriter.

# 6 May 1966, Unknown Interviewer (CityWeek)

Source: *CityWeek*, Northern Ireland newspaper, 12 May 1966. A facsimile was printed in *Isis Revisited*, UK fanzine, Nos 16/17, 1987, page 53.

The interview took place in the ABC Theatre, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

**Talking to a 'Modern Myth'**

The door of the drab dressing room was ajar. A fuzzy golliwog in a tight diamond pattern suit stood staring at me with wild wide open eyes. **'What dya want?'** asked Bob Dylan. His lips hadn't moved. The sound seemed to emit from somewhere in the inner regions of the thick dark curls.

Dylan was on the second day of his second European tour. So far he had spoken to nobody except his sound recordist, his road-managers and Victor – his cowboy general factotum. When CityWeek asked for an interview the request was refused. Dylan hates reporters. He won't accept the fact that fame like his makes him a pubic spectacle.

Eventually he invited me inside. This wasn't an interview he emphasised. **'We're jest gonna have a lil' talkie!'**

And lil' talkie we had. Bob Dylan – the modern myth of the Tame West – sat staring at me vacantly. His legs were crossed and his zippered suede boots swung neurotically over the cigarette strewn floor.

Name singers who do ABC concerts usually talk about sex, drink, parties and the girls they've known. Dylan talked guitars and homesickness. He claimed to have no feelings about the tour. All he wanted to do was go home.

He told me of the lousy reception he'd been given in Dublin. The southern Press had slayed him because of his non co-operation. Everybody was criticising his fresh disc 'Rainy Day Numbers 12 and 35,' and the Gresham Hotel mistook his entourage for a band of gipsies!

He strummed his guitar, chewed a mouthful of harmonica and sang one word 'Belfast.'

'That sounds like the start of one of your memorable quotes,' I stuttered.

The genius leaned back and laughed. He hadn't ever smiled up to now.

**'God!'** choked the poet. **'We're straight out of Charles Dickens. You and me both!'**

He talked more freely now. He asked about the border. About Irish folk music and about Belfast in general. Bob poured a cup of black tea and shovelled in a few spoonfuls of honey. He lit a kingsize cigarette. **'Do you ever do any real writing?'** he asked. I replied quickly.

The question was rhetorical. He wanted to let me know that he was writing a lot. 'Prose?' I interrograted (*sic*). **'Yeah!'** he grunted with a wry smile. **'Don't we all?'**

The tour manager came in again. 'Come on!' he urged Dylan. 'Come on!'

Bob Dylan's hand was very limp as he shook goodbye. His eyes were looking at the blank wall.

# June 1966, Earl Leaf

Source: *'Teen*, US magazine, July 1966, page 30. The text reproduced here is from *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 65, Winter 2019, pages 89, 91-92.

This interview was conducted at an unknown location.

**My Fair and Frantic Hollywood**

The Byrds were really shot down when Gene Clark split. The maracas-tambourine-song man had no personal beef with his mates, but he couldn't hack the pace or fly as high as they do. I tooled my 'Stang out to the Strip to hear their opening night at The Trip. Without Gene on the scene, the Byrdies came on neither grotty nor groovy – ah, heck – I'll be frank: they were rank. They dragged through the act like four zombies until even the most dedicated Byrds bird wondered where the action went… (they) slunk away for some dressing room soul searching… Table hopping among the celebrities, I fired of (*sic*) a couple of camera flashes at Bob Dylan, sitting at a far dark booth with cronies. He jumped three feet out of his skin, snatched off his dark shades and cried out: **"Hey, man, whydja take my picture?"**

I told him he's a fascinatin' character to my *'Teen* people.

**"Hey, I'm no different than any other cats in the joint,"** he declared. **"We're all the same."**

"That's pretty freaky," I argued. "No two people are the same. You're nothing like me."

**"How do you know how I am?"** he persisted, **"Can you read my mind? Do you know me so well? Maybe we're more alike than you think?"**

It was the same old Dylan put on. He made room for me next to him, and we argued what personality is and ain't. Then the Grass Roots began blasting salvos of herd rock into the hot smoky air from king-sized amps on the unguarded flanks of the stage. To carry on our dialogue, Dylan had to put his mouth to my face foliage and yell into my earhole, and I hollered into his.

Bob Dylan writes lyrical prose and poetry but speaks a hippy lingo. He sipped coffee from a tall frosted glass and often lifted his lid to scratch his scalp or run fingers through his tangled poodle-hair. Dylan has more nervous mannerisms than a hound has fleas. He also smiles easily and beams from ear to ear at a compliment. He claims to be indifferent to what people write or say about him, but he listened all ears when I repeated some of the Dylan stories and opinions I'd written in these columns.

He took it as praise when I said he had a distorted, deceptive and devious mind that races along on a slippery track. His sense of humor is so far-out an astronaut couldn't catch up. At his December press conference, I reminded him, he mocked or duped his interviewers with wry fabrications and fantasy put-ons, absurd statements which he delivered with a straight face, not even an eye twinkle, making people believe him while he laughed up his sleeve.

**"Yeah, man, that's right! Some of their campy and very personal questions blew my mind,"** he allowed. **"Say, if I laid nine put-ons and one truth on you, could you tell which is which?"**

"Sure, man," I boasted. "I've been alerted to your wavelength."

We hollered into each other's ears about music, poetry, people, freedom, loneliness, faith, honor, ethics and philosophy.

**"Philosophy's only a crock. It's just a belief or theory that some cats are hung up on,"** he declared. **"That intellectual garbage grabbed me when I was 13, but now it shuts me down."**

I would have switched dials, but Bob kept returning to deep-think brain talk like a dawg that can't leave a bone alone.

**"Are you going to write something more about me?"** he suddenly asked. I said sure. **"Well,"** he added, **"The magazines will soon begin to write a lot of rot about me and I have one favour to ask: will you defend me?"**

That was Dylan's final put-on, for at that moment, the Trip broke into a thunderous roar of glad cries, whistles and foot stomps. Bob flipped on his shades to see the distant stage (this made me think his tinted glasses are prescription lensed), and I rushed down front to learn what caused the throng to din. The Byrds had returned for their second set when Gene Clark suddenly emerged from the smoky gloom, jumped on stage, seized the maracas and vibrated his tonsils into the mike… A dramatic moment! We all hope that it meant the return of the prodigal but, alas, it didn't. He played the 45-minute set and vanished back into the gloom whence he came.

# Late February 1969, Jann Wenner

Source: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Number 29, 15 March 1969, page [1].

This interview was conducted by telephone with Dylan in Woodstock, New York.

**'I Can't Remember Where They Come From'**

Bob Dylan has completed his next album and joined Johnny Cash for a duet or two. The recordings were done in the middle of February at the Columbia studios in Nashville, Tennessee, produced by Bob Johnston and using several of the same musicians who played on John Wesley Harding.

**"They are the songs I've been writing over the past year,"** Dylan said in a telephone conversation from his home in upstate New York. **"Some are songs that I've sung and never written down and just sort of turn up again.**

**"I can't remember where they come from. I was just sitting down trying to write some notes on where the songs came from and I couldn't figure it out myself."**

The Dylan record – containing ten or eleven new songs – was done in three mid-February sessions at the Columbia Studios in the Country Music Capitol of the World. In the last nights of Dylan's stay in Nashville (February 17-18), Johnny Cash joined him and together they did about fifteen songs, one or two for possible use on the new album and the rest for a possible joint Cash-Dylan LP. Bob Johnston, who produced Blonde on Blonde and John Wesley Harding is also Cash's producer (did the Folsom Prison LP, among many of Cash's recent recordings) and helped bring the two performers together. It was also a natural outgrowth of the long-time friendship between the two singers.

"You don't produce Dylan or Cash," Johnston said, "they produce themselves." Johnston hopes to record about fifteen more Cash-Dylan duets and take the best of them for an album. In February, they did songs like "I Walk The Line," "Big River," "Careless Love," "One Too Many Mornings," and "Understand Your Man," among others.

Cash and Dylan simply went into the studio and jammed for a while, sang some of Bob's old songs, some of John's old songs, a song they wrote together, did some rehearsed material and now have about three hours of tape if they want to release it as an album.

The new Dylan LP will probably be released before April 1, depending on how smoothly mixing, covers, liner notes and so on go. A Nashville photographer was used to take some shots and those are currently being considered for the cover. **"I've done my part,"** Dylan said, **"and I don't know any more about it."**

Session men on the date included Kenny Buttrey on drums, Charlie McCoy on bass and Pete Drake on steel guitar, all of whom played on John Wesley Harding. Joining them were Norman Blake, a guitar teacher from Chattanooga on rhythm guitar (and dobro on the "Understand Your Man" duet); Charlic Daniels, who played dobro, Fender electric guitar and acoustic gut-string guitar (**"a fine song writer, you'll be hearing a lot about him"**); and Bob Wilson, Wilson, from Detroit and currently a Nshville session-man, on piano (**"you'll be hearing a lot about him too"**).

Some of the song titles are "I Threw It All Away," "One More Night," "Country Pie" ("Anything like 'Honey Pie'?" **"No, wish it was"**) and "Tell Me That It Isn't True."

**"I can't remember too much about how I wrote the new songs. It depends on where I am, what the weather is like and who is around at the time. The music is a little of everything. You'll know what it is when you hear it. I can't remember that much about it. The new songs are easy to sing and there aren't too many words to remember."**

# 1-2 May 1969, Patrick Thomas

Source: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Number 34, 31 May 1969, pages 1, 6.

This interview took place near Ryman Auditorium and, later, at a hotel Nashville, Tennessee.

**Cash and Dylan Tape TV Number in Nashville**

Nashville – As the crowd settled in, T. Thomas Catrer, the master of ceremonies, explained how the show would run and what the applause sign meant and the rest. This was the Johnny Cash Show, they were taping the first segment now, and the part with Bob Dylan would come first. But first for a little warm-up humor, Nashville style.

"If anything strikes you as funny, just laugh," said Tommy Catrer. "We'd appreciate it. Miss Fanny Flagg's here. I think you'll enjoy her."

About that time, Dylan's wife Sarah and their son Jesse took their seats with the wife of Bob Johnston, the Columbia producer who has worked with Cash, Dylan and the Statler Brothers. Johnston is said to be the man who interested Flatt & Scruggs into recording Dylan songs before the team broke up.

Cash came out before the taping began to sing a few numbers for the folks, and he seemed a happy man. He introduced a new number by Vince Matthews he's about to record called "Wrinkled Crinkled Wadded Dollar Bill." The Tennessee Three backs him with Carl Perkins on guitar. His wife June Carter joined him and they did "Jackson." June is a woman who absolutely means to entertain or know the reason why. She's got that hash-house flash and she really drives.

When Cash left, Dylan's band got into the jungle of instruments behind the cameras and warmed up. They are the same group that backed him on Nashville Skyline: Kenny Buttrey, Charley McCoy, Pete Drake, Norman Blake, Charlie Daniels and Bob Wilson.

The show with Dylan as featured guest will be shown June 7 on ABC. The taping took place May 1st at the Grand Ole Opry.

Cash seems determined to bring entertainment to television, a most remarkable innovation in this medium. Besides Dylan, Cash and his wife June Carter, and the Carter Family, the session included Joni Mitchell, the Statler Brothers and a remarkable Cajun fiddler named Doug Kershaw.

But the highlight, of course, was the performance by Dylan. Back in March, Dylan was featured in an NET special on Cash. The segment showed them recording a duet version of Dylan's "One Too Many Mornings," one of his older songs. Apart from this, Dylan has been seen publicly only once since his motorcycle accident in the summer of 1966. He appeared at the Woodie Guthrie benefit in New York over a year ago.

For the Cash Show, Dylan did "I Threw It All Away" from the new album, Nashville Skyline. He also did a new song, "Living the Blues," which will be released as a single on June 8th. Then he and Cash did "Girl From the North Country," also featured on the new album.

The Dylan appearance was no secret in Nashville, fortunately. It goes without saying that Cash fans are as baffled by Dylan's emergence here as Dylan freaks were startled at the news of this new axis. But they all lined up outside the Opry: businessmen and their wives, country boys, bald heads, acid heads, bee-hive bouffant blondes, drawling teenyboppers and other assorted traveling wonderers. There is no doubt that a good part of the audience was there just to see Cash and didn't know what all the fuss was about. But the seats and aisles of the Opry were full, and Dylan did not lack a fine representation of people familiar with his work.

Dylan appeared to a great ovation, tieless, short-haired with his five-day beard, dressed in a stove-pipe suit, looking a little like Charlie Chaplin. His manner was somewhat strained.

He opened with "I Threw It All Away." A shock went through the auditorium because all the amplification was off on the studio speakers and you could barely hear Dylan over Kenny Buttrey's drums. From what we could hear, the takes on all the numbers were up to recording standards. (Reportedly, Dylan did only one or two takes for each cut on Nashville Skyline.)

The second number, "Living the Blues," will be released as a single the day after the Cash show is aired. It's almost an Everly Brothers swing song, and could have easily followed "Peggy Day" on the new album.

Dylan joined Cash in a living room set, where they did "Girl From the North Country." It sounded virtually indistinguishable from the album cut. There was a fine friendliness between the two and if you watch closely, you'll see Dylan slyly driving Cash on the refrain ("… true love of mine…").

When the set was over, Cash said, "It's really fine to have a great man like Bob Dylan on the show." Then he announced that the first take had been fine and that Dylan enjoyed the audience so much that he wanted to do the numbers again for them with amplification.

While they were setting up to run it through again, T. Tommy Catrer came out to say that Dylan "just really doesn't believe who he is." It's true: Dylan was incredibly reserved. He only flashed an occasional smile during the entire performance. But it was a strange audience, though not at all unenthusiastic. As a matter of fact, it was outrightly reverent. Not one word was heard from the crowd despite the fact there was no explanation about the lack of amplification on the first run through. Everybody just leaned forward. Those who knew were glad to have him back.

The amplified set was low-keyed, perhaps a bit cautious, but when Dylan ran through "Girl From the North Country" again with Cash, he seemed considerably looser, if the occasional flash grins he gave are any indication. He ran through the new single a third time after this set and left to hot applause.

(Earlier, Dylan had whispered something in Cash's ear, who then turned to the crowd upstairs and said, "Bob says you're a great audience.")

Cash did his portion of the show next and he played some of his best numbers. He was exuberant about the affair, and it was a very fine performance. He did a medley of "Folsom Prison," "Don't Take Your Guns to Town," "Egg-Sucking Dog," and "It Ain't Me, Babe" as a duet with June Carter. He also did "Orange Blossom Special" in his three-harmonica version.

Later, Cash, Dylan and June Carter went down to the Black Poodle down in Printers' Alley to see Doug Kershaw, the Cajun fiddler who also played on the Cash show. To what must have been Dylan's delight, the attention was primarily on Cash. Joni Mitchell and Graham Nash were there, too. Kershaw really ripped loose on the first set and passed the mike around at the table when he did "Orange Blossom Special."

A little later, Cash and his wife took to the stage with Kershaw backing them on his fiddle. I have never heard happier music. Dylan sat quiet and smiling through the set. The people who happened to be in the club when this began were stunned.

The Nashville Banner ran an "interview" by Red O'Donnell on its front page. It was casual to say the least, but it showed sympathy for Dylan's move to Nashville. The Tennessean ran a feature way back inside with a shot of all the longhairs sitting on the sidewalk outside the Opry House. Its caption ran "Subjects Wait to See Their King." The headline for the story said: Now Monarch At Opry Tabernacle. The writer quoted "one mustached young man from Cincinnati" on his reaction to the show:

"'Hey, he walks like an ordinary person. I came 300 miles to see an ordinary person!' And he laughed."

Another "reaction" was: "He just sounds like a not-so-good hillbilly to me. What's he got?"

The fact is that the current sound he plays is more country & Dylan than country & Western, and Dylan is wise in not attempting to kick his way into the Grand Ole Opry. The one thing that was a constant source of conversation here, probably to too great a degree, was the shyness that he showed among his company.

After the concert, a photographer said to him: "You seemed to be a little nervous tonight, Bob."

**"I was scared to death,"** he said with a smile.

Certainly he seemed a bit strained – not an unusual situation for a man who had given only one public performance in three years. But in my encounters with him, he seemed more reserved than afraid, and it was obvious that this reserve is getting him a good deal of respect in Nashville. They were there first and they know it. So does he.

The day after the concert Dylan came back to his hotel from a recording session with his producer, Bob Johnston. Word had it that he was planning to record an Everly Brothers tune, and sure enough, he had a copy of one of their singles in hand and the sheet music for a song called "Take a Message to Mary." He said that one of the Nashville papers was going to **"get a list of ten things I like."**

"You mean ten songs?"

**"No. Ten things."**

# Early August 1969, Don Short

Source: Short produced two overlapping articles based on this interview: *My Secret Wife – by Bob Dylan*, in: *Daily Mirror*, UK newspaper, 9 August 1969, page 7, and in *Melody Maker*, UK newsprint magazine, 23 August 1969, pages 12-13. Only the latter is included in Every Mind Polluting Word and this is republished here with some minor corrections marked in red font. The earlier article is reproduced first, also printed in red font.

The interview took place at Dylan's home in Woodstock, New York.

**Daily Mirror article:**

**My Secret Wife – by Bob Dylan**

Bob Dylan has stirred. His hibernation is at an end.

As the cool morning mist hung over his country house an hour's drive out of New York, he murmured quietly to me: **"It's nice to be back. What's happening out there?"**

For three years, during which intrigue and curiosity has grown, Dylan has carefully avoided direct communication with the world.

Understandably so, for most of that time he has been recovering from the gruesome car smash that halted his career.

Now, fit again, he talked to me about his comeback which begins in Britain in three weeks' time – and revealed to me some lesser known facts about his personal life.

Who knew, for instance, that Dylan is married? He is. To a pretty brunette named Sarah Lownds who once worked as a waitress in a New York restaurant. And they have four children.

Said Dylan: **"It's just that I didn't want to advertise my personal life. I've never talked about it before. We've never been in the show-business set.**

**"Sarah and I grew up together as kids in Minnesota. It wasn't love at first sight.**

Work

**"We met again in New York where she working as a waitress. So we married and now we've got four children. They're wonderful."**

The marriage was five years ago and their children are Maria 4, Anna 3, Sam 2 and Jesse, who is just a year old. Bob is now twenty-eight.

**"Sarah and maybe a couple of the older kids will be coming to England with me,"** he said.

And, thinking about his come-back**: "Gee, I'm nervous. I've been so long out of it. But we're gradually getting the show together."**

Dylan is faintly amused that he has, to the outrage of top American and British impresarios, chosen as his comeback pitch the Isle of Wight Festival.

Backing

**"I always wanted to go to the Isle of Wight,"** he chuckled.

Dylan will bring with him The Band, now becoming popular in their own right, who will back him for the concert.

Dylan, the man who injected culture and philosophy into pop, has composed a whole catalogue of new songs for the concert.

And during his visit he will record for the first time in London.

He told me: **"George Harrison has offered to let us use the Apple Studios and we hope to take up that chance."**

Dylan and The Band may also play at the Albert Hall and undertake other major engagements in Europe.

**"But we won't go back on the road in the sense that we were from 1962 to 1966,"** he said. **"It wore us out.**

**"Besides I still get some effects from the car crash, like when I move suddenly, or at odd times when the weather's cold.**

**"But I'm very happy with the way I've progressed. I think my voice is better now than ever before. I like my new songs too."**

Hits

Dylan's greatest hits have been in the folk and blues bag, but "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times They Are A-Changing" still rate his biggest sellers.

What are Dylan's long-range plans?

**"Well, I'd like to do a film. Maybe next year. I'd like to do it with someone like Alfred Hitchcock."**

Dylan and Hitchcock! Now there's a real mind-beater.

**Melody Maker article:**

The second life of Bob Dylan is about to begin. The legend is to live again. But can he change the pattern of folk history as he succeeded in doing in the years 1961–1966?

That question, and all the curiosity, intrigue and compassion Dylan has aroused among fans and sceptics alike through the years, will be dissolved at the end of this month. For it is then that Dylan has chosen to emerge from the green-clad obscurity of his countryside lodge retreat outside New York and sail to England to appear at the Isle of Wight festival.

It may not seem a particularly significant venue for the great Dylan to choose as his comeback platform; but it is ideally Dylan if one takes into account his unpredictability.

And as Dylan says, **"That's a little island of yours I always wanted to go to. It seems okay by me."**

It's okay by Julie Felix, Ritchie Havens, The Who, Joe Cocker, Marsha Hunt, the Moody Blues and Family who appear on the festival bill, too.

Dylan talked to me in New York as he was preparing to leave; it was his first interview since he survived a horrific car crash which halted his career three years ago.

Until then his music, poetry and philosophy had gained tremendous influence. **"Not so much here at home, but in England and various points abroad my music did well,"** concedes Dylan in modest strain today.

Communication

Nevertheless, his influence directly inspired many other artists and broadened the musical attitudes of fans, tired of mundane pop and through Dylan found a new language of communication.

Today, the world has gone folk and it's precisely at this moment that Dylan, the original master from Minnesota, returns.

What of the others – what of Donovan I ask Dylan? Did he consider Donovan who superseded him an imitator?

Says Dylan cautiously: **"No, I wouldn't say that. He has developed his own style and his own kind of feel. Sometimes his lyrics get a bit corny and the arrangements gather a bit of fuzz, but I don't know of anyone who is doing what he is doing today."**

Dylan, although in hibernation all this time, has obviously kept his finger on the pulse; for he talks of The Cream, too, and the headway they were making and their surprising decision to split**. "Just when they were goin' big as a group in America,"** he said. **"That's a shame..."**

Just how has Dylan been spending his lost three years? He has been writing new music, "reams of it and with deeper perception," says his closest friends. Says Dylan: **"I don't know about that, except that I'll be playing it at the Isle of Wight but all I can say is I'm happy with my new songs. They make me feel good."**

Dylan, long known as his own best critic, has never said that before and this indicates his zest to return, as indeed was illustrated last month when he leaped on stage at a St. Louis concert and ad-libbed into an act completely unconcerned.

**"I just had to do it. The music called and I went,"** reflected Dylan. **"Yeah – I'm rarin' to go. But don't believe I'm not nervous. Gee – I am. It's been a long time."**

In these past few weeks Dylan has been rehearsing with The Band who have stamped their own fame in America and elsewhere and the five-strong combo will be doubling up on a wide range of different instruments to produce the backing sounds for Dylan's Isle of Wight show.

**"We're getting together a brand new repertoire and we may be on stage for a full three hours,"** declared Dylan.

His accident scars are now healed and he only gets minor symptoms when the weather is cold or he moves awkwardly or suddenly. **"Otherwise I feel fit and strong again and I think my voice is best as it's ever been,"** Bob tells me.

Through the last three years Bob has been nursed by his wife Sara Lownds. It was not generally known Bob was married, or that the couple have four children: Maria (4), Anna (3), Sam (2) and year old Jesse.

It's a disclosure which once more shows how Dylan has clung to protection from any intrusion on his personal life. But now he tells the story:

**"Sara and I grew up as kids together in Minnesota. Then some years back we met again in a New York restaurant where Sara was working as a waitress.**

## Opportunity

**"We fell in love – although it was not love at first sight and five years ago we were married in New York State."**

Said Bob: **"We didn't advertise the fact as we feel our personal lives are what they mean. Otherwise we would have gone to Hollywood to live and become members of the showbiz set, which we hope we will never be."**

Bob is going to bring Sara and possibly the two elder children to Britain with him and while he is here he hopes to fulfil other plans.

**"It is possible I will record in London,"** he told me: **"George Harrison has offered to let us use the Apple Studios and we hope to take up that opportunity while we are there."**

After Britain, Dylan and the Band will appear on a major city tour – **"although it won't be like the old days when we fell from exhaustion."**

## Hitchcock

He is also eyeing the prospects for his first film. **"That is something I would like very much, but the story line has got to be very strong... You know I wouldn't mind working for someone like Alfred Hitchcock. He wouldn't do anything thin..."**

I leave Dylan to get back to his rehearsal with the Band. **"So much for the future,"** he says. **"Now for the present and believe me the Isle of Wight show is the start of a new life for me..."**

To concur with his arrival CBS are to release "Lay Lady Lay" as a single track slipped from Dylan's latest album "Nashville Skyline" and Dylan is pleased to hear it; **"although there may be better singles in the fresh material."**

Dylan will get 50,000 dollars for the one night show and a cut of the profits and as we part the 28-year-old American spiritual folk leader laughs: "**And I can tell you man after all this time I need the money!"**

Money is an incentive, even to a genius.

# Early August 1969, Ian Brady

Source: *Dylan: 'If it wasn't for my recording contract I don't know if I'd ever write another song'* in: *Top Pops*, UK magazine, week ending 30 August 1969, page 2.

The date and venue of this interview is not known. Clearly it predates the Isle of Wight concert on 31 August 1969. It may have taken place in England after 25 August 1969 but the printed publication date makes this seem unlikely. It is not from the Press Conference on 27 August 1969. It may be that this was one of a number of interviews that took place in Woodstock at the beginning of August.

**Dylan: 'If it wasn't for my recording contract**
**I don't know if I'd ever write another song'**

Whether Bob Dylan's Isle of Wight concert will in fact be recorded and released as an album we shall have to wait and see. But one thing is sure, if it isn't we may have to wait a very long time for another LP from the man.

For the matter of fact is, Dylan doesn't particularly enjoy recording. It seem odd that a man regarded by millions as the greatest folk poet alive today should feel reluctant to put his songs on disc.

**"If it wasn't for my recording contract I don't know if I'd ever write another song,"** Dylan revealed unexpectedly. **"The contract requires me to make a certain number of records, so I have to.**

**"I don't mind if I have to record other people's numbers, they don't have to be mine. I didn't want to make 'John Wesley Harding'… I planned to do an album of other people's songs but when I started looking round there just weren't enough songs good enough.**

**"If a song repeats itself – the bars, phrases, verses and so on – it doesn't interest me, so that doesn't leave me with a very wide choice of material. Maybe, though, the songs do exist and I'm just too lazy to look."**

If ever Dylan were to stop recording it would be a sad day for music. But while his recording contract holds Dylan will continue pleasing people, if not himself.

His producer, the large-built but short Bob Johnson from Texas, told me: "The record company are always calling me up and asking when Bob's gonna make a record and I just tell them that when he's ready he'll do one.

"Bob will ring me and ask about the boat and we'll talk about the weather and all that crap, then he'll say 'goodbye.' Then he'll call again in a few weeks, tell me he wants to record and we'll go and do it.

"You can't hustle him, you have to let him take his time… when he's ready he'll let you know."

Though a lot of people won't believe it, Dylan admits that a lot of his songs are written not for himself or what he feels, but to suit other media.

Direction

**"Before I cut the last album I was waiting for people to tell me what they had in mind, what direction they wanted me to take, but nobody did, so I just went ahead and cut it,"** he explained.

**"But you always have to do something that the popular radio stations will play, really think about it. It's no good just giving over half your mind, it must be total involvement."**

Selling-out

Bob has been criticised for "selling out" and playing commercial music. He knows the criticisms and is concerned that he reaches his audience all the time.

**"The next time I tour, I want to just play the songs,"** he pointed out. "**Last time, we made the mistake of doing too much production and that spoiled it.**

**"The songs were all mine, but long and I guess the programme just evolved from when I played alone, not with a band. At the time, I wasn't aware of the problems, only the screaming.**

**"This is something that all artists encounter, but it can be got over. There are people going to see Jimi Hendrix who listen to him and don't scream."**

How does Dylan feel about touring?

**"When I was touring, that was my job,"** he replied. **"You have two choices – either go and do it or don't go and do it. You can never tell what's gonna happen when you go out on stage, though, every audience is different.**

**"I like to play on stage, I believe I always will be, so it doesn't matter to me that I'm not performing all the time. I have different material now, so people will notice a change when I play."**

Touring isn't something that Dylan does regularly obviously, but he finds that when he does, some nasty things can happen. He does his best to avoid them.

**"We were doing a whole show with no other acts and the strain got pretty tough,"** he recalled. **"While I was working, playing to people, everyone else was having a good time and some really unhealthy things cropped up.**

**"I realise now that there must be another way of doing things and that's what I'm planning. I don't want all that to happen again. I didn't have any choice but to do it, I was pushed into it, that's all."**

## Influences

One of the great intriguing problems is: How on earth does Dylan write his songs? What are his influences? Where does he get his ideas from?

**"The whole business of songwriting has become far too serious,"** Dylan said. **"I don't strain to write. A song just comes out… something may trigger it off, I might hear a phrase or a word and a song comes out.**

**"A songwriter just connects two ends together, he fills in the gap between two ideas. I'm no different to any other songwriter."**

A GOOD MANY PEOPLE WOULD DEFINITELY NOT AGREE WITH THAT!

# Before 24 August 1969, Tony Palmer

Source: *The Observer*, UK newspaper, 24 August 1969. The text reproduced here is from *The Dust of Rumour* edited by Dave Percival, 1985, X-ASITY, page 39.

Probably not interview but the article contains a direct quote from Dylan that has not been seen elsewhere.

**The Dylan Invention**

There really is no such person as Bob Dylan. He was invented because he was needed by the white youth of America who had been searching with increasing desperation for something, or someone positive with whom to identify. The nationwide campaign in the United States against racial injustice, which became the rallying point for protests of all kinds, found a voice at the 1963 Newport Jazz Festival. The resident poet was Bob Dylan.

One student commentator wrote: "We don't give a damn about Norman Mailer's private fantasies. We're concerned with the blight of dishonesty, conformism and hypocrisy in the U.S.A., especially in Washington. And Bob Dylan is the only American writer dealing with these subjects in a language that makes sense to us."

Dylan has now come to Britain for the first time in nearly three years to appear at the Isle of Wight festival next weekend. British Rail are running special trains to make sure that the expected 150,000 audience gets there. It's his first big-time stage-show since he was booed from the stage, crying, at another Newport Festival two years and eight million records after the first. He had committed the crime of advancing his music beyond the comparatively simple demands of folk, embracing rock 'n' roll, country and western music and rhythm 'n' blues en route.

Rejected by his early followers, Dylan was suddenly 'discovered' by the mass-circulation news-magazines. They needed a comfortable explanation for the anti-Johnson mood among the new youth, so they picked on Dylan. "He is Shakespeare to my generation," wrote Richard Goldstein in the New York Times; "The Rebel King of Rock 'n' Roll" trumpeted the cover of the Saturday Evening Post. The fact that he was neither rebellious nor to do with rock 'n' roll didn't seem to matter. "Because of Dylan"… began a piece in Time.

But, because of Dylan, Dylan had become a liar. He denies that his protest songs ever existed, although 'A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall' was clearly about the 1962 Cuban crisis; 'Oxford Town' was about the ordeal of James Meredith; the 'Ballad of Hollis Brown' commemorated a particular bloody killing of a Dakota dirt-farmer. Some people thought his well publicised motor-cycle accident in 1966 conveniently removed him from the recording scene during a fall-off in his creative energies. Interviewing him was impossible. Could we assume he was married? We could assume we liked. He was born married 45 years ago. How did he feel? His toe-nails didn't fit.

All that remained were his songs and it must have seemed that they alone could not be invented. In spite of their apparent differences, they are totally consistent in their imagery and in their flinty, savage melancholy. He was psychedelic before the term was invented, piling dream upon dream in a kaleidoscope of terror. The music is lean and pinched like his voice. Recently it has mellowed a little but his optimism is still desperate. His subject-matter is still intolerance and the love of liberty, both expressed in almost incoherently drawling lyrics. **"I'm trying to be a singer without a dictionary and a poet not bound with shelves of books,"** he says.

His songs depict a frozen world to which he and he alone has access because they have no truth other than that which he cares to give them. The ache they pitifully express is probably as alien to everyone else as the 'ramblings' of Norman Mailer were to that student commentator. Private sorrow has again been used as public grief. The Dylan, the person whose sorrow we thought it was, we invented.

# 31 August 1969, Unknown Interviewer (Daily Express)

Source: *The Daily Express*, UK newspaper, 1 September 1969.. The text reproduced here is from *The Dust of Rumour* edited by Dave Percival, 1985, X-ASITY, page 58.

The interview took place at Woodside Bay, Isle of Wight, England.

**Just 65 minutes of Dylan (at £538 a minute)**

Folk singer Bob Dylan disappointed 200,000 pilgrims of pop last night after they had roared a message of welcome and adoration, by appearing for just 65 minutes instead of the expected two hours. Promoter Ron Foulk said as Dylan was driven off: “I’m surprised. I expected more.”

Dylan, asked about the brevity of his appearance as he was hustled to the car, said: **“I don’t mind, I’ve enjoyed it.”** And so had the 200,000 screaming, semi-hysterical fans who forgave him for the three years of silence, and for the three hours he was late last night.

Some of the faithful had waited for days. Yesterday the organisers thoughtfully laid down a quarter-acre of foam for them to frolic in at the weird happening, and Dylan was earning more than £538 a minute.

# Late August 1969, Chris White

Source: *Melody Maker*, UK magazine, 6 September 1969, page 16.

The interview took place at Forlands Farm, Isle of Wight, England.

**Dylan charms the labourers**

Bob Dylan has been an elusive person during his visit to the Isle of Wight.

Apart from his one press conference on Wednesday he has been spending most of his time at the 16th century stone farm house, Forlands Farm, near Bembridge, rehearsing with the Band.

The farm house is set in picturesque sunken gardens and has its own private swimming pool.

Beside the farm house is a converted barn where Dylan and the Band have been practising.

At the entrance to the farm house is a pair of boarded-up, wrought iron gates, where one or two civilian guards keep a constant watch from a parked car. They earn a reported £15 a day for this duty.

Outside the cottage, labourers working on the road have been gathering near the barn rehearsal room to listen to Dylan and the Band run through such numbers as “Lay Lady Lay” and “Nashville Skyline.”

But one reporter has managed to penetrate the security lines, he is Daily Sketch writer Chris White.

Chris went to Forlands Farm and eventually met Bob Dylan, after speaking to Al Aronowitz a journalist friend and unofficial press agent for Dylan.

“Dylan walked out of the barn into the garden,” said White. “He was wearing a brown leather coat and green-lensed sunglasses. I asked him if I could have a word with him and Dylan replied **‘sure, what do you want to know.’** I asked what was the attraction about the I.O.W. and he explained that it was a place where Alfred Lord Tennyson had lived and that it was a place he had always wanted to come to.”

Dylan is believed to have rented the house for at least three weeks.

White asked Dylan if he had any thoughts about taking any other engagements. **“Not at the moment,”** replied Bob, **“but we will consider any offers we get. Basically we are just having a holiday.**

**“It’s nice to be working with the Band again. We’re just getting a bit of practice in. They are a great bunch.”**

Bob also said that he was aware of the large number of fans he had in England. **“They write to me a lot. They are the most loyal fans I have and that was one of the reasons that I wanted to come to England to make my comeback. It’s not the money I’m interested in, I just want to play music.”**

“I found Dylan easy and pleasant to talk to,” said White. “He was a complete contrast to what the publicity makes him out as and a contrast to his lack of communication at the press conference.

“He was a completely different person to what I had expected. It was an insight into the person and not the public image. Something you caught very little of with all the paraphernalia of a press conference. I think he is a person who is quite willing to talk to you on his own. Basically he is a shy person.

“I spoke to the Band’s Robbie Robertson who told me, ‘We’ve been rehearsing with Bob since we got here, working out what we are going to play. He’s a bit vague about it, and we’ve been trying to get the feel of the place.

‘But he just likes to play all the time. We’ve had to say ‘give it a rest’. We could hardly finish our first album because he wanted to play all the time.’ ”

# 1 September 1969, David Wilsworth

Source: *The Times*, UK newspaper, 2 September 1969, page 2.

The interview was held in Ryde, Isle of Wight, England.

**Dylan Cuts Short His Stay on Island**

Ryde, I.o.W., Sept. 1

Bob Dylan cut short his stay short on the Isle of Wight and left today for a holiday tour of Britain. The American singer had been here for less than a week and had been expected to stay for up to three weeks.

This morning, as he boarded a charted Hovercraft bound for Portsmouth, he said: **"We are going to stay here in England and we may go to Ireland, Scotland and Wales too."**

Mr. Dylan, who was reported to have been paid £35,000 for his appearance, was accompanied by his wife and two children and by George Harrison, of the Beatles, and his wife.

Tens of thousands of Dylan enthusiasts who came to see his concert at Woodside Bay, near Ryde, last night also made their way home today, with the same lack of fuss that has characterised this whole weekend.

Early this morning there was a rush to board ferries because of an overnight build-up of passengers and one crew turned hoses on youngsters who were trying to board across railings instead of on the gangway.

The Dylan concert ended with almost jarring abruptness shortly after midnight. Dylan appeared just after 11 p.m., more than two hours later than advertised. His group, The Band, had played for an hour before that.

There were some boos and jeers when Mr. Dylan did not prolong his performance. This morning he said: **"I wanted to do more but it was late and I did not want to keep anybody up late."** He had been ready to play from 5.30 and did not know what had caused the delay.

Mr. Ron Foulk, one of the promoters, said: "I did expect Dylan to sing for a bit longer but he fulfilled his contract and I believe the whole concert was a great success." Mr. Foulk denied reports that the concert might show a loss.

Police at Newport said 22 people had been arrested on drug charges. All but one had been bailed to appear in court in mid-September.

# 1 September 1969, Philip Finn

Source: *The Daily Express*, UK newspaper, 2 September 1969.

The interview was held in Ryde, Isle of Wight, England.

The party's over. They've burst their giant balloons and taken the foam away.

And as 150,000 Bob Dylan fans make their way home from the pop festival on the Isle of Wight the cost is being counted in the musical citadels on both sides of the Atlantic.

The fans hoping to be back at work in offices and factories all over Britain today are the ordinary material of society.

But the star people involved have more to lose – and more to gain.

Dylan himself, the high priest of pop, more than anybody. He left the island last night vowing: **"I'll be back…"**

But this £583-a-minute singer was upset by reports that he had sold his fans short by not singing for long enough.

Brilliant

**"I was shattered by stories that the kids were angry because I was three hours late,"** he said. **"I was there at 5.30 as promised. I don't know why we were so long before going on. Ask the producers.**

**"It was the biggest audience I have ever faced. I couldn't see anybody out there. It was frightening, but I soon warmed up and got the feeling. The fans were terrific."**

Dylan's friend, Beatle George Harrison, also defended his performance: "The concert was marvellous. Bob did not walk off the stage halfway through his act. He gave a brilliant performance."

From this astonishing performance one man has clearly emerged as the new Prince of Pop – fair-haired Ron Foulk, managing director of Fiery Creations, a zip-along enterprise just 12 months old.

He pulled off a fantastic show business scoop by agreeing to pay £38,000 to Dylan. He also paid top money to more than 30 leading artists and laid on the three-day spectacular.

Optimistic

Foulk, with rings of tiredness around his 24-year-old blue eyes, discounted reports that he will pocket £100,000 from the spectacular.

He said: "I am optimistic about a nice big cut but although there were 150,000 at the concert nowhere that number paid to get in.

"Thousands and thousands got in by con tricks or simply leaping over the fence.

"We estimate that 70,000 tickets were sold. It will be days before our computer reckonings are finished. Dylan and the other artists cost us £50,000. Publicity cost us another £20,000.

"We laid on some terrific sideshows, including the Great Foam Frolic area which cost more than £5,000.

"On top of this we had to lay out about £10,000 to get the place in shape with special walls."

Ron Foulk hardly knew the first thing about the Top 20 a year ago. Then he left his business, a small printing firm, with the thought that all the young fans represented a fantastic market.

Expenses

This weekend's success has convinced him that he was right.

He got Dylan to emerge from his three-year retreat by a bombardment of letters and telephone calls.

"All told, my phone bills this year must be around £5,000, plus other additional expenses in getting Bob to this country," he said.

Ron Foulk is one man sure of the reputation, if not yet the money, involved in this festival.

"My real achievement," he said "was giving pleasure to those 150,000 fans.

"Next year I hope we can put on something bigger and better. This means a fantastic amount of really hard work and worry.

"But that is my life."

# October 1970, David Reitman

Source: *Rock*, US magazine, 29 March 1971, pages 19, 30.

The interview took place in New York City, New York. The article was billed by the magazine as an interview but, in truth, it was more of a couple of conversations. It has been included anyway.

**Blonde On Blonde: One On One**

" ... and even the President of the United States must sometimes have to stand naked ..." - bob dylan

"Poets and kings defecate, and ladies, too."- alexander pope

"He was never known to make a foolish move." - bob dylan

It must have been about this time last year that a friend mentioned that he had seen Bob Dylan walking around the west village near N.Y.U. Shortly after, I read in the Village Voice that Dylan was living on Macdougal Street, and could in fact be found, from time to time, playing basketball with the neighborhood kids. Thus began an incredible eight month journey through time and space that ended one hazy New York October afternoon in one of the most amazing basketball games ever played.

You see, I was a reserve guard on my high school team before my playing career was terminated in the early part of the 11th grade, by a bicycle crash and the resultant torn cartilage in my right knee and although I stopped being serious about the game, I can still handle myself on the court pretty well, and the thought of meeting Dylan head on in any context appealed to me.

You can tell a lot about a person by the way he handles his body, you know. I had noticed this when I had worked with emotionally disturbed children, many of whom had physical manifestations of their disturbance, such as an unnaturally stiff posture, contorted face and neck muscles, psychosomatic limps and fits, etc. Those are pretty obvious, but you can tell a lot of things about "normal" people from the way they stand, walk, etc. Although most of my observations of that kind had been confined to women, I knew it would apply to men as well.

Starting late last spring, I would haunt the West village basketball courts whenever I could with my four year old Spaulding ball which had cost me $16 new, but was now showing the signs of wear. A great ball to play on asphalt with, it was particularly well balanced. I played at the courts on Houston, near 6th Avenue, the courts a few blocks up on 6th (not too many whites there. Dylan probably wouldn't go against such stiff competition, anyway), the schoolyard on Greenwich, all within easy striking distance of Dylan.

This was not an obsession, mind you. I just did it every week or every other week, going from court to court, occasionally getting into a game. I didn't find Dylan; but I was developing a renewed interest in the game. My jump shot was starting to go in again and my "floater" (a driving, twisting lay-up usually around a high post and down the lane) was coming back to me.

As spring dragged into summer, I began losing interest in meeting Dylan and gaining interest in playing basketball. I started playing outside the area – in Riverside Park, in Brooklyn, wherever I happened to be. I had all but forgotten my project when some musicians I had been playing with invited me to come along with them to play basketball at the court on Houston one Sunday afternoon in early October. We played for two hours and they left, leaving me there to shoot alone. I have this peculiar habit of playing for 4 or 5 hours at a time, staying behind when others have left from exhaustion. It was late in the afternoon, and I was shooting alone at one of the baskets – there were half-court games at all the others when I suddenly was aware of a person behind me, a few inches shorter than me, with a scruffy beard and sunglasses; carrying a white windbreaker neatly folded over one arm and a basketball cradled in the other. It was Bob Dylan!!!

**"Mind if I shoot here?"** he asked me.

"Sure, go ahead," I answered. We both began shooting, but I was watching him out of the corner of my eye.

"Well he can shoot alright," I thought, "but he probably can't drive because of his bad back (the famous bad back from the famous motorcycle accident)."

He seemed to favor shooting from the right side of the basket.

He was wearing $20 Adidas sneakers – a useless bourgeois extravagance. I was wearing $9 Cons.

He seemed to be afraid of hurting himself because he did not engage in any violent movements and rested frequently, breathing heavily. He seemed more interested in getting some exercise than in playing a game of

basketball. After about a half hour I noticed he was getting restless and would probably leave soon so I decided to chance it.

"Wanna play a game?" I asked with a great deal of nonchalance.

He paused for a minute before answering, **"I don't think I better, I-uh-I'm just getting over a back injury."**

He smiled weakly but in that pause, as I studied his face, silhouetted in the late afternoon sun, he told me wordlessly that he was interested. I had pretended not to recognize him, and he was intrigued by someone who would relate to him not because he was Bob Dylan, but because he had a basketball.

Five minutes later he left with a simple **"so long,"** and a tired smile.

Next weekend I was back there waiting for him. I played for six hours on Saturday and received nothing for my efforts except a sunburn, a blister, two hectic; half court games and a game of HORSE with an amazingly good 16 year old (in HORSE you get a letter every time you fail to duplicate your opponent's shot until someone gets H-O-R-S-E).

But I was back there Sunday early afternoon and about 3 o'clock he materialized, as unobtrusively as before.

"Hello there," I greeted him.

**"Howdy,"** he replied. **"Mind if I shoot here?"**

"O.K. with me," I said.

There was also a third kid there but he did not recognize him either and left after a few minutes to join a game.

"Your back feeling any better?" I asked as I put up a foul shot.

**"Yes it is,"** he replied with surprise. He didn't think I would remember.

My head was swimming and I felt like passing out, but somehow I got it out. "Wanna play a game, one on one?"

**"All right, just one. 10 points. Then I have to go,"** he said as he canned a 15 foot jumper. He was definitely up for the game.

"Winner's out," I added, "you can have the ball first."

He took the ball and dribbled to the right. I didn't guard him too closely and he got an easy 10 footer. 0-1.

He dribbled to the right again and took a 12 footer and sank it. Damn, I better start guarding him. 0-2.

He starts to the right once again and starts to shoot. I lunge, but it was only a fake. He gets the shot off but it is short and I am in position for the rebound. I take the ball to the top of the key and fake a drive and take a jumper. Yes. 1-2.

I fake to the left and drive right. He is flustered and I get an easy layup. 2-2.

I fake right and drive left, but he is ready for me this time and I am forced to retreat to the left corner where I miss a jumper. I am obviously the better ballplayer, but he is better than I expected. He gets the rebound. Because of my superior height, I should have no trouble getting most of the rebounds.

He goes to the top of the key and shoots before I can get back. 2-3.

He fakes the same shot and much to my surprise drives around me to the right. 2-4. His back didn't seem to be bothering him on that one.

He decides to try the left and tries to back his way in, but when he shoots, I get a slight piece of the ball and it falls short where I grab it and practically stuff it. 3-4.

I miss an 8-foot turn around jumper from the left but I tip in the rebound on the second attempt. 4-4.

We both take turns missing long shots before I drive on him down the lane. 5-4.

I am definitely in command as I take the opening pass from him and put it right up from 18 feet. The net hardly moves. **"Nice shot,"** he says. 6-4.

I, try it again, but I miss. He tries a short one and misses. I miss a short jumper, but grab the rebound, fake once and lay it in. 7-4.

I try one from the corner and miss. He then tries to back in from the right. I sense he is napping and plant my feet. He backs into me. "Charging," I announce emphatically. He stops and gives me a dirty look and is about to protest, when he realizes that I am right and I take the ball out of bounds. I drive across the lane and sink an amazing running one-hander. 8-4.

The game then hit a dry spell as neither of us could buy a basket. We must have missed at least 5 shots apiece. Then it happened.

Dylan got a rebound from one of his own shots and put it in. I had the last six baskets and was overconfident and wasn't trying particularly hard, so when he got a rebound that I should have had, he became determined. 8-5

He got a 10 footer from the right side. 8-6.

I became concerned about his new confidence. I lunged at the ball and fouled him. He took the ball out of bounds and faked to the center before stopping and popping another 10-footer. 8-7, and I had a real battle on my hands. The next point was crucial.

Then my break came. He started to the right side. Anticipating this, my hand shot out and knocked the ball away. I won the race and Dylan overran me. The layup was uncontested. 9-7.

But he wasn't about to give up yet. I tried to end the game with a long jumper from the top of the key, but his hand in my face threw me off just a little and he got the rebound. Then he missed a layup he should have had and I got the rebound I faked right and drove left, but I kicked the ball out of bounds clumsily with my left foot.

He then pulled the surprise of the game by driving behind the basket from right to left and hooking it off the backboard. "Nice shot," I admit, sweat pouring from my face. 9-8.

But he was clearly desperate and he took a shot from the middle that was a bit out of his range, because I didn't guard him out there. The ball nicked the front of the rim and bounced out of bounds, where I took it out. My best shot has always been my long jumper, so I decided to give it one more try. I took it way out and he didn't guard me. I set. I shot from about 20 feet. Swish. I won, 10-8.

**"Nice game,"** he said as he got his basketball and white windbreaker and started to leave.

"Sure you don't want to play another game?" I asked.

**"Sure. I have to go now,"** he answered.

"By the way, my name is David. What's yours?"

**"Bob,"** he answered and smiled as though he had put something over on me. **"So long, see you later."**

I acknowledged him with a grunt-like "yeah" and went back to shooting baskets. I continued to play for another 15 minutes and then went home. I never returned to that court.

But on the first warm Sunday of this year, when the temperature climbed into the mid-40s, the basketball freaks were out there playing. I was passing that playground in a taxi when I noticed, in a heavy ski sweater and sunglasses and $20 Adidas, Bob Dylan, shooting baskets, alone.

# 18 to 24 March 1971, Tony Glover

Source: article by Douglas Brinkley in: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Issue 1345, November 2020, pages 50, 52-55, 78.

Excerpts from three separate interviews that were conducted in Dylan's lower Greenwich Village office / rehearsals studio, New York City, New York. Other sections of the interviews have been published, notably facsimiles of typed and texts modifed by Dylan. Perhaps transcripts of these can be added at a later date.

**Dylan Unguarded**

As Bob Dylan's career blossomed, he kept in close touch with his friend Tony Glover. The pair's conversations and letters — published here for the first time — show a Dylan that few people knew

On March 18th, 1971, Bob Dylan sat down in his Manhattan office, put his feet up on a table, strummed a guitar, and opened up like he rarely, if ever, had before. He was talking to his old friend Tony Glover, the first of four interviews they conducted that year. At various moments Dylan reacts to being booed at Newport in 1965 (**"It was a strange night"**), recalls writing "Subterranean Homesick Blues" (**"story of a mad kid"**), remarks on his craft (**"My work is a moving thing"**), and dismisses his honorary doctorate from Princeton (**"a strange type of degree — you can't really use it for anything"**). Feeling unfairly dissected by dimwitted critics who milked his lyrics for autobiographical information, he fired back. **"Do you think Johnny Cash shot a man in Reno?"** he asked. **"Or that Paul Simon would throw himself down over a troubled Hudson River and let somebody use him as a bridge?"** The interviews totaled three and a half hours, and never saw the light of day — until now.

Speaking with Glover, Dylan's jangled nervous energy of the previous decade had vanished: He was untroubled and erudite, willing to shed light on things he'd never fully explained before. Dylan felt comfortable with Glover, a blues harmonica player and musicologist from Dylan's home state of Minnesota. Glover was one of the few people with whom Dylan regularly kept in touch once he left Minneapolis for New York. In the Newport Folk Festival program of 1963, Dylan wrote that Glover was "a friend to everything I am … who feels and thinks and walks and talks just like I do."

In entrepreneurial mode, Glover hoped to use the interview transcripts — extensively annotated and revised in Dylan's handwriting — for an article in *Esquire*. Nothing ever came of the project because Dylan eventually lost interest in it. The fiercely loyal Glover, who died in 2019, safeguarded the tapes and transcripts along with four letters and a treasure trove of other memorabilia he amassed from Dylan over the years. Beside the main interviews, there are six additional recordings of telephone calls between Dylan and Glover from 1969 to 1971.

On November 19th, RR Auction in Boston will sell this historic collection of Dylaniana on behalf of Glover's widow, Cynthia. It makes for an extraordinary time machine, bringing readers inside the mind of Dylan in the wake of the counterculture Sixties, an era that, from the safe perch of 1971, Glover deemed "a very destructive, mind-, body-, and soul-destroying time."

The Dylan-Glover friendship began around 1960, roughly the same time Dylan stopped attending classes at the University of Minnesota to play folk and blues music in Minneapolis clubs with Spider John Koerner, Dave Ray, and Glover. All three had consequential careers as musicians in the Twin Cities and beyond. Glover played blues harmonica with a complexity all his own, becoming an inspiration to Dylan, the Rolling Stones, and the Doors. "As far as harp playing went, I tended to keep it simple," Dylan recalled in *Chronicles* about his days in Minneapolis' Dinkytown. "I couldn't play like Glover or anything, and didn't try to. I played mostly like Woody Guthrie, and that was about it. Glover's playing was known and talked about around town, but nobody commented on mine."

Dylan was living in New York when Glover suggested the series of in-depth interviews. Only to Glover would he admit that listening to his mid-Sixties album masterpieces like *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited* **"spooked"** him out. **"You didn't sing songs like that and live a normal life,"** Dylan said. **"In order to be that strong on one level, you have to be very weak in other ways."** Their resulting conversations — published here for the first time — are always upbeat and friendly. For the most part, Glover tried to maintain a chronological approach, starting with Dylan's departure from Minneapolis in January 1961 to meet his idol Woody Guthrie in Greystone Park Hospital, in Morris Plains, New Jersey, and ending with the release of *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Vol. II* in 1971.

Glover knew the meeting with Guthrie was especially important to Dylan. In the first interview, Glover wondered if Dylan met other musicians in the hospital wanting to hang with Woody. **"I didn't see any**

**musicians, I saw a lot of other men just sitting around,"** Dylan recalled. **"That's the only place we could meet, in the lounge. There'd be, like, 50 or 60 guys sitting around in pajamas. There'd be like little card tables all over the place. … I can remember the smell at the place more than anything else."**

Imagining the scene, Glover suggested it must have been difficult talking one-on-one in the crowded hospital. **"There really wasn't much to say,"** Dylan responded. **"He wanted to hear his songs, and I would play 'em. I knew 'em all at that time. I must've known at least 75 of his songs. So there I was, any day I'd go out there, I'd never exhaust the repertoire, ever."** At one point, Guthrie suggested Dylan should visit his wife Marjorie in Howard Beach, Queens, to listen to some of his unrecorded songs. **"I took the subway out to the end of the line — this was really out there,"** Dylan recalled. **"And after I got off the subway I walked through the swamp. This was in February, I think. Eventually I got up to the door — that was one long trip. I remember that more than I remember actually going to see Woody himself — because it was actually easy to get to see him. It wasn't easy if you lived in California or the Midwest — but if you were right there, just anybody could walk in and meet him at the Morristown hospital. Between 2:30 and 5:00 any visitor could come. … Well, I came to New York to see him … I was dead set to meet him. And that's what I did. Must've been three days in the city and I was out there. I was high on that feeling for a long time."**

Glover was curious how Dylan made it to New York on his first trip. **"Hitchhiked out of St. Paul and wound up in Madison, Wisconsin,"** Dylan responded. **"Destiny just brought me there, I had no idea. It was just some stroke of luck. I got out of the car … and ran into some guitar players. After staying around there for a few days … I can't recall. Think we got a ride from Madison all the way from two young New Yorkers."** As for fleeing Minnesota, Dylan felt it was the only sensible option. **"I mean, I had to leave. The only other choice was to sell shirts, or work in the mines, or maybe to learn to fly an airplane. … I don't think I wanted to be James Dean — but there was a period of time when I blocked out everybody else. No one else really meant anything as much as [Guthrie] did."**

There was a sense of tranquility and camaraderie in Dylan's answers to Glover. It was as if he had gone down Niagara Falls in a barrel and was now in a safe harbor enjoying the sunshine. When the conversation moved toward musical figures like Sonny Boy Williamson, Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf, and Ernie Freeman, Dylan glistened. Less so when the conversation turned to his own work . **"I could never listen to my albums up to, oh, about 1969 — never could stand them. Hated them. I guess there's good and bad in all that, you know? In feeling that way."**

Glover was a critic for *Little Sandy Review*, *Sing Out!*, *Hullabaloo/Circus*, and ROLLING STONE, and Dylan enjoyed getting the scoop about what was going on in the music industry. His curiosity may have been due to his self-imposed remove. For example, he told Glover that he'd rather read the *Police Gazette* than ROLLING STONE, which had trashed his double album *Self Portrait* and published a "non-interview" (presumably referring to a 1969 cover story in the magazine).

Dylan was still livid at *Newsweek* for publishing a nasty exposé piece in 1963, which challenged the authenticity of his hard-travelin' stories. And he was outraged that *Time* had recently made his friend John Lennon **"look, like, ridiculous"** and **"like a punk"** in a snotty article. **"They just really had it in for him, man,"** he said with disgust. **"They just cut him right down."** When Glover raised the question of why Lennon had said he didn't believe in Zimmerman on the *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* song **"God,"** Dylan giggled. **"That's his problem, not mine."** Later, he offered, **"Well, Lennon is into that shit, taking his pants off, you know? That's where he's at. His record is about the same kind of things as that — who gives a fuck, you know?"**

A mischievous Glover recounted how foolish Lennon and Yoko Ono came off on *The Dick Cavett Show*, acting like they possessed LSD recipes for world peace. **"I saw that too, man. I couldn't believe it,"** Dylan said, laughing. **"I just felt like throwing something at the set when it was over, you know? I just went to bed and was pissed off."**

By contrast, when George Harrison came up, Dylan gushed with unadulterated praise. Not only had the ex-Beatle organized the Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden on August 1st, 1971 — with Dylan doing elegant versions of "Just Like a Woman" and "Mr. Tambourine Man" — but he also exuded tremendous integrity of purpose. **"Oh, man, [George] was fantastic,"** Dylan said. **"I mean, just the fact that he did it — incredible."** Likewise the triple-disc *Bangladesh* LP, filled with original Harrison material from the concert, left Dylan flabbergasted. **"He gets the sound,"** he elaborated. **"You put the record on, you're just almost transformed. I mean, you're just there. You just can't get out of it once you put the needle down. … Really in his own right. He just pulled it together in some kind of cohesive sense, and he rides it, right on top of it, and he's right there, all the time. Really, he was the only guy who did any talking — I didn't say shit. He put on a suit, got up there, and said, 'Quiet now, here's Ravi and pay attention.' … Lennon couldn't have done it."**

Couching his questions with courtesies, Glover gingerly asked Dylan why he changed his last name from Zimmerman to Dylan, a touchy subject for any other interviewer. Perhaps, Glover intimated, he was worried

that anti-Semitism would hinder his musical career. **"Well, there is Jewish discrimination,"** Dylan agreed. **"A lot of people are under the impression that Jews are just bankers and merchants and watch salesmen. A lot of people think Jews have tails, or they're gonna eat your daughters and that kind of thing. A lot of people think those things — and they'll just have to be taught different."** The bottom line was that the "Dylan" moniker was chosen as a way to establish a dynamic showbiz identity. **"It allowed me to step into the Guthrie role, with more character,"** Dylan delineated. **"And I wouldn't have to be kept reminded of things I didn't want to be reminded of at that time. I had to be free enough to learn the music, to be free enough to learn technique."**

Not quite satisfied, Glover asked the origins of the folk figure named Dylan. **"The character which had to become named Dylan,"** he responded, a bit annoyed. **"I mean, it wouldn't have worked if I'd changed the name to Bob Levy or Bob Johnston or Bob Doughnut. I mean, it wouldn't have worked. There had to be something about it to carry it to that extra dimension."**

Dylan noted that while his 1962 debut didn't sell very well, he received fan mail from, as he recalled, **"very odd places,"** like **"little towns in Idaho, or Michigan, Ohio, Louisiana, Florida — little places that you hadn't ever heard of."** That positive feedback spurred him onward. Glover and Dylan both agreed it was the recording of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, with its hit "Blowin' in the Wind," that turned Dylan into the newest darling of the folk revival. Glover asked how he composed his signature song. **"Every day I'd be writing songs — some I'd remember, some I wouldn't,"** Dylan recalled. **"The general scene at that time was to consistently write as much as you could — almost to the point where if you were performing, you'd have a new song to perform that night. You were just writing all the time. Everyone around at that time was doing that. It was like machinery the way you turned out songs in those days. 'Blowin' in the Wind' just happened to be the lucky one, the one that stuck. But I probably wrote a song the night before that, and I probably wrote one or two the next day which haven't been heard, which were probably in the same vein. To me it was just another song. It got singled out because a lot of performers were singing it."**

As if offering a tutorial, Dylan explained that the many-versed, surrealistic "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" was written to **"exist on paper"** with or without a tune. **"That one was a breakthrough — it was a breakthrough because of the form,"** Dylan said, insisting the doomsday lyric had nothing to do with the Cuban Missile Crisis. **"That song really existed because of the new form — new to me at the time. That 'da-da-da, da-da-da, da-da-da,' on and on — that was like hypnotizing me. I could just hypnotize myself singing the thing. It just sort of freed me from having to sing all that rhyming stuff where I'd have to remember the rhymes, I had to remember the story, plus the intricate detail. That's OK when you're really doing it, but you get beyond it, to something else — I had a hard time remembering all that stuff. See, I did it to write it — the enjoyment for me was writing it — that's what kept me going."**

Concerned for his own safety, Dylan told Glover a harrowing account of A.J. Weberman, a fake-journalist stalker, threatening his family and rifling through his trash to write sleazy articles about him. To Dylan, this was corroboration of how rotten some reporters were. **"I know what was in the garbage, like, you can't believe what the cat must have had to go through,"** Dylan said. **"Like, we got two kids still in Pampers, baby Pampers. Like the garbage is really filled up with that stuff, man, and it was really funky."** Dylan related that his bohemian friend David Blue — a Village folk musician and Elektra recording artist — warned him about nutjobs congregating all over Southern California, endlessly harassing rock musicians in confrontational ways. **"There's a big Jesus kick . … a lot of people on a tremendous Jesus kick, and they'll just grab you in the streets,"** Dylan warned Glover. **"People like Joni Mitchell and Neil Young are really getting hit on a lot, and they just don't know what to do about it. [Blue] told me about some guy that reached out for Neil. Neil wrote a song with the words 'silver fiddle' in it, and the guy showed up and he was the Silver Fiddle — and they couldn't get rid of him. But, I mean, I can understand that shit, 'cause this happened to us for years. Up at Woodstock — that kind of nonsense."**

Dylan, known for bouts of prickly concealment, was willing to shed a light on the process of writing songs and, to a lesser degree, the impetus behind his lyrics. **"The songs of *John Wesley Harding* were all written down as poems, and the tunes were found later,"** Dylan explained. **"On *Nashville Skyline*, just the opposite. The tunes existed first — so that would change things, ultimately. … If you were to isolate the words [of *Nashville Skyline*] for a minute, and just think of the sound of the voice, the sound of the music and the vocal — suppose you couldn't understand English at all and you just heard the sound of it — the sound of it would be pretty much what the words are. You know, a lot of dreamy kind of stuff, nice, pleasant, soothing type of music, I'd imagine."**

Glover was curious as to just who weaponized Dylan's rage when he wrote "Like a Rolling Stone." Was it "chicks" or the establishment? **"It's just … you know, who are you mad at when you go into a store and ask for a screwdriver and you don't get waited on for an hour, man,"** he said, laughing. **"Then you go to get something to eat and you look in your pudding and you see a puddle of shit. You go to a movie house, man, you walk down to your seat and step in some slime, then you sit in some slime. You walk**

**outta that and go for a ride in your car, and it breaks down — who are you mad at? It's not any kind of one person."**

Five months before the first interview with Glover, Dylan had released the album *New Morning*, which included the brilliant song "Sign on the Window," which he explained was about the town of Le Sueur, on the Minnesota River, where migrant workers came to pick peas and corn for the Green Giant company. He went on to discuss other tidbits about his songwriting inspirations. "Lay Lady Lay" wasn't written for the movie *Midnight Cowboy*, as was widely reported, but as a tune for Barbra Streisand. When Glover spun a theory that "It's All Over Now Baby Blue" was about the demise of capitalism, Dylan nixed it. **"Would you believe it if I told you that the song was written for David Blue?"** At the inference that "Mr. Tambourine Man" had something to do with drugs, Dylan snapped **"[that's] nonsense and bullshit."** Was "Gates of Eden" about the Berlin Wall? **"It was Eden in the mind, that's what it was,"** Dylan explained. When asked which of his songs he would put on a greatest-hits record, Dylan threw out "One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later)" and "Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat," both from *Blonde on Blonde*. **"That's a great album, *Blonde on Blonde*,"** Dylan said. **"I hear that album every once in a while, and I know it just can't be topped."**

When Glover asked Dylan if he thought Jack Kerouac was a "great writer," Dylan corrected: **"He was an entertaining writer; I don't know if I'd call him great. He really didn't keep you in any suspense. He didn't really tell you a great story — he didn't give you anything you would carry around with you for weeks — he didn't change you. I remember reading *On the Road* years ago, and I re-read it recently — I don't recall any great change. I read this story called *The Slave*, by Isaac Singer — I must have thought about that for months afterwards."**

As for Dylan's novel *Tarantula*, which was released in 1971, Dylan thought it wasn't **"a well-written book at all, but it's got a hell of a lot of energy."** While he admired Norman Mailer's writing about the Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier heavyweight championship fight, he couldn't stomach reading his coverage of Apollo 11 for *Life*. **"I couldn't get through the moon thing — it just didn't ring a bell — but I love Mailer's writing."** This led to a back-and-forth about space exploration.

"Does it mean anything to you that man has walked on the moon?" Glover asked.

**"No, it really doesn't,"** Dylan answered. **"All it means is that man can walk on the moon."**

"Nothing beyond that?" Glover pressed.

**"What else could it mean?"**

"Well, it's supposed to be a stepping stone to Mars and Pluto—"

**"So they can walk on Mars, so they can walk on Pluto?"**

"Does it bother you that there'll be hot dog stands on the moon?"

**"It bothers me that they're spending all that money on it."**

Glover, with carte blanche to get personal, asked Dylan about his notorious 1965 performance at the Newport Folk Festival, in which he was backed by an electric band — to the boos from a great many folk purists. Rumor had circulated that the disheartened Dylan cried backstage. **"No, I wasn't crying,"** he said. **"Pete Seeger was crying."** The sight of Seeger sulking in a car, in fact, with the windows rolled up, was seared in Dylan's mind. **"[People were] pounding on the windows — 'Come out, Pete, come out, Pete!' — he was just bawling. So I went back on solo and sang 'Mr. Tambourine Man' and 'Baby Blue' because that's what they wanted to hear. They were just like little babies. They wanted to hear that, and that's all they wanted to hear — so I went and sang it for them. At that time I just knew they were a bunch of fucks, and I just thought, 'Oh, forget it!' if that's all they want you to do is sing 'em to sleep."**

Glover wondered whether that experience contributed to a newfound vitriol in the lyrics of *Highway 61 Revisited*, recorded during the same period. **"The Newport thing — I don't know, I've never really been what you'd call a professional entertainer,"** Dylan offered. **"For someone like Steve Lawrence or Robert Goulet, to go up in front of a large audience at Newport and get booed — that would be a considerable jolt to their career. But to me, it was just one of those things. My life was like that — booing didn't matter, you know: up and down."**

Rock & roll memories flow through their conversations. On October 4th, 1971, Dylan took his wife Sara to see David Crosby and Graham Nash perform in Carnegie Hall. He was underwhelmed: Too much nostalgia, kitschy sap, and drugs for his taste. **"The whole house was like the Fillmore. Carnegie Hall, people snorting coke in the aisles, everybody passing joints around … it was incredible."** The two-part harmony was too cute for his liking, and the appearance of Stephen Stills and Neil Young didn't help. **"They just sang this one song called 'Helpless.' And they just repeated this word over and over," he said, laughing. " 'Helpless. Helpless. Helpless.' And it really got to be a drag after a while, just hearing this word 'Helpless.' You just wanted to stand up and say, 'What the fuck, man?'"**

After the concert, Bob and Sara wandered out of Carnegie Hall and suffered the indignity of street-side vendors selling bootleg versions of his unreleased songs and live concerts. **"Last night we were walking down Seventh Avenue, and on the corner was this cat hawking bootleg records, just 'Bootleg records, bootleg records, get 'em here.' Just hawking 'em right on the street,"** Dylan fumed. **"I saw one. There was one he had of mine called 'Zimmerman.' And I caught it just out of the corner of my eye going by, and uhhh … I was with my wife, and we went back and said, 'Gimme that record.' She grabbed the record from him and said, 'Punk!' — and we just took it, man, and split, just walked away with it."**

Just as intriguing as the taped interviews up for sale are four letters Dylan wrote to Glover between 1962 and 1964, with frank discussion of his early career and musical influences. In letters from 1962, he raves about seeing John Lee Hooker perform at Gerde's Folk City (the site of Dylan's first professional gig in 1961), and discusses writing a "new song called 'The John Birch Paranoyd Blues.'" Letters to Glover from 1963 and 1964 document Dylan's transformation from a Midwestern Woody Guthrie devotee to the composer of "Desolation Row," offering vital information about early recording sessions, songwriting, guitar tunings, his relationship with Joan Baez, and the historic meeting with the Beatles. Two handwritten notes are also enclosed in one-quarter-inch-tape cases containing early mixes of 1971 recordings (including "I Shall Be Released" and "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere"), which Dylan sent his old friend for feedback. The Glover archive is rounded out by one of Dylan's copies of *The Basement Tapes*, on one-quarter-inch tape.

On January 20th, 1962, Dylan wrote to Glover after playing successful gigs in Greenwich Village. Full of pride, Dylan enthuses about learning his craft from blues icons John Lee Hooker and the Rev. Gary Davis. Comically, he notes that their mutual Minneapolis musician friend Dave Ray — the guitarist in the Koerner, Ray, and Glover trio, whose 1963 *Blues, Rags, and Hollers* album with Elektra was critically embraced — should move to the Village to study with these Delta blues masters:

Hey hey hey it's me writing you a letter. Back now in that city and thinking of all that whistling harmonica music you are making back there in that dungeon hole gets me thinking and talking to my good girlfriend about the harp player I knowed — I looked high and wide and uptown and downtown for that book you wanted and I feel so bad, I can't find it — will send it tho as soon as I get it. Seen ol Dave Ray and sorta introduced him around. We went one time to see John Lee Hooker paying his dues to the blues at Folky City. Ol Dave is doing & singing & playing better & better every day — Sometime I get the feeling that if it wasn't for New York, I'd move here. … I was up in Schenectady last week playing and singing — I spent so much money that I went in the hole and had to play an extra nite just to get back to New York. Hope sometime to get an apartment so if you're ever out this way drop by and my house is yours — it's getting colder here now and the wind blows right thru to your bones — you'd think you were [in] a swamp land when you walk down the street or something. I'm a gonna take Dave Ray to see Gary Davis sometime soon — Dave then would automatically be 10 times better.

Dylan ends his letter by telling Glover to "say hello to that Mississippi River for me" and quotes Guthrie: "This world is yours, take it easy, but take it." And he adds: "My girlfriend says that you don't sign your full name to friends, so — Me, Bob."

On February 16th, 1962, Dylan wrote Glover in "Minneapolice" on an envelope from the Normandie Hotel, in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He was jazzed about his new satirical, protest talking-blues song "Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues," which was written from the point of view of a right-winger convinced that communists were infiltrating the United States.

A part of the long letter reads:

Work out a new tuning on the guitar you gotta hear it to believe it — Big Joe Williams start at Folk City next Tuesday for two weeks. So the Minor Flea or Bee or key or something like that somewhere huh? oh well what d'you want? — That's U of M'land [University of Minnesota] out there and you can't expect too much you know

There ain't much work around here now I aint workin, I'm writing a lot and bummin' around — This here place we got a couch in one room — I'd sure like to know when you're a comin'

I'd sure like to know why that Mississippi didn't say nothing — maybe cause she's mad at them people for kickin' [David] Whittaker outta that there keg place — Times aren't too awful good anywhere right now — Rote a new song called 'The John Birch Paranoyd Blues'

Dave Ray's still working down the Gaslight hole — times aint too good down there neither

That's all for now man, hurry write back and say when you're a coming here — (Bring a piles load of money with you — fill yer trunk up — we can use for wood to burn when you get — wood's expensive as hell nowadays — Blow inside out & upside down till then.

Dylan once again signs off with a Woody Guthrie quote ("Sometimes I feel like a piece of dirt walkin").

Shortly before he released *Freewheelin'*, Dylan was set to perform "Talkin' John Birch" on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, a decision initially OK'd by all involved. But on the day of the show, CBS lawyers demanded he

abandon the song, in fear it would incite a defamation suit from the John Birch Society. Dylan refused to be censored and walked out.

A few weeks later, in May 1962, Dylan handed Glover an unpublished lyric he wrote to honor the gritty and flamboyant Delta bluesman Big Joe Williams, his new hero and mentor. Dylan and Glover had just visited Guthrie together at Brooklyn State Hospital. Williams was the self-proclaimed "King of the Nine-String Guitar," who popularized the blues standards "Baby Please Don't Go" and "Crawlin' King Snake." Dylan had recently played blues harmonica and sang on an album with Williams, recorded in Brooklyn. The lyrics, given to Glover, read:

"My eyes are cracked I think I been framed/I can't seem to remember the sound of my name/What did he teach you I heard someone shout/Did he teach you to wheel & wind yourself out/Did he teach you to reveal, respect, and repent the blues/No Jack he taught me how to sleep in my shoes."

The lid of creativity blew off Dylan's hinges in a letter dated December 6th, 1963, two weeks after John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Channeling French symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud and leading Dada figure Tristan Tzara, Dylan's words soared in first-thought best-thought freedom, literary abstractions, and playful and down-home Midwest charm:

hey man that surprised me yes/I am rum runnin an ease droppin my route/an tryin not t get surprised an shook up when/the door slams. big door. out of Edgar allen poe sometimes …/yeah I guess I could say I needed a harp player/but I'd be lyin/an misguidin I wish I did …/I honestly wish I did … but I dont play blues on my guitar/I don't play southern mt stuff either now/My guitar strings have escaped my eyesight …/they remain with me now as a friend/a flashin dashin friend who stands in front a me/makin me look better …/an its getting so now that I'm growin not t need/it … an soon I expect I will shout my words/with out it. for it's colors are wearin off on/me an soon I myself will vanish into the sound/hole … an all that will be going down will be/stark naked undressed obscene flesh colored/songs … yes maybe lunatic … ha/you ask about harps/I cant even understand how my own harp fits into/me … it has the fuckin job of tryin t meet me/hard hard … oh pity my own poor harp/I am a writer of words I am honest/I do not mean t harm nothin an nobody save that/that runs against the boards of nature/its a big nature … sometimes a circus nature/an other times a courtroom nature/but above all it is my nature/an I own stock in it/as much as anybody/an I will defend my clown courthouse/with the eyes of a lawyer/dont got enuff bread this month/last month gave too much money t scc or as you'd say/sncc … or as winny churchhill snick …/find myself owin the government/money I dont have/gotta pay it nex month/I don't know whn I can get that kind of bread/but for christs sake I should be able t shouldn't I?/Maybe February …/goin up t woodstock t finish my book/at last look my man was lookin over new york/from the empire state … seein strange fish in the hudson river an thinkin of england …/he's got some ways t go yet yes. ha/sue says I should get a new warmer coat/I shake my head an bring her spare ribs …/she gets discusted an walks away in a flurry silent flurry …/but me?/shit man I run an grab her/an promise t get a warmer coat …/sue laughs an I laugh/an nite falls …/take it easy man/dick farina's mimi got out a the hospital/richard's hip/he dont pay nothin/'look man i'm ppor i aint payin'/he dont even think about it/'I want an investigation a them doctors/I dont remember that one there that charged/me this price here'/an nite fallsthere too a brown pacific nite an we ride in the mornin …

Dylan spent much of August 1964 at manager Albert Grossman's Woodstock retreat with Joan Baez, and guests like Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky. "Most of the month or so we were there, Bob stood at the typewriter in the corner, drinking red wine and smoking and tapping away relentlessly for hours," Baez recalled. "In the dead of night, he'd wake up, grunt, grab a cigarette, and stumble over to the typewriter again."

At the end of the month, Dylan left for Manhattan, where he met the Beatles at the Delmonico Hotel. "john lennon groovy also ringo," he wrote Glover not long after. This was the legendary encounter where Dylan introduced the Beatles to marijuana. "I don't remember much what we talked about," Lennon recalled of their first encounter. "We were smoking dope, drinking wine, and generally being rock 'n' rollers and having a laugh, you know, and surrealism. It was party time."

Soon after, Dylan wrote Glover a fast-paced and lyrical letter that mirrored his songwriting process. The clang of typewriter keys is all but audible as one reads Dylan's warmhearted callouts to Marvin Gaye, Manfred Mann, Dionne Warwick, Ichabod Crane, Greta Garbo, and others, which runneth over with colorful word riddles and poetic jive. As was Dylan's way, he chopped off the ends of words, as his girlfriend Suze Rotolo put in *A Freewheelin' Time*, "like a hiker hacking a path through the woods, machete in hand."

received letter bearsville post market/walk up road read you write better now — should be snow here soon. me i ramble concert high ho cold face always an always return there — everythings fine/am writing green songs an tieing play words togeter … I am outside an somewhat free/long for nothing. john lennon groovy also ringo. holy household here something out of fictitious gandi novel/fire very warm we are out in woods. nobody seems t think they have any enemys neither/me victor too, David. — i dont think you've met david we play pool in kingston/lots of strange towns round here very ancient/old stone buildings — rip van winkle icabod crane demon horseback people/abandoned hotels within twenty mountain mile radius like out of last year at marianbad/greta garbo hangouts Grand hotel you know what i mean? boarding house air. vagabondcanadian

hitchhike boy wonder poetsperhaps can imagine many different sorts living hiden away winding up an down nameless mountains all very devely … mystic country no smell of any city anyway i bum around up here. live here not but alway come back t groovy silent house. I write by candlelight. hardly never during day/bob dylan he plays makes bread facing kind fond people menace in their bathtubs/they call him names an pay outrageously just t see what he looks like … bob dylan he laughs/it is all a joke see me in sky. the sky is on fire. gotta listen hard t hear the giggles. once done tho it is thee only way/dig marvin gaye. gas station dudes. deonne warwick. drive in movies. cold cream ads. dig eye patched forest ranger wear short pants he talks too? see texas bronc buster break mexican vergin. worse then that i pet semantha the cat wonder how come i used t dig woody guthrie so much oh my gawd/met manfred mann in england/have you heard a song they sing called sha la la? It is fucking beautiful. hope dave ray becomes that doctor. will have some connection at leat least in wooly yonder midwest/you got telephone? yes youre right about hipsty people … stay away from all those who talk about burning down the suberbs/they will burn you next … most of them can be detected by when they try t give little boys hot foots/also they casually drop into square hangouts an tilt pin ball machines/they court pill head colored girls quite regularly. glad t see youre taking your time now/gotta go … noose is waiting joan baez is hot an bothered. type writer turns her on. door bells ringing must be the prospectors/anyhow be brave an watch for the tambourine man/ write you later.

Prior to signing his name in bold black felt tip, Dylan typed an amusing flourish of symbols and numbers before adding “an kisses.”

Glover and Dylan remained close for decades. Journalists turned to Glover as an authority on Dylan and his years in the Twin Cities. When Dylan played the Orpheum Theater in Minneapolis in September 1992, Glover performed in his touring band. In 1998, Glover was enlisted to write the liner notes for his collection *Bootleg Series, Vol. 4 Bob Dylan Live 1966, “The Royal Albert Hall” Concert*.

Dylan also made a confession about his 1966 motorcycle accident. The event has been shrouded in Dylanesque mystery, yet with Glover he was emphatic that the crash saved his life. **“I had done stuff for so long, I was moving for so long, moving so fast for so long — that it took years to get out of my system,”** Dylan explained. **“It wasn’t like, ‘Man, I had been on a binge since ’62 or ’63.’ Before that even, before that. I had been on a binge my whole life, you could say. My whole life had been one big, long binge.”**

A binge of what, Glover wondered, nonstop travel or drug overdose or depleted constitution? **“Forgetfulness,”** Dylan continued, explaining his outlook, **“forgetting everything, wiping all out, man. Keeping it all over there and just going straight ahead. … Don’t look back. Doing who knows what? You know what amazes me? On this whole thing? We listen to radio nowadays — and there’s so much music that was influenced by me. Most of it, you know, even the Beatles, now that they’re — hey, I’m not bragging when I say this, or nothing like that. But for a cat to actually say, ‘Well, I changed popular music’ [laughs], man, what a hell of a statement is that? I can actually say that, man, and it blows my mind. … All these people are just doing, in one kind of phase, what Bob Dylan was doing back in those days, you know?”**

Glover wondered if his old compadre felt a sense of pride for changing music history. **“Yeah, really do, really do feel a sense of pride … on one level. On another level, no, it’s nothing at all — of course not.”**

# January to October 1971, Anthony Scaduto (New York Times)

Source: *The New York Times Magazine*, US newspaper, 28 November 1971, Section 6, pages 34-38, 40, 43, 45-46, 48, 50, 52.

From interviews that were conducted in New York City, New York.

**'Won't You Listen to the Lambs, Bob Dylan?'**

The setting is Madison Square Garden, Aug. 1, 1971: George Harrison, former Beatle, leads a group of fellow superstars in a Sunday benefit performance to aid citizens of East Pakistan. Twenty thousand fans are at each of two performances and thousands of others in the street hope to crash inside, for this promises to be one of those Events that later become part of larger myth.

"Bob Dylan's gonna be here." Through the lobby, up in the galleries, down on the sports floor where music industry executives have paid $100 each for the privilege of settling their $400 suits into hard wooden folding chairs, spreads the rumor: Bob Dylan, whose own myth surpasses the hyped-up *mystique* of the entire rock culture, might possibly make one of his rare public appearances.

For a while the concert almost makes the audience forget Mr. Dylan. Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan, two giants of raga, play the folk music of their suffering land. And then Harrison and his gang of friends, including Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, Leon Russell and Billy Preston, prance through a dozen numbers, bringing the house roaring down after each song.

Near the end of the concert, Harrison, deliberately low key, announces: "Here's a friend, Bob Dylan."

The words jolt, as if 20,000 people of all ages and life-styles are playing Ben Franklin, kites in the storm clouds, getting an electric charge. One young man, about 19, cries without embarrassment; a young woman, in a long purple velvet gown from the nineteen-twenties that barely covers her scruffy second-hand Army boots, leaps up and cries: "I can't believe it. I'm really seeing *Dylan*. I just can't believe it." Even a hardened rock writer turns to his lady and says: "Are we really seeing this?"

It is indeed Dylan, looking as young as on the cover of some of his earliest albums, carrying his acoustic guitar and singing those songs that had so much power in the days of protest and radicalism, among them, "Blowin in the Wind," "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." The concert is no longer simply an event. This is Dylan, singing songs many thought he would never do again, and his audience hangs on every word and note.

"He's coming back to protest," says one older record company executive, who will probably rush into his office the next morning and tell his stable to "write it like the old Dylan, baby."

Two months later, before an overflow audience at Carnegie Hall, Joan Baez, the woman with the most stunningly pure voice in pop music, introduces a new song.

"This is a song I've written for Bobby Dylan," she says (and does one simply imagine that her voice grows husky?). "I haven't seen him in four years. I'd be ashamed to sing it to him, but I'll sing it for you." And she sings:

*I'll put flowers at your feet*
*And I will sing to you so sweet*
*And hope my words will carry home to your heart*
*You left us marching on the road*
*And said how heavy was the load*
*The years were young, the struggle barely at its start.*
*Won't you listen to the lambs, Bobby?*
*They're crying for you.*
*Won't you listen to the lambs, Bobby?*
*They're dying…*
*No one could say it like you said it*
*We'd only try and just forget it*
*You stood alone upon the mountain till it was sinking*

*In a frenzy we tried to reach you,*

*With looks and letters we would beseech you*

*Never knowing what, where or how you were thinking.*[1]

Miss Baez asked that the rest of the lyrics not be quoted because she is still polishing the song, but she sang that Dylan had cast off his "cursed crown" and that the people who are still marching on the streets have reserved a place for him in the struggle. Please come back, Bobby, sang from every line.

"To Bobby" received the longest ovation at the concert. For the audience knew that years before he had provided Miss Baez with the "fingerpointing songs" (as Dylan called them) that enabled her to raise her voice in protest. They knew she and others have accused Dylan of turning his back on social commitment; many in the audience felt that of Dylan. Some critics have charged him with caring more about the steady growth of his investment portfolio than the problems of the world; of being a "capitalistic pig," to use the shrill rhetoric of the radical movement.

Those accusations clearly have stung Dylan. He denied during several conversations that he was being affected by the anger directed against him. **"It's all petty,"** he said. Yet a week later, at the beginning of November, Dylan went into the recording studio to cut a new single called "George Jackson" – a "protest song" about the shooting of the Black Panther in San Quentin, a song that could have been written by the young Bob Dylan who wrote "Blowin' in the Wind" in 1962.

The reaction of the audiences at Madison Square Garden and Carnegie Hall reflects the conflict that envelops Dylan's fans and former fans. Controversy has swirled around this small, thin, 30-year-old man with blue eyes, pale skin and a haunted look, since he first achieved notice as a folk singer in Greenwich Village 10 years ago. The controversy may possibly grow even more intense now that he appears to have returned to so-called message songs.

After writing "Blowin' in the Wind," Dylan went on to be worshiped by many as a "prophet" of the youth revolution. The deification has made him wealthy. Nine of his albums have been gold records, those selling more than $1-million at wholesale prices. His recording royalties alone have come to more than a million. He has undoubtedly received much more than that from royalties on sheet music, from radio air plays and from recordings of his songs by other artists.

Dylan's songs are among the most recorded today, but record sales and income cannot measure his effect. It is difficult to write of him without making it all sound an exaggeration. He touched the young, deeply. He sang "in a voice that came from you and me," as folk singer Don McLean puts it in his recent hit, "American Pie," a song lamenting the rock era's lost promise. For millions of the young, Dylan has been a poet of the streets, crying out in pain against society's indifference and stupidity; his voice, his word, his visions gave substance to their radicalization.

But in the last couple of years some who deified him as a leader of the radical movement have expressed fears that he is no longer lashing out against a System into which he refused to fit. He has burned himself out, they charge with much passion, has grown old, physically soft and mentally mushy, with a wife and children and a great deal of wealth to protect. Among his harshest critics are other singers, not only Miss Baez, who have written of Dylan's apparent loss of commitment and who are, in effect, throwing down a challenge to him. McLean, in "American Pie," writes of Dylan as "the jester… in a coat he borrowed from James Dean," who stole the king's "thorny crown" and then became "the jester on the sidelines in a cast."

Those who depended on him and believed he was a prophet cannot understand how the man who had written such lines as "the ghost of electricity howls in the bones of her face" (in "Visions of Johanna," a song from his most tormented period in 1965) could begin to write "Oh me, oh my, love that country pie" (from the "Nashville Skyline" album recorded in late 1967, when Dylan was writing down-home country songs).

It seems to many that Dylan is deliberately telling them he has backed away from whatever power he once had to affect their lives, telling them he has to be left alone, that all he wants from life is to write and sing pretty country tunes or Cole Porter-style lyrics. Even his voice has changed enormously. Back in the early years he sounded honest and full of pain, appearing at times to lack control, as he bent notes that had never been bent and stressed words that had never been stressed by any other folk – or rock – singer. He had a nasal quality that made him sound like a man from a chain gang whose nose had been broken by a guard's rifle butt.

Most recently, in his records and occasional concerts, Dylan has been singing in his richer, natural voice – the voice that only close friends were permitted to hear in the privacy of their living rooms, when he would sing "This Land Is Your Land" and other Woody Guthrie songs. It is a voice that some critics insist proves he wants to be another Johnny Cash, or even Kate Smith, playing the big prime-time TV shows.

Bob's reaction to the attacks on him is, basically, that they are attempts to dictate to him, and he is not about to permit anyone to dictate his life, or his art. In one of our conversations for an unauthorized biography I was

[1] "To Bobby." Words and music by Joan Baez. ©1971, Chandos Music. Used by permission.

writing about him, Bob said of those attacks:

**"It's fantasy, created by cowardly men who turn wheels."**

"What kind of wheels?" he was asked.

**"Media wheels. I said 'not to follow leaders, to watch parking meters.' It was that simple. I wasn't going to fall for that, for being any kind of leader. The media made up that crap – that Dylan, the Rolling Stones, the Beatles were leaders. We didn't know anything about it, and what's more didn't want any part of it…**

**"Nobody should look to anybody else for their answers. But the times are tough. Everybody wants a leader. In fact, everybody wants to *be* a leader…"**

In all our conversations over the past several months, Bob has stressed that he is simply trying to be as good a musician and songwriter as he can and that everything else is extraneous, and even destructive. More than six weeks after his Madison Square Garden appearance, still up high with excitement over the performance, full of that enthusiasm that has always been so infectious, he asked:

**"Did you see that concert, man? Wasn't it the most incredible show ever? The audience has changed. They're into the music now. They've grown up, and it's the music that's most important. They heard it and dug it. Just incredible."**

What he has been trying to do over the past couple of years is simplify his life, so he can focus completely on the music he is writing and recording.

He had worked in a converted store near his Greenwich Village home almost every day that he was in town over the last year or so, but even that studio hideout began to make too many demands on his time and his head. The phone number had a way of getting around, and friends who wouldn't dream of knocking at his door at home would knock on his studio door. **"I don't have a studio anymore,"** he said.

He no longer has a manager either. His contract with portly Albert Grossman, the former Chicago folk-club owner who became Dylan's manager in 1961, ran out a couple of years ago. Dylan refused to renew it. **"I haven't seen him in years,"** Dylan says. His only aides now are his secretary and her assistant, who spend much of their time protecting him from hucksters who want him to endorse guitars, sweat shirts or soapsuds, as well as from writers and fans who want to pick his brain, and mendicants who want him to perform at benefit concerts.

**"I'm just doing what I used to do in the old days,"** Bob says. **"My music. Trying to keep my life simple. I'm making a new album and I'm trying to devote all my energies to that. I'm helping other people out, making records with them, helping one friend edit a film.**

**"I'm studying agriculture,"** he joked in a phone conversation with me. **"Doing what you're doing, man, just standing in a phone booth. Hang out in the garment center a lot.**

**"Just trying to keep things nice and simple."**

He had originally blown into town, into that Greenwich Village folk-club world that meant so much to his musical development, one terribly cold day in January, 1961. He was a manic, Chaplinesque figure then, a strange little 19-year-old kid, very nearsighted, skinny, with a baby face that reminded some of a beatific choir boy. He was totally immersed in Woody Guthrie, imitating Guthrie's songs, speech, dress and mannerisms.

He had been born Robert Zimmerman, the son of a Jewish merchant in Duluth, Minn., on May 24, 1941, and raised in Hibbing, a mining town near the Canadian border. His father, Abraham, who died in 1968, operated a hardware, appliance and furniture store. His mother, Beatty (pronounced Betty), encouraged his youthful interest in poetry and music. Bob refused to take formal music lessons as a child, but before his teens he was pounding out rock 'n' roll songs on the piano his parents bought for him and his younger brother, David.

Old friends describe the Zimmermans as "a typical Midwest family." But Bob resented the whole Midwestern straitjacket and began to picture himself as a James Dean-style rebel. Almost as soon as he entered the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, he began to deny the existence of a family. He told everyone that his name was Dylan, that he was an orphan from the Southwest, part Indian, and had spent most of his childhood running away from orphanages and foster homes. He wrapped himself in tales of hard-travelin' and in myth, refusing to permit anyone to know him. All the while, he was being supported by his father.

"Bob was afraid of people, actually," recalls a friend from the early folk days. "He's still incredibly shy."

**"I was just a lad from the Midwest wanting to make it,"** Bob said during one conversation with me.

He dropped out of college after the first six months to pursue his dream of "making it" and hitchhiked to New York. Within the astonishing space of a year he had become a folk hero, creating folk protest songs – "stories" he called them – of the American Dream grown nightmarish, songs describing the chains still binding mankind. "Blowin' in the Wind" was certainly his finest song from that period, but it was only one of many: "Masters of War," "With God on Our Side," "Only a Pawn in Their Game," and dozens more, songs that even amazed other

artists. Pete Seeger was running around the Village at the time proclaiming Dylan a genius, and many others agreed.

But Dylan soon lost his enthusiasm for protest song, which he considered a dead end in terms of his career and his music. He wanted to be a pop star ("Another Elvis," as he once said), and he also wanted to try in song what had been accomplished in poetry by writers who were beginning to affect him – Rimbaud, Brecht, Villiers and others. By 1964 he was writing more personal songs, introspective lyrics describing the artificiality of human relationships, of love gone wrong. Not standard love songs (although some are among the finest love ballads in pop music), but cries of anguish that plucked a chord in his young audiences. To a woman raised on the Hollywood tinsel dream of love-for-evermore-and-happiness-ever-after he wrote:

*You say you're looking for someone*
*Who'll pick you up each time you fall*
*To gather flowers constantly*
*An' to come each time you call*
*A lover for your life an' nothing more*
*But it ain't me, babe,*
*No, no, it ain't me, babe,*
*It ain't me you're lookin' for, babe.*[*]

The following year he turned to an electric guitar, put a band behind him and became a rock 'n' roll star, idolized as a living James Dean. Folk purists – who had condemned his unorthodox style in the beginning and later were forced to accept him as a true folk artist – charged that he had "sold out." But to the young he became even more of a spokesman and a leader, for the amplified band behind him created an enormous tension between performer and audience and added a cutting edge to his song-poems, which were harsh condemnations of men and women caught in societal trap, one-dimensional men imprisoned by a culturally induced lifelessness:

*Well, I try my best*
*To be just like I am*
*But everybody wants you*
*To be just like them*
*They sing while you slave and I just get bored*
*I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more.*[**]

His own anguish, sparked mostly by demands that he behave as a superstar and a demigod, his realization that fame was enslaving him as fully as all those mindless men he had criticized in song, almost destroyed him.

**"The pressures were unbelievable,"** Bob says. "**They were just something you could never understand because they did such weird things to my head."**

In the summer of 1966 he was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident near his home in Woodstock, N.Y., to which he had retreated when fame enveloped him. He cut himself off from almost everyone, using the months of recuperation to work through the chaos his life had become, remaining in seclusion in upstate New York for a couple of years.

He began to feel isolated in Woodstock, though, began to miss the city streets which had been the source of his most powerful song images. In the fall of 1969 he bought a house in Greenwich Village only blocks from the Gaslight, Folk City, the Bitter End and other clubs in which he had hung out and developed into a renowned urban folk-song figure.

"Bob came over to visit me at the end of 1969, right after he got back to the Village," says Terri Thal, who managed him briefly in the early folk days. "He wanted to see some of his things that I still have, like his old corduroy cap. And he told me:

" 'I'm completely uptight. Got all this money and don't know what to do with myself. Got a great wife, great kids, but don't know what to do. Can't perform any more. I hate performing in front of big audiences. But I guess I'll have to, 'cause I don't have anything else to do. Ain't done any writing in a while. Can't seem to write.' "

[*] "It Ain't Me, Babe." Words and music by Bob Dylan. ©1964, M. Witmark and Sons. Used by permission.

[**] "Maggie's Farm." Words and music by Bob Dylan. ©1965, M. Witmark and Sons. Used by permission.

Miss Thal adds: "He was looking for a piece of his past. He wanted to find out what he had missed in the music world that he had been out of for a while. Plus actually looking to catch up with his past."

Last January, after living in the Village for more than a year, Bob told her:

"I've been finding it just by being around. All I really needed was to sort of get back into the beautiful world."

Now that he is living in the Village again Bob is almost as anonymous as in the days when he was unknown and a "street cat" able to wander along Bleecker Street and into bars and folk clubs without being besieged by fans. He takes long walks along Village streets, sometimes drops in at some of the clubs to see musicians who interest him (like singer Dave Bromberg), and is seldom recognized. Dylan spotters report a phantom appearance this month on New York's educational television station, Channel 13, with a group of poet Allen Ginsberg's friends, on "Free Time." Those who caught the show say Dylan chanted Ginsberg's poems and played his electric guitar as just another of the musicians and poets present: though the camera panned to him frequently, he was never introduced.

A great number of young men are affecting a Bob Dylan look, which permits Bob to be almost invisible. Even when he is recognized, he is seldom accosted. Walking down MacDougal Street late one afternoon with an interviewer, Bob seemed to tense slightly when a young man who passed him flashed a look of recognition and turned to pass Bob again. It seemed likely he would ask for an autograph, or demand an explanation of the songs Bob was writing, as so many had done in the "Blowin' in the Wind" days. But he simply checked Bob out, satisfied himself that he had actually seen Bob Dylan, and walked away.

He fits every possible definition of the term "superstar," but he refuses, for the most part, to play the role. He has no personal press agent, no fan club. He refuses to make the TV talk-show circuit. He has appeared at only one official Dylan concert in more than five years (at the Isle of Wight in the summer of 1969, when he performed before more than 200,000 people). He seldom grants interviews, and then usually only to those whom he can trust or whom he is trying to keep from writing something he might not like.

But Dylan is a complex man, and his words and actions are often a series of contradictions. He carefully gauges the span between interviews and periodically sits down for one of those inane question-and-answer periods he honestly loathes because, as he put it in discussing one such interview, **"I felt it was time to have something out about Bob Dylan."** He is also concerned to a degree about the way his fans perceive him. In one conversation he said:

**"Did you see the John Lennon interview in Rolling Stone? Whew! Lennon was completely out of control. He's leaving no place for himself. Me, I gotta keep a place for me. I like Lennon though. I dig him a lot; he's given me a lot of insight. Don't ask me how. It's just good that he's around."**

In wanting to "keep a place for me," Dylan clearly recognizes that a major part of star's mystique is to be unobtainable, that the mystique may vanish if the star is foolish enough to reveal everything; Dylan is not about to let it happen to him.

He is perhaps the most completely private man ever to become a public figure. "He was paranoid, he never wanted anyone to know anything about him," recalls Hibbing High School classmate. That paranoia-privacy is the root of all the Dylan myths; on occasion he deliberately created an aura of mystery, but mostly he felt he needed to hide his inner self in order to protect his soul. As he has written in one song:

*The man in me will hide sometimes,*
*To keep from bein' seen*
*But that's just because he doesn't want*
*To turn into some machine.*[*]

His demand for privacy for himself extends to those closest to him: his wife and children. He married Sarah Lowndes on Nov. 22, 1965, in a judge's chambers in Mineola, Long Island. She is a former Model, almost as tall as Bob, dark-haired and very attractive, described by a friend as "never into that phony New York model scene, just a Zen-peaceful woman who helped Bobby survive." They have three boys and two girls, ranging in age from 1½ to 7.

In all our discussions about what I was going to reveal of his private life in my book, Bob's greatest concern (**"Like any man's,"** he insists) was over his wife and children. **"You can leave them out of it, right?"** he asked. Told it was impossible to write of Dylan without writing of his family, he said, simply: **"Bull—."** I asked him whether he would leave his wife and children out of his autobiography. Bob replied: **"Sure, I'll write about them, of course. But in my style, not yours."**

Years ago, anger would make Dylan appear to be a spoiled child, about to throw a tantrum. Now he has much greater control over his anger, the fury smoldering and ready to explode but held in check by a great discipline, like Marlon Brando in "On the Waterfront." Except when he feels Sarah and the children are threatened.

[*] "The Man in Me." Words and music by Bob Dylan. ©1970, Big Sky Music. Used by permission.

Last year, A. J. Weberman, the self-styled "Dylanologist" who has made a career of interpreting Dylan's lyrics and going through his garbage to learn all he can of the man he evidently both idolizes and hates (and mostly, to make himself as famous as Dylan), formed the "Dylan Liberation Front." An assorted group of radicals, freaks, Village musicians and lost souls, the D.L.F. engaged in street theater in front of Dylan's home, demonstrating against his apostasy. Weberman has also written of Dylan's "sellout" in the radical press and has made radio, TV and campus appearances "because I want to harass Dylan and make him come back to his people."

In early October, Weberman was sifting through the Dylan trash once again for the first time in months when Sarah came out the front door. She became understandably enraged at the sight of the scavenger on her doorstep. "Get out of here," she shouted. "Get out of that garbage, you leech." Weberman muttered something about the garbage being "public property" and Sarah turned to chase a magazine photographer who was with him down the street. A TV cameraman shooting a feature on Weberman packed up his equipment and left, with Weberman sheepishly following him.

Several hours later Bob went over to Weberman's tenement home at Bleecker Street and the Bowery, attacked him on the street and bounced his head on the sidewalk. Weberman says he fought Dylan to a draw (he has at least 30 pounds and a couple of inches on Dylan).

Bob has put on a little weight in the last few years, but he is still very thin. He is several inches under 6 feet and probably weighs no more than 135 pounds. He has seethrough blue eyes. His face is less drawn, is fleshing out somewhat, but the skin is still taut and almost translucent. When he speaks, the cowboy sound he had affected in the early years slips through only occasionally. Today, there are traces of his Midwest background in his voice, with phrasing from the city, Oklahoma and upstate New York thrown in. He recently shaved off the mustache and wispy beard he had worn around his jawbone for the last couple of years, and his brown hair once more rises from his head in a profusion of curls.

He now looks somewhat like the photos on his 1965 album, "Bringing It All Back Home," his first album to use electric instruments, which contained some of his most effective "radical" songs. The change in appearance is another of the "clues" that make some of his fans believe he will once more write songs of commitment, for Dylan's outer appearance has always changed with every change in his style and mood, from folk, to protest, to radical rock-superstar, to country and Western singer.

Ever since his motorcycle accident he has gone through what some have called a metamorphosis. In working through the problems created by fame, he has returned to Judaism, a heritage he had always denied. He has studied Hebrew, has made several trips to Israel (he visited the Wailing Wall on his 30th birthday) and has celebrated his renewed belief in God in several songs since the accident, most recently in "Father of Night," on the "New Morning" album:

> *Father of night, Father of day,*
> *Father Who taketh the darkness away*
> *Father Who teacheth the bird to fly,*
> *Builder of rainbows up in the sky…*
> *Father of minutes, Father of days,*
> *Father of Whom we most solemnly praise.**[*]

Dylan's interest in Israel and Judaism led him, over a year ago, into an unexpected relationship with Rabbi Meir Kahane and the Jewish Defense League. He has reportedly attended several meetings of the J.D.L. and is rumored to have donated money to the organization; Rabbi Kahane will say only that Dylan has "come around a couple of times to see what we're all about." Dylan's enthusiasm for the militant Jewish organization has brought down the wrath of some in the radical movement. To many young radicals, including Jewish kids, Israel is simply another one of those fascist states propped up by a fascist American Government, and Dylan's fervent support of Israel and his overpublicized contacts with the J.D.L. are to them a further indication that he has sold out to the political right he condemned.

Bob appears uncommitted about the J.D.L. **"My enthusiasm has altered,"** he says. **"In this day and age one can't put one's faith in organizations and groups just like that. There has to be a certain amount of comradeship, root beginnings and moral justifications to allow one to put his mind and body on the line."** As he talked, carefully phrasing his reply so that it could also apply to the commitment that Baez and others are asking of him, one thing became dear about Dylan: He has always been so vague and so elusive because, as a man forced to wear a crown, he has become trapped in the myth and must choose his every word with great deliberation. **"What a life to have to lead,"** he said at one point. But he added: **"I can't complain, actually."**

Among a certain element of the radical movement that is distressed by Dylan's "sellout," a story is making the

[*] "Father of Night." Words and music by Bob Dylan. ©1970, Big Sky Music. Used by permission.

rounds concerning a meeting between Dylan and Black Panthers Huey Newton and David Hilliard. About a year ago attorney Gerald Lefcourt wrote a letter to Dylan at Hilliard's request, asking him to do a benefit or in some way to help raise funds for Panther trials. Eventually, Dylan met with Newton and Hilliard, the story goes, and as soon as they sat down Dylan began to lecture them on their anti-Zionist pronouncements. Within minutes Hillard leaped up, angry, and headed for the door shouting: "Let's get out of here! We can't talk to this Zionist pig!" Newton asked him to "cool it" and Hilliard returned. The conversation reportedly continued for another hour or more but was a standoff. "I can't help you as long as the Panthers are against Israel," Dylan is said to have told them.

Asked about the story recently, Bob said: **"What meeting? Why don't you talk to Huey about it?"** Newton was in China at that time, Hilliard in prison, and the story could not be confirmed by Panthers who are supposed to have been there. Dylan won't concede it took place. Those radicals who tell the story insist they heard it from Newton.

If his political commitment seems to have faded, Dylan has not lost the enormous capacity for work which his friends from the early Village days remember. He's up and working by 10 A.M. or so, and often goes late into the night. Among his projects over the past year has been his autobiography. **"I never thought of the past,"** he told me. **"Now I sometimes do. I think back sometimes to all those people I once did know. It's an incredible story, putting together the pieces. It's like a puzzle, as far as stories go. I meditate on it sometimes, all that craziness… I really like to work on it."**

He spends much of his days, and many nights, in the recording studio, laying down tracks of his new material, working with other artists (including George Harrison), and he continues to write new songs. He is also beginning to work out a format for a one-hour TV special which he planned to tape before Christmas. **"A TV show with just songs,"** he said. **"One hour of songs. There'll be a lot of new stuff, from my new album."**

That new album will contain totally fresh material, and friends who have heard some of the songs believe it will be another reversal of field that will startle Dylan fans much as "Nashville Skyline" did in 1963 (*sic*). At that time most rock groups were getting heavily into electronic tricks, and "Nashville Skyline," filled with easy-listening country songs, pulled the plug from the wall; most musicians promptly joined Dylan in the country sound.

Dylan insists his friends are hearing things in his new songs that are not there. **"Nobody's going to be startled,"** he maintains. He refuses to discuss the album further, except to say he is producing it himself. He is so secretive about his new work that few people at his record company, Columbia, have heard the tapes. Reportedly, they are locked in a vault and only Columbia president Clive Davis is permitted to touch them.

But this month Bob released a two-record set called "Greatest Hits No. 2," the title of which is not quite accurate. While it contains primarily songs from previous Dylan albums and singles, there is some fresh material on it. One cut is "Tomorrow Is a Long Time," recorded live at Carnegie Hall in 1963, a strangely moving love song he's never before released. Another is "When I Paint My Masterpiece," a song Bob wrote about a year ago that was recently recorded by The Band. Three other cuts are newly recorded versions of old Dylan songs, "I Shall Be Released," "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere" (with Happy Traum singing harmony on both) and "Down in the Flood."

Bob had come over to my apartment one afternoon in October and he put the disc on the turntable. He then wandered over to stand under the speakers suspended near the ceiling, listening intently, quite serious. The song he seemed most excited about was "When I Paint My Masterpiece." I remarked that his version has created a completely different song from The Band's, that The Band sort of ran through it nice and easy while Dylan has built a suspense and tension that approaches some of the more stunningly angry songs he was doing back in 1965. **"Yeah, maybe so,"** he said. **"Glad you like it."**

"Masterpiece" begins with Leon Russell on the piano for a couple of bars, joined by an electric guitar riff, the whomp of a drum, and Dylan suddenly coming in: "Oh, the streets of Rome…" Immediately, the sensation is a flashback: This sounds almost like Dylan from six years ago, the days of "Like a Rolling Stone," which is probably still the most moving song he's ever recorded. Bob's voice on "Masterpiece" reinforces the *déja vu* mood. The rich country sound is less noticeable than at any time in the last couple of years; his voice is harsh and grating once more, not quite filled with the youthful anger that had struck so deep, but approaching it.

Is it possible, as some Dylan confidants suggest, that these songs and the material he has written for the album signal the return to commitment that has been demanded of him? You won't get the answer from Dylan:

Q. Bob, one guy who apparently is pretty close to you tells me, "Dylan's still the same cat who wrote "Blowin' in the Wind." When he's moved by something he jumps into it, and it's possible the East Pakistan benefit means he's taking a stand again on what's going down in the world. I think his next album will put him right in the center of the action again." That statement, and some other clues that Dylan freaks say they're sniffing in the breeze, seem to make people feel you're coming back.

A. **I don't understand your question.**

Q. Okay. Are you returning to some form of political commitment?

A. **I was talking to** [Village radical] **Louis Abolafia last night, the guy who ran for President. Told him he should run for President again. He was ahead of his time and should run again.** [Pause.] **Maybe I should run.** [Grin.] **Maybe you should run.**

Q. That's no answer. You're being vague.

A. **That's because I'm vague kind of a guy.**

Q. You haven't answered the question.

A. **Just use the quote. Let the quote stand.**

Even as he was saying this, Dylan had written and was preparing to record "George Jackson." In the song, Dylan writes that he woke up crying when he learned George Jackson, a man "I really loved," had been shot to death. Jackson was killed, Dylan thinks, because he was "too real," and because the "authorities" were "scared of his love." There is little doubt the song is Dylan's response to the challenge thrown down by Joan Baez, McLean and other artists, and by critics and radicals. During my conversations with him, Dylan demonstrated much concern about his public image. **"You can quote radicals who are up on me, right?"** he asked when told him I would be writing about radicals who are down on him. **"You are not gonna paint me on only one side of the radical thing, are you?"**

Weberman appears to be one of those who have affected Bob. After hearing "George Jackson" for the first time, the Dylanologist was both ecstatic and dubious.

"I feel great," he said. "When I started harassing Dylan through the media, I didn't think my chances of affecting his head were too good. But the objective of the D.L.F. has been reached. I don't think Bob would have changed without the D.L.F.'s pressures."

Weberman adds, however:

"I hope Bob puts his money where his mouth is. If he just sings these songs, it's no more than empty rhetoric. I hope he goes beyond that, gets involved with the real problems."

Within days after the song was first played on the radio, others raised questions about Dylan's motivations. Said one young singer who was radicalized by the Bob Dylan of the mid-sixties: "I just don't believe he means those words. I don't believe he loves George Jackson, or relates to any of it anymore. It all smacks of calculation, of Dylan being afraid he's losing his audience. People believed it when he sang about Emmett Till and Hattie Carroll and all the others who were destroyed by the system. I believed it back then. I don't believe it about 'George Jackson.' "

Dylan continues to provide the stuff of fantasy for fans who seek to entwine their lives with his, to satisfy their own needs. But it is clear he has been afraid that if he speaks out again in protest he will once more be burdened with that prophet's cloak that weighed so heavily on him. As he has written of that burden:

> *Storm clouds are raging all around my door,*
>
> *I think to myself I might not take it more.**

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* "The Man is Me." Words and music by Bob Dylan. ©1970, Big Sky Music. Used by permission.

# January to October 1971, Anthony Scaduto (Let It Rock)

Source: *Dylan's views on Bootlegging*, in: *Let It Rock*, UK magazine, December 1972, pages 24-25.

From interviews that were conducted in New York City, New York. A different article to that published in *The New York Times Magazine*, containing different quotes from the same series of interviews.

**Dylan's views on Bootlegging**

I've interviewed Bob Dylan about a dozen times (yes, *dozen*) between January, 1971 and the end of October of that year, and so I approached Tony White's article on Dylan bootlegs(*Let It Rock* November) from a special vantage point: with Dylan's voice still fresh in my head. Since I'm one of the few guys Dylan has talked to for publication in the last few years, I'd like to add my thoughts – and Dylan's – to the growing literature on the bootlegs.

White's suggestion that Dylan deliberately sent the demos to Witmark so that they would be bootlegged, and that he withheld 'Tarantula' from publication for the same reason, makes Dylan appear to be an infallible master propagandist, a Big Brother orchestrating events and pulling the puppet strings with which he's hooked us, getting us to dance to his tune. It just didn't work that way at all. What follows are the facts, and my interpretation of them, based on the pretty good insights I've developed into Dylan's persona after more than two years of studying the man to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Dylan is a songwriter. He said that to me again and again:· **'I'm just a songwriter, man. Not a culture hero or any crap like that. Just a songwriter,'** to quote him in one context. He is a songwriter who happens to believe very strongly that his songs are the best around today, and in most cases is absolutely correct. He wants other artists to record those songs. To put it on a crass commercial basis, which people do more often than is wise, Bob's income from his recordings is rather small, compared to other pop artists who can sell three million dollars worth of each album produced. Bob's income is dependant to a great extent on royalties from recordings of his songs by other artists. Some of his biggest song hits were not recorded by Dylan, but by Peter, Paul and Mary, the Byrds, Manfred Mann, and so on. In most cases, the songs were recorded because the various artists involved were knocked out by Dylan's demos.

But the commercial part of it is only a very small factor; Bob's desire to get his songs into circulation goes beyond the loot he takes to the bank. No artist writes for his private scrapbook, Dylan least of all. If you're writing a book, you want it published. If you're writing songs, you want them recorded and played as widely as possible. If you're Bob Dylan and you know damn well you have something important to say, then you feel even more strongly about getting your material to the public. Especially if you know, as Dylan does so well, that to release three or four albums a year is to destroy your mystique by over-exposure. Bob told me his conception of the artist's mystique during one of my first interviews with him.

**"Did you see the Lennon Interview in Rolling Stone?"** he asked. **"Wheew! John is making a mistake, revealing so much of himself. If he keeps it up, he's not gonna have anything left for his fans. I can't ever be out front like that. I have to keep something in reserve."**

Those are the basic reasons Bob has made demos of his songs, not only the Witmark material available here in London but demos Bob has made for his own music publishing companies, Dwarf Music and Big Sky Music, much of which is in the hands of collectors in America.

Bob's attitude towards the bootlegs makes it clear to me that he feels precisely the reverse of the machinations Tony White ascribes to him. In October, 1971, months after my biography of Dylan was completed and sent off to my publisher, the New York Times Magazine asked me to do a portrait of Dylan. At first Bob refused to cooperate, but eventually he decided to give me an interview. He came bouncing around to my flat at the opposite end of Greenwich Village from his home, on three separate occasions. The first time he visited I very deliberately put 'Great White Wonder' (number c-iii in White's discography) on the turntable, hoping to provoke a reaction from Bob. The cut being played when he walked into my flat was 'I Shall be Released' and Bob promptly said: **"Oh, the basement tape. You should hear the originals. They're fantastic. The crap they're putting out doesn't even sound like me. And they're sure not in the order *I'd* put on an album."**· (An aside: the tape that Dylan cut with the Band in the basement of their home outside Woodstock on April 12, 1967 is called 'the basement tape' by everyone in the states, including Dylan himself. That tape was laid down as song demos for Dwarf Music. The version circulating in the states is more complete than White's list. It includes two other versions of 'Tears of Rage', one alternative of 'Mighty Quinn, two alternatives of 'Open the Door, Homer' – a song that Bob usually calls 'Open the Door, Richard' – and two versions of 'Apple Suckling Tree.') Back to Dylan, in my flat, reacting to the bootleg. We got to discussing all the bootlegs and Bob made it

plain that he objected to them on a number of levels: because he was being ripped off; because the quality of most of the stuff in circulation is absolutely rotten and sometimes doesn't even sound like Dylan: and because Bob has no artistic control over the order in which the songs appeared on the bootleg albums and tapes.

That last – the sequence of the songs – is the most important to Bob, from all the things he told me. Bob demonstrated that the next time he came around to my place, a few days later. He brought with him the acetate of 'More Greatest Hits', which wasn't scheduled to be released for another month. Bob laid the side containing the freshly recorded material down on my turntable, placing the needle down at the end of 'Baby Blue'. And he said: **"Listen to this. Running right into the next song from 'Baby Blue', I didn't think it worked. But now I do. They go together,"** And the next song came on, almost on cue: 'Tomorrow is a Long Time', the song he wrote of his woman in 1962, after she had left him to go to art school in Italy, and Bob repeatedly emphasized to me that he had structured that album the way a writer structures a novel or a book of poetry. **"I produced every bit of it,"** Bob told me. **"Everything fits together on it. not like that stuff they're bootlegging. That stuff ain't really me at all."**

Those discussions with Bob lead me to the only possible conclusion: That the idea Dylan deliberately permitted his material to be bootlegged is absurd. Dylan is quite angry at all the bootlegs. Mostly because he has always planned his albums and his concerts with great care, knowing that the sequence of his songs created the proper amount of tension and response in his audience. With the exception of *complete* bootlegs of his concerts, none of the material in circulation does Dylan any justice.

As for *Tarantula*, Dylan began to hate that book, as I explained in my biography – toward the end, he was writing it simply because he had a contract to fulfil. When it was completed, Bob held it back for a number of reasons, among them the fact that Allen Ginsberg had warned him that the literary Mafia in the states was lying in wait to shoot Bob down because his fans had been calling him a poet and no-one is a Poet in America unless the intellectual elite puts its brand on your brain. A couple of months before *Tarantula* was finally released in the states, Dylan told me why he was permitting it to be published: **"I'm letting it out now because I dig it now. It's a good book. I didn't dig it back then, but I dig it now."** Another reason for permitting its publication, Bob admitted, was that it was being bootlegged and he was once again being ripped off. Which is just the reverse of the theory that Dylan held it back so that the bootleggers would peddle it and add that much more to Dylan's mystique.

And that brings us to the assertion that Dylan began 'to look back' because the bootlegs forced him to look back. The truth is that Bob had begun the slow process of searching back into his past – and into some of the rather unpleasant things he saw in his soul which I describe in the biography – immediately after recovering from the motorcycle accident. That was long before the bootlegs began circulating. Hell, 'John Wesley Harding' was written in late 1967 and it is the ultimate looking back: It describes the ego bubble and false values that had enveloped Dylan in those insane, first years of super-stardom, when Bob almost came to believe that he was the savior of the jukeboxes that the more fanatic Dylan freaks were fantasizing him to be; and it describes his escape from that kind of mind-trap. Dylan said as much to me in discussing his looking-back meaning in that album. But, most important of all, because he went through chaos in the years before the accident and was almost destroyed by that chaos, both physically and psychically, Dylan began digging into his Judaic roots after the accident, into the Bible, seeking the road to his *personal* salvation. You can't look further back than that. And you don't need bootleggers to drive you back, not when you're as fragile as Dylan and find it impossible to cope with fans who want you to be either Christ or Lenin. Sometimes both.

The statement that Dylan hasn't given a single interview since the one in 1969 with Jann Wenner of Rolling Stone is simply not accurate. Wenner's was the last *published* interview in question and answer form. At least three men have succeeded in getting Dylan to sit still for interviews since Wenner's. As I've already pointed out, I've had at least a dozen interviews with Bob in two basic time periods in 1971 – one batch at the beginning of the year for my book, and the second in the Autumn for the magazine article. Each set of interviews were made up of a series of conversations spread over several weeks at a time, both face-to-face and over the telephone. Combined, those interviews come to a total of at least 30 hours. Those interviews have never been published in question and answer form because they would not fit that way into my book and in the magazine article. Also, some time in early 1971 Dylan did a long interview with Tony Glover, a friend from back in the Minneapolis days, later of Koerner, Glover and Ray, still an incredible harp blower and now a journalist. That interview was offered to a major American magazine whose editors jumped at the chance to get Dylan in print. But Bob later withdrew permission to publish it. Finally, somewhere between my two separate sets of interviews with him, Bob gave Robert Shelton – whose own book on Dylan may be published in a couple of years – an interview of a couple of hours; at least, that's what Shelton claimed the last time I talked to him.

One last point. In one sense, as White points out, Dylan did indeed spend years trying to escape from 'Blowin' in the Wind' because he was the kind of man who lived only for the present, a man who had to deny everything he had done in the past in order to raise to greater level whatever he happened to be into during any later period. In "My Back Pages' Bob very specifically waves goodbye to the 'Blowin' in the Wind' days: "Fearing not I'd become my enemy/In the instant that I preached… Ah, but I was so much older then/I'm younger than that now." But now that he has matured, and has somehow survived that frenzied period when he was moving so

fast that he could barely keep up with himself, Bob has mellowed a great deal about those protest days. He once commented to me on 'Blowin' in the Wind' **"It means a whole lot to me, that song. A whole lot."** When you get to understand Dylan's elliptical way of speaking, you learn to interpret his words by paying close attention to the feeling behind the words, and I know that what Bob was saying was: 'Blowin' in the Wind' is the most important song I ever wrote. And that's why he sang it at the Bangla Desh concert.

I don't mean to put down Tony White for his article. Within understandable limitations, it is a very fine job. But I know, from personal experience, that it is difficult to fathom Dylan unless you've been lucky enough to sit and talk with him, to pick his brains and let him pick yours.

# Early 1972, Unknown Interviewer (Esquire)

Source: *Esquire*, US magazine, May 1972, page 109.

The interview was conducted by telephone.

**The Metaphor at the End of the Funnel**

But is it art?…

Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour! But thou ain't, Milton; instead, we have Bob Dylan (Doctor of Music, Princeton University), whom Jack Newfield called "the Walt Whitman of the jukebox, the Brecht of the electric guitar." Of course we also have Norman Mailer, who said, "If Dylan's a poet, I'm a basketball player." Well, we believe that Mailer *is* a basketball player, Jack Newfield is the Dizzy Dean of the catachresis, and Bob Dylan is right on and groovy; and anybody who doubts that view of Dylan must confront the general and constant opinion of mankind for lo these five or six years at least. We, of course, are but one voice; other voices are those of Frank Kermode, one of the foremost English language critics; Stephen Spender, poet and former editor of *Encounter*; and photographer Art Kane. Professor Kermode, indeed, takes Dylan seriously enough to have planned a book on him (defeated by copyright technicalities); Mr. Spender; as you shall see, doesn't take him seriously at all; Mr. Kane responded to the images in six Dylan songs with the pictures on the following seven pages. Finally, we called up Dylan, after months of fruitless trying, and asked the Wordsworth of the microgroove himself.

**"Well how do *you* see me?"** he responded.

"Well, as a kind of human metaphor at the end of a corporate funnel," we answered.

**"Well, that ain't bad,"** he said, and hung up.

# 6-7 January 1973, Mike McGrath

Source: *Bob Dylan: Reluctant Messiah*, in:*19*, UK magazine, October 1973, pages 82-83, 85, 87.

The interview took place in London, England. Some of the quotes attributed to Dylan are probably from elsewhere.

**Bob Dylan: Reluctant Messiah**

**"That's one of the reasons I dig Britain."**

We were in my Mini in a London traffic jam and my eyes followed his finger to the Kensington Tyre Service yard, where a sign read: 'Would trespassers kindly remove their dentures as our guard dogs find them most indigestible'!

Mr. and Mrs. Dylan and I chuckled. On their way home from a trip to Israel, they had stopped off in London to do a little shopping and I was reacting to order as they consulted a list of shops they had to get to that day.

"We so rarely leave the five kids and the dog behind," explained Sarah Dylan, "that we must make the most of this and get everything done."

That night we caught up with a folk duo called Evensong, at Vincent's Club, in West End Lane, who turned out to be two likable guys, Tony Hulme and Mike Lawson. They looked at Bob as if he was an apparition from another planet.

While we talked to them afterwards the sound·of their current album filled the club and Tony told Bob he had been one of the 150,000 faithful followers who had pilgrimaged to the Isle of Wight four years ago for the Dylan concert there.

The guy who is still considered by many to be the only significant folk and protest writer of the 'Sixties smiled as he quoted a reviewer of that concert who said: "The words still come wriggling out of what appears to be a serious nasal blockage somewhere between the eyes".

"But you got your own back later," I reminded him, "at that Press conference when he asked what else you were doing in Britain and you said, with a straight face, 'We're shooting this film about the life of Christ in New York and I'm here looking for a team of donkeys for it'."

We chatted about *Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid*, the western Bob recently made in Mexico. Then a girl appeared pleading for an autograph on a copy of *Tarantula*, a book of Dylan's poems and prose. I mentioned that this seemed to be his year for books about him and his songs.

**"I'm grateful to all of these writers,"** murmured Bob, sipping his vodka. **"I'll get around to my own autobiography one day 'cos some of these publishers do seem to be short of books. That way, I'll get the chance to explain I never planned to be a youth leader through my songs. I never planned to lead anyone, spiritually or politically. Some people seem to be looking for a face to lead the way for them and, for a while, some of them got the idea I was the one to do it."**

For years, it was a problem to pin down the Dylan background because he developed an obsession for saying he was an orphan who had grown up in foster homes and had spent his teens touring the States with carnivals and circuses or just hitching rides with his harmonica and guitar.

Everyone in Hibbing, Minnesota, where he was born, remembers Bob as a loner. He never wanted anyone to know anything about him. Everything had to be kept a secret. At fifteen, they saw him tearing around riding a Harley Davidson and modelling himself on James Dean. Bob had taught himself to play harmonica, piano and guitar by the time he was twelve and formed groups with names like the Golden Chords.

His teenage steady, Echo Helstrom, remembers they saw so much of each other because of their mutual interest in music.

"We went steady the whole eleventh-grade year, or winter '57 and summer '58, although our dates had to fit in with when Bob wasn't practising with his band in garages around the neighbourhood. Nobody liked their music much, least of all Bob's voice. He and the band played around town fairly often, at school assemblies and youth clubs. But in big auditoriums people would laugh and hoot at him and I'd just sit there embarrassed, almost crying. He always had the amplifiers too high so it was practically impossible to hear his voice. I guess he lived in his own world 'cos apparently the audience's booing and laughing didn't bother him in the least.

"Bob was such a dreamer. We talked about each other's careers a lot and about some day leaving Hibbing. Neither of us could wait to get out of that town. With Bob, his career was all that mattered. He really wanted to show everybody… and he has, I guess. Though few people in Hibbing could even care."

He looked forward to going to college, the University of Minnesota, as it was in Minneapolis, and took him to a new world away from his home town. But he stopped going to classes almost completely after the first six months as a new obsession had entered his life.

Woody Guthrie's records began to dominate his life. In him, Bob found a ready-made identity for a young man in search of a strong image. In the weeks that followed, he learnt hundreds of Guthrie songs and performed them at folk clubs where anyone would let him. Early in '61, Bob arrived in New York, going straight to the folk clubs and coffee houses of Greenwich Village.

At the Café Wha?, he asked the owner, Manny Roth, if he could do a few songs. Afterwards, Manny took the microphone and told the audience: "This kid has just come into town and has no place to stay. Can anybody help out?"

There were half a dozen offers and while no one remembers now where Dylan spent his first night in town, there are those who remember very clearly his innocent appeal that seemed to mesmerise that audience.

Bob had been hanging around the Village for a few months when he found the ideal public stage, which, though initially not paying him a cent, gave him the perfect setting in which to be seen to advantage. It was Gerde's Folk City, owned by Mike Porco, and as Mondays were traditionally slow nights on the New York club scene, Mike decided to try an amateur night each week, which were called Gerde's Monday night hoots. Young faces of the folk world, like Judy Collins and Tom Paxton, would perform hoping the boss would give them a real paying job for a week or two. The Dylan break came when Mike Porco offered him two weeks' work with John Lee Hooker, an incredible black blues guitarist, who had quite a following.

The fortnight·brought him no reviews, no public acclaim, no fans queueing at the doors to get in. But it cemented the impression on the Village folkies that he was something quite special.

Joan Baez first saw him at about this time and well remembers: "He knocked me right out. He was so tiny. He was just astounding. I was totally absorbed. His style and his eyes and the whole mystique, whatever it was – I thought about him for days. He really made me happy that there was someone with that kind of talent around."

Dave Van Ronk, a successful folk singer of the time, and his wife, Terri, befriended Bob, who tended to live with them between the odd week elsewhere.

For a while, Terri tried to manage him and began taking tapes to record companies. An executive of Vanguard Records passed the word that Dylan wasn't their scene. Years later, after Bob became the most important singer in the folk world, this executive found at the bottom of his desk a note of his conversation with Terri which said: 'Bob Dylan – nothing doing'.

This period brought Bob his first opportunity to get into a recording studio, for Harry Belafonte and his producer were looking for a more-gutsy blues sound to back the Belafonte voice.

When a hard-driving harmonica was decided upon, Bob was offered the job and he was ecstatic until the session started. Then, he found Harry was such a total professional that he would do half-a-dozen versions of a song and study the replays in detail to achieve perfection. To Dylan, of the folk club circuit, where you make a mistake and laugh at it, this kind of perfection aggravated him so much he quit after only one song. As a result, he appears on only one cut of Belafonte's album, *The Midnight Special*, playing harmonica on the title song.

Another unexpected combination of the time for Spivey Records was Bob playing harmonica to the strong guitar and sandpaper-rough voice of Big Joe Williams.

Victoria Spivey was a prominent blues singer of the late 'Twenties and 'Thirties, with hits like *Blue Snake Blues*. Later, she formed her own record label and was turned on to the Dylan charisma seeing him singing and hanging around Gerde's every night. Two of the tracks he made at the time have been issued on an album called *Three Kings And The Queen*, featuring Miss Spivey, Big Joe, Lonnie Johnson and Rossevelt (*sic*) Sykes. They are: *Sitting On Top Of The World* and *Wichita*, on which Big Joe calls out "Little Junior's blowing his harp" and "Play for me, Junior".

The record producer, Len Kunstadt, recalls with awe now: "They got it down in one take and it sounded as if they had played together for years. Dylan was fantastic. Big Joe is a difficult artist to play with as he's never the same twice. I've never seen anyone follow him that well."

Miss Spivey summed the situation up simply: "Dylan's a born genius of a musician."

Soon after, he was offered another fortnight at Gerde's and a few faces, eager to offer advice, suggested he get a group together to back him. The Dylan retort should be moulded in words of gold and studied every day

by anyone who has ever been in a musical group: **"I won't join a group. Groups are easy to be in. When you fail in a group you can blame each other. When you fail alone, you yourself fail."**

Bob's opening brought a·rave review by Robert Shelton in the *New York Times*: "Although only twenty years old, he is one of the most distinctive stylists to play in a Manhattan cabaret in months… there is no doubt he is bursting at the seams with talent. Dylan's voice is anything but pretty, but a searing intensity pervades his songs. His music-making has the mark of originality and inspiration, all the more noteworthy for his youth. Mr. Dylan is vague about his antecedents and birth place, but it matters less where he has been than where he is going and that would seem to be straight up."

Bob was ecstatic about the review and carried it in his pocket until it fell to pieces. But in folk circles it caused more than a little jealousy, as no others had received such gushing treatment from Shelton. And, yet, success was to be spasmodic. Bob came to learn no two audiences are the same and a performer faces a different world with each performance.

Bob was ecstatic about the review and carried it in his pocket until it fell to pieces. But in folk circles it caused more than a little jealousy, as no others had received such gushing treatment from Shelton. And, yet, success was to be spasmodic. Bob came to learn no two audiences are the same and a performer faces a different world with each performance.

He was offered the chance to do an uptown concert at Carnegie Chapter Hall, a room on the fifth floor of the Carnegie Hall building with seats for 200. Only 50 of them were filled and he realised that good reviews have to be combined with good management and promotion.

There were other compensations though. Bob had given Carolyn Hester a song to record, *Come Back Baby*, and he was to back her on harmonica. Columbia recording manager John Hammond met him at the run through and was impressed.

"I saw this kid in the peaked hat playing not terribly good harmonica, but I was taken with him. I asked about the songs he had written and invited him to the studio for a demo-session. I kept thinking, *What a wonderful character, playing guitar and blowing mouth harp, he's gotta be an original.* When I heard his demos, like *Talkin' New York*, I flipped and had a contract drawn up right away. He, said he had no parents or manager, so I said I'd get him. the best deal possible. We usually start a new artist at two per cent of royalties, but I started him at four, which was really quite unprecedented."

The first Dylan album was recorded so quickly it only cost Columbia $402.

It was at this time that Albert Grossman, a manager of stature, came into his life. He had had a lot of success managing Odetta, plus Peter, Paul and Mary.

The first Dylan album didn't hit any sales records – 5,000 sold the first year, just enough to break even for Columbia, but over 200,000 had gone by the end of 1960 (*sic*).

Bob was now sharing an apartment with Suze Rotolo. Suze worked as a secretary at CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) and spent much of her time telling Bob of the latest segregationist brutalities. As a result, one of his first protest songs, *The Ballad Of Emmett Till*, was written for CORE.

Then came the song that is likely to last centuries alter all of us are gone – *Blowin' In The Wind*.

Bob said later: **"The idea came to me that you are betrayed by your silence. That all of us in America who didn't speak out were betrayed by our silence. Betrayed by the silence of people in power. So many of us refuse to look at what is happening. So many ride on trains, reading the paper, but they don't understand. They don't even care, that's the worst of it."**

*Blowin' In The Wind* boggled the minds of most people who heard it. It had been produced by a scruffy-looking kid who had been on the professional folk scene for less than a year and equalled, if not surpassed, Guthrie's *This Land Is Your Land* and Seeger's *If I Had A Hammer*.

In fact, even Pete Seeger was telling the world now: "This kid has to be a genius."

Grossman shrewdly used his other artistes to promote Dylan songs, on campus tours and concert dates, especially *Blowin' In The Wind*. Peter, Paul and Mary, who were enormously popular, sang it everywhere they went and they went everywhere, introducing it with the line: "We'd like to sing a song written by the most important folk artiste in America today, Bob Dylan".

Before long, Bob was almost as well known on campuses and almost as idolised as the folk queen herself, Joan Baez.

Mikki Isaacson, whose New York apartment was open house to the folk-singing crowd, remembers that during Bob's romance with Suze Rotolo he seemed to change. "When she was around, Bobby was so sweet. Sweetness wasn't part of his personality and neither was compassion. He was a bit of a terror. But when Suze was around he was gentle and loving." But Bob likes to be totally possessive about his women and Suze's mind was still eager to develop in other directions. Her parents invited her to spend the summer with them in Italy, but she had qualms about leaving Bob.

Saying she wanted to study, she finally did go, probably concerned that, otherwise, she could end up as just another very attractive musician's chick.

When she had gone, Bob seemed to fall apart. He got scruffier, started drinking heavily and there were all kinds of rumours about drugs. But the songs continued to flow from him – *Down The Highway*, *Don't Think Twice, It's All Right* and *Hard Rain*, which Pete Seeger started singing at all his concerts.

Out of the blue came an offer from BBC TV to sing a number in a TV play. Bob saw it as an opportunity to look up Suze in Italy, but she had left for home two days before he arrived.

The fact that he wasn't eager to encourage his girl to have a career of her own brought continued stress to the relationship when it was resumed. He had been working on his second album*, The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, and he had a Columbia photographer take a picture of him with Suze, walking arm in arm.

"She was the envy of every folk-singer's chick in the business," Terri Van Ronk remembers. "It was a big ego trip being on a record sleeve."

Well, it would have been to most girls. But reflected fame wasn't Suze's bag.

The second album was near completion when personality clashes again dominated the Dylan world.

Albert Grossman discovered that a few months earlier his boy had signed the Columbia contract when he'd been under age. Grossman had Dylan send a letter to them repudiating the contract and demanding the return of all tapes and masters. Columbia's attorneys pointed out that Dylan had been in the studio several times since turning twenty-one and the contract could not be broken.

John Hammond, who'd given Bob his first major recording chances, was in an awkward situation.

"Relations with Grossman were not the most pleasant because I got Bobby to repudiate that letter and to sign a new contract which made Grossman uptight."

Grossman might not have been able to break the contract, but he began demanding that Dylan be taken away from Hammond. At about the same time, Hammond says, he asked to be released as Dylan's producer and he suggested that Tom Wilson, a young black producer, take over. Bob hit it off well with Tom Wilson, which finally calmed Grossman down.

His national TV appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show* and the hit single of *Blowin' In The Wind* by Peter, Paul and Mary had made him a national name. Joan Baez included many of his songs in her concerts and appeared to be falling in love with him.

"I wanted people to hear him," she says now. "And I wanted to take care of him. I mean brush his hair and brush his teeth and get him up on stage on time."

Alter the Monterey Festival, he went to Joan's house in Carmel and lived there for several weeks, writing and playing dozens of songs to her. The Baez stature was such that her performing so many Dylan numbers cemented his reputation more firmly than ever.

His crowning moment was the Newport Folk Festival in 1963. Before he appeared, every time one of the performers mentioned his name, the 46,000 crowd cheered endlessly. He was finally introduced to a stunning ovation and sang *Playboys And Playgirls*, an acidic poke at some American institutions.

When he started singing *Blowin' In The Wind*, Joan Baez was so moved by it that she joined him, her clear soprano flowing above his harsh nasal voice. All those on stage rose from their chairs to harmonise Dylan's song – Pete Seeger, Theo Bikel, Peter, Paul and Mary and the Freedom Singers. The effect was electric. The audience seemed to feel that they had come to take part in a movement and had discovered a real live prophet.

Suze was at Newport quietly sitting watching, telling herself that Bobby couldn't really be interested in anyone as famous as Baez. She knew it was against his nature to fall for someone as prominent as himself.

A scene between them resulted in Suze going to live with her mother in New Jersey.

Albert Grossman had purchased a large house in Bearsville, near Woodstock, a hundred miles away in upstate New York, and Bob spent a lot of time there. Those close to him believed he was near to a breakdown. He'd wander through the woods most days and tried to bury himself in work on his next album, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy at the end of '63 had a significant effect on the folk world's new prophet. It made him realise that America had a larger percentage of maniacs than anywhere else. And it made him increasingly uneasy that his songs were making people treat him as some kind of messiah.

Maybe he was aware that leaders of causes are open targets for any mental case and in the States it is as easy to buy guns and bullets as a packet of mints.

A few weeks alter Kennedy's death Bob gave a disastrous speech which indicated how much the assassination had troubled him. In the plush ball-room of a New York hotel he had to accept the Tom Paine Award of the

Emergency Civil Liberties Committee for his work in the civil rights campaigns. The ballroom was full of gents in suits with their wives wearing all that money could buy, and Bob began to drink.

When he accepted the award his sentences ran into each other, saying his friends didn't have to wear suits to prove their respectability and meandering on about the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. He finished amid boos and the chairman kicking him under the table. In a letter of apology he told them he couldn't make speeches and that the next time he'd simply give them a couple of his songs.

When Suze returned to New York, she took an apartment with her sister, Carla. Soon after, Bob arrived and persuaded her to let him stay. He moved in with them but it wasn't a popular arrangement, as there were no doors on any of the rooms, no chance of privacy and Carla soon asked him to leave. Bob ignored her and stayed, unable to leave Suze.

Friends who visited them remember they spent plenty of time watching TV and arguing until he decided to get some fresh air and drive across America on his way to some singing dates.

**"I want to meet the people,"** explained Dylan. **"Stop in the bars and pool-halls and talk to real people. That's where it's at – people. Talk to farmers and miners. That's real."**

Outside a bar in one town he came across a singer, who was busking with his guitar, and after watching him awhile Bob asked if he could borrow it. He sang two numbers.

"Man, you sound just like Bob Dylan," exclaimed the young, penniless street singer.

**"Saw Dylan once,"** answered Bob impassively. **"A place in Greenwich Village. He's all right, I guess."**

Suze was left in New York for six weeks, not working as he did not want her to, and for several weeks he hadn't even bothered to call her. He battled with her sister again after the trip and it seemed ironical that the guy so many thought of, because of his writings, as a mystic who could lead them to a better life, couldn't, in fact, organise his own love life satisfactorily.

As some form of revenge, and it is said he did this with other people later, he wrote about Suze's sister in *Ballad In Plain D*. Finally, Suze returned to her mother in New Jersey. As far as she was concerned it was over.

In '64, Bob and the Beatles seemed to form a mutual admiration society. They got on together after he did a London concert (in '70 he wrote *I'd Have You Anytime* with George Harrison) and his British tour impressed him as the Liverpool boys and the Stones showed him clearly that rock 'n' roll was a pungent force again. Never again would he write a song of explicit protest, although he continued to perform the best of his protest songs.

At the Newport Folk Festival, he provoked a storm by singing negative, bitter, love songs of love gone wrong, a subject he surely knew about. Some reviewers pleaded with him not to give up protest. But they didn't stop him releasing an album of the songs he performed at Newport, *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*.

His fifth album, *Bringing It All Back Home*, which eventually became his first million seller, indicated the way he wanted to go now. This was rock with electronic instruments and was denounced as a complete sell-out by folk purists.

Joan Baez also felt Bob was betraying those committed to reform. They had been lovers for about a year, spending as much time together as possible, considering she lived in California and he in New York. They shared the bill on concerts together, but he tended to criticise Joan for her 'naiveté' about the actual value of commitment.

She was devoted to moving people to become forces for good in the nation. He implied these movements were a waste of time, saying he was more interested in rock 'n' roll than social involvement. When he flew to Britain for another concert tour Joan accompanied him, but didn't perform as her reputation here was nowhere near as established as his was.

A film crew accompanied him to shoot a Dylan documentary, ominously titled *Don't Look Back*, for a rift had grown between him and Joan that never mended. They never sang together again.

His transformation from folk to being a folk rock star had him worried early on. He was backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band at the Newport Folk Festival in July '65; and gone were the jeans and denim shirt. In their place he had added a black leather jacket, black slacks and a dress shirt and he carried an electric guitar.

As he sang *Maggie's Farm*, the audience looked bewildered. Most of them sat on their hands. When he swung into *Like A Rolling Stone*, there were shouts of derision. He later denied there were tears in his eyes as he walked off stage.

He was upset by the reaction at Newport, but it wasn't a complete disaster, however, as the publicity helped his album to sell and *Rolling Stone* shot up the charts. What's more, his next LP, *Highway 61 Revisited*, was acknowledged as one of the most brilliant pop albums ever made.

Late in '64, Bob met a dark-haired former model, Sarah Lowndes, through his manager's wife.

She was a frequent guest at the Grossman home in Bearsville and had a pleasantly relaxed outlook; maybe because she was studying Eastern religions.

In Greenwich Village, she stayed at the Chelsea Hotel, and when in town he began staying there to be with her. They were married on 22nd November 1965.

But he kept Sarah a secret, as he had kept so many things a secret, until someone broke the story in a New York newspaper the following February.

Sarah's main ambition was to be successful as a wife and mother, which she has fulfilled perfectly, first at their home in Woodstock, and later at a house they bought in MacDougal Street in the Village, which is a hive of activity with their three sons and two daughters.

From the beginning, his life was calmer with Sarah as she made it that way.

A motor-cycle accident in '66 hurt his back enough to keep him out of action for nine months. But the albums still came about once a year: *Blonde On Blonde*, *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline*. Each one had enough Dylan originality to make them big sellers.

But in June '70 a certain amount of furore took place when his *Self Portrait* album was released. It was his interpretations of other artistes' works – numbers like *Blue Moon* – and reviewers said it was dreary enough to be piped into elevators and waiting rooms. Four months later came his *New Morning* LP, which restored him to critical favour.

No more can he blame a manager for career decisions for in '69 he refused to sign a new contract with Albert Grossman. It was his decision entirely to go into movies like *Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid*. His only concern now is that should he dare to write one protest song again, he'll rekindle the flame that burned so strongly in the minds of so many who listened to him in the 'Sixties, crediting him with mystical powers and treating him like some prophet or messiah. He would have been flattered at being treated like another Elvis Presley. What he couldn't cope with was being treated like another Jesus Christ.

# 20 January 1973, Chet Flippo

Source: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Issue 130, 15 March 1973, pages 36-37.

The interview took place in the CBS Disco Studio, Mexico City, Mexico. Other reportage refers to conversation during filming in Durango, Mexico.

**Dylan Meets the Durango Kid: Kristofferson and Dylan in Mexico**

The camera loves Bob, and Bob might just love it back.

Durango, Mexico – Fifteen nervous chickens that were buried up to their necks in dirt blinked in the bright Mexican sun and looked as unhappy as it is possible for chickens to look. They were arranged in a line in the parade ground of a crumbling adobe fort at the foot of the dark Sierra Madre near Durango. Chickens aren't given much credit for intelligence, but these chickens knew that something was about to happen. They caught a glimpse of a dapper young gunfighter – Billy the Kid – and his scruffy bandits lounging 60 feet away around a stone fountain.

The outlaws interrupted their whiskey-guzzling to taunt Billy to try his trigger finger on the hapless fowl. He slowly raised his Colt .44 and squeezed off three shots:

Crack! The head of the center chicken suddenly separated from its body in a whirl of blood and feathers. Crack! The head of the next chicken exploded straight upward, spraying technicolor blood across the parched ground. Crack! Another chicken head took off in a slow, lazy arc against the Kodachrome sky before coming to rest 15 feet away. The outlaws laughed and Billy smiled. He was still Top Gun.

But before Billy and his boys could get back to their whiskey, three rifle shots shattered the silence and three more chickens became headless. Feathers were still drifting down as Billy whirled to confront Pat Garrett lowering a Winchester. "Hello, Billy," he rumbled.

"Cut!" snapped the short, gray man in a director's chair inscribed Sam Peckinpah. This was Sam Peckinpah's latest film, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid. It marks the first time he's dealt with the Old West since The Wild Bunch, and he had James Coburn as Garrett, Kris Kristofferson as Billy and Bob Dylan – making his feature film debut – as Billy's mysterious sidekick "Alias."

Peckinpah had added the chickens scene to the script, branding the opening sequence as clearly one of his own. Rudy Wurlitzer, the novelist (Quake, Flats, Nog and the script for Two Lane Blacktop) who wrote the Billy screenplay, sidled up to a visiting writer after the chicken scene and muttered, "That's Sam for you. I only had one chicken head in my script."

There could be no mistaking this set for John Wayne's Batjac location a few dusty miles back down Mex 45 toward Durango. For one thing, the Mexican government posted a nark here who, disguised as a swarthy caballero, wandered through the fort peering nearsightedly at everyone's cigarettes. For another, there was a discernible tension in the air, a sense that something terrible might happen any minute. Peckinpah was pushing and driving his cast and crew, and the strain was evident. The picture was said to be at least two weeks behind schedule and $1 million over budget.

Wurlitzer edged close and spoke sotto voce through his beard, "Hey, something heavy may happen." He turned to see if anyone overheard, and the sun rays sparkled on his gold earring. "The word's come down from the Cobra that if Sam doesn't get a full day of shooting today, he's fired. And he's behind, man. The Cobra – Jim Aubrey himself – is after him. If Sam goes, the cast walks and there goes the movie. Heavy?"

He gave a knowing glance and moved away as Gordon Carroll, the film's producer, walked up. Carroll, who could be perfectly cast as a Hollywood executive (tall, blond, tanned, slightly harried), watched preparations for closeups of another scene. The producer smiled a tight-lipped smile as Peckinpah exploded at a bumbling extra who strayed into camera range. "Goddammit! Get outta there!"

Rita Coolidge, who played a minor role (even more minor after she refused to do a nude scene), walked by and bumped her head on an earthen jug hanging from a tree. Carroll whispered, "The French critics will write that only Peckinpah could make her look stunned and cross-eyed at the first sight of Billy."

Carroll exited and Wurlitzer appeared from somewhere in his place. He continued his role as the Greek chorus of the set: "This scene is the most important. It's got to grab the audience. Sam wants it to be flashy so the audience will be into the picture without realizing how banal it is. Sam's really an old-fashioned director that way. That's Westerns, though, all banality. This scene here, man, wasn't in my script. There's no script left."

Then it's not a Wurlitzer? "It's a Peckinpah."

The writer, who had found Wurlitzer's original script tight and fast-paced and evocative of the legend (if not the fact) of Billy, had noticed lines and scenes being filmed daily that weren't in the script and inquired about those changes.

"Well," Wurlitzer turned his gaze inward. "Sam does the changes, mostly."

* * *

Dylan did his only scene of the day almost before anyone realized he was there. Scene 483, Take 4, found him seated on a stone wall, watching Kristofferson blasting away at cans and bottles. Dylan, responding to Peckinpah's cue, applauded by beating on a can with a stick.

The cast broke for lunch in a nearby tree-shaded courtyard of the fort, built for the Mexican army in the last century.

Dylan had taken a few bites of his steak when two young American hitchhikers, who had talked their way onto the set in hopes of getting work, sat down a table away and tried to cadge food from the cast. They began talking loudly: "What's happenin' with this movie, man? Is Dylan gonna sing or what, man? What's the story? Where is he, man?" Dylan bolted up and hurried to his camper. The two youths were banned from the set and publicist Larry Kaplan said it wasn't the first time such an incident had occurred.

"It's a complex situation," he said. "At first, you say 'Bob Dylan, the fucking legend.' And it takes a couple of weeks to get past that to the man underneath. He's really shy and withdrawn, and it's genuine. Reporters here have really spooked him. They follow him around and of course he won't talk to them, so they end up interviewing everyone else about him. It gets bad when you have reporters asking Mexican extras about Bob's kids."

After lunch, Kristofferson invited the writer to sit and sip cognac with actors Emelio Fernandez and Jorge Russek.

Kris, who had pleasantly surprised the cast with his portrayal of Billy, looked very close to what the script called for: youthful, but hard, highly charged with "erotic energy," with "very blue eyes" and "sensual lips." Russek offered him a slug of cognac, "for your throat, man."

"Thanks, you silver-tongued devil." Smacking his lips, Kristofferson turned to the writer. "Dylan was interested," he said, "interested in making movies and in Sam's stuff. I called him up and he said, um, there's a lot of heavies down there. I said, shit, you can get paid for learnin'. So he went and saw a couple of Sam's films and got really enthusiastic and decided to come down here, and he brought Sarah and the kids. He had already written the title song but he was still a little reluctant about acting. I said, hell, the only reason I got in was to learn about acting. He said, but then they got you on film. I said, shit, they got you on record anyway. Come on, we'll have a ball. I still feel guilty about sayin' that."

He laughed, shifted his weight in his canvas chair, and flipped a cigarette butt at a mud-encrusted pig that was rooting underfoot. "The first day we shot was also Bob's first day on camera. We had to be ridin' horses after these turkeys and he ropes 'em. Well, Bob hadn't ridden much and it was hairy riding, down in gullies and off through a river.

"And then we had to rope these damn turkeys. I couldn't do it but Bob did it all. I couldn't believe it. I've seen prints and he's got a presence on him like Charlie Chaplin. He's like a wild card that none of 'em knew they had. I think they just hired him for the name and all of a sudden you see him on screen and all eyes are on him. There's something about him that's magnetic. He doesn't even have to move. He's a natural."

What about his role as Alias?

Kristofferson lowered his voice as Peckinpah called for silence for rehearsal. "Well, me and Rudy just got through writing a new scene for Bob. The sense is supposed to be that times are changin' and there's a push for me to get goin'. The way the scene was, the lines were embarrassin', like 'Hey, dude, hand me that apple,' but I was past complainin'. Rudy, who had to write it, hated it, and Dylan, man, it just blew his funk. So we changed it and now we gotta show it to Sam.

"The trouble is, man, Dylan ain't had a chance to talk. His speakin' lines have been a buncha stutterin' that really pissed me off. He's called Alias, and in every fuckin' scene the sonuvabitch is put in different wardrobe and he looks entirely different and that could be why he's called Alias. And that damn stutter thing – that could be as big a defense as his change of clothing. Who knows? I thought it was supposed to be like the fool in Lear. He sees it all, he knows the whole legend and can see where it's all going. But we never relate as characters. We're always chasin' turkeys or some damn thing and don't even look at each other. But – the fucker's fantastic on film."

Assistant director Newt Arnold bellowed Kris' name for rehearsal and he stomped off, two-inch silver spurs jingling.

Peckinpah tried to get an interior scene in a bar going later in the day but it went badly. The hundred extras who lounged out of camera range kept chattering and he finally burst out of the bar, shouting and waving his arms: "Who are these fucking people? Get out, get them out! Everybody out! Move, goddammit!" The voice, like a bolt of thunder, did its job. People panicked and scattered in all directions, leaping fences, trampling each other, kicking pigs and dogs out of the way.

By late afternoon, things were worse, and it was time to ferry the press corps back to Durango. Wurlitzer, too, was preparing to leave.

"It's happening, man," Wurlitzer said. "Sam knows he's losing to Dylan. He's giving a screening of The Getaway in town tonight, but everybody wants to go to Mexico City with Dylan for his recording session because that's heavier. Sam'll be counting heads at that screening, and he also just called a 6:30 rehearsal for Monday morning because he knows we won't be back till after 8. But I don't care, man. I've got to get away from here for a while. See you at the airport."

Durango Airport at 6:30 Saturday evening was a bleak study in gray stone and gray faces. The only plane on the only strip, a dented Aero Mexico 727, was warming up its engines for takeoff and there was a handful of worried Americans in the lobby. Coburn voiced the concern as he paced, brandy in hand, before the front windows: "Is the Big D coming?"

Wurlitzer the Pessimistic wrung his hands: "Christ. If Bob decides not to come, this session'll never happen."

"Well," Coburn said, "the session is secondary to me. I just want to get out."

At the last possible moment, a car sped up and deposited a black-clad figure. Wurlitzer heaved a sigh of relief, but his smile flickered out as he found a new worry: "That plane, man. It don't look too good. What if it went down? Holly, Valens, the Big Bopper… think about it."

Dylan wasn't worried and got on the plane and went to sleep. A jello-faced tourist reached over him, nudging him aside, to get Coburn's autograph.

* * *

CBS Discos studios, a gray fortress out on the outskirts of Mexico City, had been alerted. A night crew was standing by for the American invasion. Dylan, Coburn and Kristofferson – followed by Rita Coolidge, Kris' band, Gordon Carroll, the film's editor and sound man and a visiting writer – swept by the security guards into an anteroom where a table sagged under the weight of food and drink.

"Sessions in Nashville ain't like this," said Kris between bites of turkey and cheese and a swig of whiskey. Dylan sat in a corner with a sandwich and a cup of vodka, while Coburn reached into the depths of his long coat and, grinning, withdrew a fat bomb of a Mexican joint. He took a puff that consumed a third of the bomb and leaned back, eyes closed, a contented man. "Adios, Bob," he waved as Dylan left for the studio.

The studio was a cavernous, floodlighted, red barn. There were two Mexican trumpet players in one corner, playing off key. **"Ask them,"** Dylan said, a half-grin playing on his lips, **"if they know 'Help Me Make It Through the Night.' "**

Kristofferson: "Now goddamn it, Bobby…"

**"Well,"** Dylan said, **"I want to use these guys on a song."**

The trumpeters were not impressive, and Kris was impatient. "It ain't gonna work. Those cats don't know what he wants. If he'd let me tell 'em… fuck it, I ain't gonna run this thing."

Dylan had written two vocal tracks – the title song, "Billy," and "Holly," a lament for a man gunned down by Garrett – and several instrumentals and had recorded them earlier on a cassette unit at Peckinpah's house. After two months in Durango, he was obviously ready to record them properly, and he shed his straw hat and overcoat and strode briskly about the studio in white peasant shirt, Levis, boots, and metal-rim shades, moving mikes and setting up the board.

Coburn eased into the studio with another joint and a glass of red wine. He had a permanent Panavision smile. "Bob's so glad to be free," he grinned, "that he's running in here. He's been cooped up too long."

Dylan was ready shortly after 11 PM and started with "Billy." He gave it a long, langorous strumming introduction, overlaid with a lazy harmonic roll:

"There's guns across the river, tryin' to ground you/Lawman on your trail, like to surround you/Bounty hunters are dancin' all around you/Billy, they don't like you to be so free."

Except for the Tex-Mex riffs, the effect – especially the vocal – was pre-electric Dylan, recalling the Another Side era. He was singing hard and intensely, punching out the lines, as he ran through nine four-line verses, with an extended harmonica break after the sixth.

Kristofferson and Wurlitzer both reacted as if they'd been slapped in the face. Kris, gulping whiskey, snapped, "Ask him to do it in G!" Apparently this was not the same version Dylan had recorded at Peckinpah's. Wurlitzer

was beside himself with wonder: “Hey man, do you dig what he’s doing? He’s changed the song. He’s bein’ perverse, man. See, he got fucked and now he’s gonna do it his way.”

Dylan called the writer aside: **“Should I cut that? It seems long. Maybe I should cut a verse. I think I just might. Let’s have a playback.”** He listened briefly, then called to the control room, **“Let’s do it again.”**

The second take was astounding. Dylan again did nine verses, but he changed two of them almost completely and dropped one of the original verses, replacing it with one that was improvised.

He bore down on the last line – “Billy, you’re so far away from home” – and repeated it twice and then addressed the control room: **“Keep that take and add this wild track to it: Corn. Beans. Succotash. Coffee. End of take.”** (Dylan, in one scene of the film, is required to stand against a wall and read the labels of canned goods.)

“See, man, what he’s doin’,” said Wurlitzer, “he’s gettin’ back at Sam. Sure. I don’t know, man, if he’s sayin’ he’s gonna quit the film or what.”

Dylan was extremely animated by then, sipping vodka straight and rushing to record. He threaded his way into “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” and was joined a third of the way through by Kris’ band: Mike Utley laying gospel organ over Sammy Creason on drums, Stephen Bruton on electric guitar, and Terry Paul on bass. They started on instrumental tracks, Dylan leading the way with a galloping rhythm, paced by Bruton’s electric lead that broke into what could only be called a turkey trot.

Dylan blended lyrics from the title song into it: “Don’t it make you feel so low down, to be hunted by the man who was your friend.” Then he slowed it to a halt: “Okay, that’s called ‘Turkey No. 2.’ ”

Next, he loped into a chunky, accelerating rhythm, trading off licks with Utley. Both were laughing and weaving and daring and challenging each other. Dylan and Terry Paul started a hypnotic “la la” lyric that grew more manic as they stood head to head and urged each other on. They jammed for four minutes and then lurched to a stuttering finish. **“Okayyy,”** Dylan laughed and raised his cup, **“we’ll call this one… uhm, ‘Billy Surrenders’ or ‘Speedball.’ They’re the same one. Hey, we need Sam here, to say what to do.”**

Wurlitzer gloomily appeared: “Sam is here, man. I feel him.” He looked over his shoulder.

Coburn took his wine and joined the circle in the studio that now included Kris and Rita on backup vocals. He sat before a mike to speak one of his lines, huskily: “Yeah, but I’m alive.” Creason hit his drums a rifle shot, Bruton looped his staccato notes around Coburn’s repeated line and Dylan and Paul angled in on one mike, like streetcorner drunks, to harmonize on another “lalaaaa” line.

Dylan was pleased with it: **“What do we call that one, ‘Turkey in the Straw’? Right. I got to put a lyric to that thing. Forget about the movie. Hey, Jim, this’s just right for Billy coming out of Lincoln.”**

Coburn made a swooping motion. “Right! I can see it now, riding down through there and this music. Yeeeeaaahhh!”

Dylan unstrapped his guitar and came over to fetch a drink from a waiter, who had appeared at about 3 o’clock. Weren’t there, Dylan was asked, some Doug Sahm riffs in that song?

**“Oh yeah,”** Dylan replied. **“We’ve learned a lot from each other. You should’ve been at those sessions with Doug in New York, the craziest things I’ve ever been in. They were the sessions to end all sessions. Oh – sometime you oughta ask the band about the times we had in Europe. Those are stories – I can’t even get ’em out anymore.”**

Another drink and he rushed back to the microphone: **“Here’s another song, let’s just call this ‘Holly’s Song.’ ”** It was slow and gospelish, with simple lines: “Goodbye Holly, Holly goodbye. Your wife’s gonna miss you, your baby’s gonna cry.”

Dylan, very much in command of the studio, called for his two Mexican trumpeters and showed them what he wanted for “Pecos Blues.” He and Terry Paul sang “ah-ah-ahhh” lines over the tinny trumpets and a looping bass. The resulting sound suggested a Mexican whorehouse or a knock-down, pee-smelly dirt-floor bar. It was good, and Dylan nodded and smiled at the two beaming Mexicans, who had waited all night to play for two minutes.

Dylan went into the control room to hear the playback, and Coburn greeted him: “Fantastic, this is fucking fantastic. When it’s matched with the film, it’ll be beautiful. I hope they realize what they’re getting here.”

**“Yeah?”** Dylan looked at him.

Coburn gave him the full wide-screen Coburn treatment: “Yeah.”

Dylan laughed: **“Yeeahh.”**

Producer Carroll approached the Big D gingerly. About that song, he wondered, it seemed that it was different than it was on Sam’s tape and he just wondered what key Dylan did it in.

**"Same key,"** was the reply. Well, Carroll just thought that Sam's tape sounded richer and he wondered if Dylan would consider cutting it another way.

Dylan was edgy: **"No, I can't even hear the song anymore. I guess it's what Sam wants. It's his movie. It's for the film."**

Carroll persisted: "I don't understand the sense. What part of the film?" All of it, Dylan replied, all of it or none of it. He grew impatient: "You have two takes, you can have either of them."

Carroll backed down, "Want to hear them played back?"

Dylan, flatly, **"I want to hear everything played back."**

As Carroll turned, Dylan uttered one word: **"Hollywood."**

It was four in the morning, and he ordered another bourbon and sat, impassive behind his shades, as he listened to the tapes. Just after Kristofferson, Coburn and Wurlitzer left to get some sleep before watching the Super Bowl, Dylan called for a new tape to be put on. **"Let's,"** he said, **"do 'Billy' again."**

For the third take, he deleted his harmonica and added bass and drums and had Paul sing harmony. He cut it back to eight verses and the sound was bouncier and flashier.

But he didn't like the take and cut it again, in G, just he and Paul singing over the guitar. He slowed it down and this version was eerie and mournful, almost dirge-like. Where earlier he had toyed with Billy, now he was pleading with him: "Billy, you're so far away from home."

He liked the take and turned to Carroll, **"Right after this Garrett rides into town. Right?"**

"Right," the producer said. "Right. That really is… unbelievable. Um. What do you think?"

**"No,"** Dylan said. **"I don't think. Usually. I don't think, I hold it all in and then… act!"** He laughed. **"I'm glad you were on the case, because I forgot all about that original."**

Seven AM. The Mexican technicians were rubbing their eyes sleepily and stepping around empty glasses and cigarette butts. As the others headed for the hotel, Dylan was wide awake and ready to return to Durango.

**"I'm thinking about doing a show there,"** he said. **"I'd like to. It's just a funky little hall. Real nice audience, though. They make a lot of noise. I'm kind of anxious to do it. I mean a real audience. I'm used to those audiences in the States, and they just come and gawk at you."**

He found a last drink and last cigarette before leaving. **"That song,"** he told the writer, **"Rudy needed a song for the script. I wasn't doing anything. Rudy sent the script, and I read it and liked it and we got together and he needed a title song. And then I saw The Wild Bunch and Straw Dogs and Cable Hogue and liked them. The best one is Ride the High Country. Sam's really, like he's the last of a dying breed. They don't hire people like that to make movies anymore. So I wrote that song real quick and played it for Sam and he really liked it and asked me to be in the movie. I want now, to make movies. I've never been this close to movies before. I'll make a hell of a movie after this."**

# Late 1972 / Early 1973, Unknown Interviewer (Beat Instrumental)

Source: *Beat Instrumental*, UK magazine, Number 119, April 1973, pages 48-49.

The interview took place in Durango, Mexico.

**The Ballad of Billy The Kid**

DURANGO, Mex.

With a large cowboy hat pulled tightly over his brow but not enough to block his vision, Bob Dylan stared at the floor and occasionally stole a sideward glance.

He picked nervously at his fingers and, with his back turned to the camera, he grimaced from time to time doing an unconscious imitation of Humphrey Bogart's famous twitch. Dylan, the man who has scrupulously guarded his privacy and diligently avoided any confrontation with the Press, was making his first movie – not as the star, but in a relatively minor role.

It was his friend, Kris Kristofferson, the star of the picture, 'Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid', who talked him into making the movie and who urged him to stay with it when Dylan later wanted to back out.

Dylan wants to direct and has long admired Sam Peckinpah's work. So when Kristofferson said: 'How about coming down to Durango and making "Billy" with me? It will be a lot of laughs,' Dylan agreed.

Is he enjoying making the movie?

**'I don't know,'** Dylan said. **'It's different. I haven't decided yet.'**

SHY

Would the shy performer, who steadfastly refuses to be photographed, want a career that would thrust him conspicuously in front of the camera?

**'No,'** Dylan confided. **'I want to direct.'** In that capacity, he would be behind the camera.

Will he make any more films after this one?

**'I don't know if I will. I haven't decided that either. This film is different. It's different from other films,'** he said, raising his eyes from the ground, and then skittered away like a frightened animal eluding the hunter.

Had it been the laughs that Kristofferson had promised?

Kristofferson answered that question as he described Dylan's reaction to acting.

'Bob walked up to me one day on the set and asked me to laugh,' Kris related. 'I asked him why, and he said "I want to see what it looks like."

ROPED

'Bobby didn't know how to rope or ride before he did this movie. He learned down here. One day a girl came on the set and started to take a picture of him. He roped her.

'Another time Sam (Peckinpah) was showing him how to throw a knife and Dylan said; "Like this, you mean". And he threw it and the knife hit the centre of the target. He's really amazing.'

Kris went on extolling Dylan's talents.

'We had a party at Sam's one Sunday and Bobby played a Spanish guitar. He played some flamenco and he imitated the sound of the mariachi players. They perform on the streets here and Bobby loves them. We all thought he was great and his wife said that she had never heard him do it before.'

Dylan was, in fact, so impressed with the mariachi bands that he incorporated their music in a record he cut while making the movie.

He and Kris have each written songs for the film. Dylan's is tentatively titled, 'Ballad of Billy the Kid', and Kris wrote 'Pat Garrett'. They recorded them with Kris's band and the Durango Street players in Mexico City, during a weekend break in production. Whether the songs will be part of the film score or released independently are details yet to be worked out.

## SONGS

Those who have heard both songs say they are great. Dylan's song follows the screen play so closely that Peckinpah played it for MGM executives and others who were interested in the film's story line.

'I introduced him to Sam and Sam told him the story. Then he wrote the song, which is really great.'

Whether Dylan had a lot of laughs it's hard to say. He doesn't talk much to anyone and doesn't reserve his shyness for the Press.

He befriended Kris's pianist, Donnie Fritts, as well as Kris, and there is an obvious mutual respect between him and Peckinpah. But he talks little, even to them. Kris went so far as to say that 'Dylan's span of attention is limited. You're talking one minute and the next minute he seems to be away somewhere.'

During lunch breaks the stars and director retire to mobile dressing rooms, where their lunch is served to them. Dylan was not originally assigned a star's dressing room and at Kris's insistence moved into his. But at lunch-time Dylan stands on line with the crew, the electricians and extras, and carries his own tray to a picnic-type table. He usually sits alone, and even if someone sits beside him he makes no effort to look up. When he's finished he gets up and walks out alone without looking to find a friendly face.

Even Fritts was at a loss to explain why Dylan chose to talk with him – when he felt like talking.

## BLUES

'Maybe it's because I'm a songwriter, too, and my first love is the blues. Dylan likes the blues, too, he told me. And, then again, Otis Redding is my hero and I came here with that thought in mind. Maybe I conveyed that to him. You know what I mean,' Fritts said in an accent that reflected his childhood in Florence, Ala.

Dylan and his wife and five children are living in a rented house in the more luxurious Los Angeles section of the city. It is next door to Peckinpah's and down the street from a much more grandiose villa assigned to Kris.

## AMUSEMENT

There are three restaurants where the American film colony usually eats and two movie houses which show English-language films with Spanish subtitles. Otherwise there is little to do for amusement and the actors find it wearing after months of isolation. Dylan seemed to be enjoying this aspect of it.

He did not explain to Kris why he wanted to back out before the picture was finished.

'He just dropped into the trailer and asked me if I cared if he didn't finish the film. I said it didn't matter if I didn't, and it was up to him. The he asked me if it mattered to me if he finished it, and I said that I'd appreciate it if he did and he said in that case he would. And then he walked out of the trailer.'

# 15 January 1974, Tom Zito

Source: *The Washington Post*, 17 January 1974, pages B1, B10.

The interview took place at the Sheraton Boston Hotel, Boston, Massachusetts.

**The Man: A Generation's Guarded Voice**

Bob Dylan slouches down into the resilient sofa of his suite. The place is perfectly antiseptic, a room at the Boston Sheraton done in contemporary styling; everything done in white and brown. He's dressed in a purple T-shirt, a black corduroy jacket and bluejeans, half looking out from and half hiding behind his silvered aviator glasses. He seems bigger than he does on stage, lost in the giant halls he's playing on this six-week, 21-city tour that brought him to Washington for two concerts, last night and tonight, grossing $260,000 here.

He plops his brown-booted feet onto a white coffee table and announces tersely. **"The tour is going good."** It comes out Midwestern and nasal – the kind of tones you'd expect from a person whose early singing sounded rough and raspy.

Then there's silence – the kind of conversational void that plummets a 16-year-old who realizes this blind date just won't work.

Here is Bob Dylan, voice of a generation, the guy who wrote "Blowin' In The Wind," "The Times They Are A-Changin'," "With God On Our Side," songs that sounded the charge of the emerging social consciousness of the early '60s and became the labor songs of America's youthful cultural revolution.

So the obvious questions come to mind: What's it like up there? How does it feel to be forced – at least expected – to be a leader? What's changed since your eight years away from the road – since LSD, psychedelic music, the Chicago convention and Watergate?#

**"Back then it was the scene,"** he says guardedly, choosing every phrase as if to make sure he isn't giving away too much of himself. **"Greenwich Village, Gerdi's** (a saloon/club where Dylan got his start in New York). **There wasn't any audience and performer. It was all one. I wasn't a hero. I wasn't giving those young people anything to focus on back then. It was just something I was articulating that a whole bunch of us felt."**

Now?

"It's different. I look out from that stage and I can't really see who's out there. I feel that a lot of those old people are out there. I get a kick from that. It reassures my own faith that there was something to it then.

"But now there's a lot of ambiguity out there in the audience. The rest of the crowd, the younger kids, I'm just not sure why they're there. Maybe they're just curious, you know, like I'm a curiosity to them. Maybe it's just, you know, 'I got some tickets for a show. Let's go.' You ask what do I think they expect of me? I don't know. What do they expect of Led Zeppelin?"

What changed it?

**"The lid came off with drugs. I mean, when LSD got 'legalized' and everybody started smoking, everybody was getting into everybody else's head. Before that, people used to try to find out what they were all about. Drugs nipped a lot of that in the bud. It made people very passive.**

**"Now a lot of people just accept things the way they are. I've been noticing all these tall buildings in the cities we're touring. They'll just grind you down into the ground. They're monsters."**

Dylan's last major one-shot public appearance was at former Beatle George Harrison's Concert For Bangladesh in summer, 1972.

**"That was a good feeling, being on stage there. It never occurred to me whether the kids who were there were thinking about the reason behind the concert. For me it was just a show. Sure, George believed very much in the importance of doing a benefit, but I didn't really think of it in political terms.**

**"Would I have done a benefit for a politician? Well, there's a real difference, you know. I mean, there were millions of people starving in Bangladesh. George McGovern wasn't starving. He just wanted to be President."**

And in an article in last Sunday's New York Times, "An Open Letter To Bob Dylan," suggesting that he do a free concert, he responds with laughing incredulity:

**“I couldn’t believe that article. The New York Times printing an open letter to Bob Dylan. It’d be one thing if somebody I knew was writing me a letter. Anyway, who deserves a free concert? Wadaya mean ‘free concert?’ Free for who? If I’m over at somebody’s house, I’ll play. Maybe that’s a free concert.”**

Slowly Dylan, now 32, starts to reveal a certain amount of ennui. He displays a distance from things that’s either real or is being used to hide his real thoughts.

What’s he listening to and reading? **“I can’t remember reading any books or hearing any records recently.”** (He does admit his oldest daughter listens to Led Zeppelin, a heavy British blues-based band.)

Does he like life in California, where he’s been living for the past year? **“California is okay. It’s easy life. I’m just passing through.”** (He’s originally from Hibbing. Minn.)

Thoughts on contemporary politics. **“Politics are a lot less clearly defined today. You’ve got a lot of mush.”**

Any truth that he, born Robert Zimmerman, is doing the tour to raise money for Israel? **“That’s like asking me if doing this tour to raise enough money to go to the moon in 1983.”**

Thoughts on Watergate? **“Nah, didn’t surprise me a bit.”** Did it outrage him? **“No.”** Can he think of anything that would outrage him politically? He leans back, muses and shakes his head.

**“I guess I just don’t really believe in the Democrat/Republican system,”** he quips. **“I like monarchies. I go in more for kings and queens.”**

Perhaps Dylan’s underlying reason for this attitude is a basic noncomprehension of why anyone would want to interview him.

**“Why do people care about what other people do?”** he asks. **“Who cares what I eat for breakfast** (he’s a vegetarian) **or how many children I have** (five, one from his wife, Sara’s, previous marriage**)? Who wants to hear about somebody else’s life. I’d rather go fishing. I resent people who come knocking on my door to ask me some dumb question.”**

But apparently enough people were interested in Dylan to generate 6 million ticket requests for the 660,000 seats available on his tour.

**“Six million, a hundred million, it’s all an illusion,”** he says. **“It doesn’t mean that much to me, really. I mean, who else is there around to go see?”**

The phone rings.

**“There’s a cousin here I have to see. You’re gonna have to leave pretty soon,”** he says.

Finally, perhaps, one true glimpse of the man.

**“You think you could scratch out that stuff I said about George McGovern?”** he asks. **“I don’t think I should go around criticising him. I wouldn’t want him to read anything like that in the paper. I think the guy’s sentiments were in the right place.”**

# May to June 1974, Andrea Vaucher

Source: This article was originally published in French. The text reproduced here is from a retranslation by Jeff Stevens published in *Freewheelin'*, UK fanzine, Volume 1, Issue 131, August 1996, page 53, and Volume 2, Issue 132, August 1996, pages 3-4. It was said to have come from the September 1974 edition of the French magazine *Rock & Folk*, but this is incorrect. The actual reference has not been established. The translation is missing a section of unknown length at the beginning as Stevens' copy of the magazine was incomplete. A number of small changes have been made to correct some typographic errors.

The text is more of a series of conversations than an interview, and begins on 9 May 1974 at Felt Forum, Madison Square Garden, New York City after the Friends of Chile Benefit Concert. It continues on-and-off over a period of a few weeks up to (probably) late June.

**BOBBY IN THE SUBWAY or**
**DYLAN BACK TO WHERE HE WAS BEFORE THE LIMOUSINES**

The performers' names are on the dressing room doors, and it is easy to work out where the most energy is coming from. I slip inside… and there ahead of me less than a meter away in flesh and blood and in living colour is Bob Dylan. He is strumming his Martin in a distracted manner, chatting to different people and drinking some wine. Looking very relaxed and with an engaging smile playing on his lips he seems happy to be back in the crazy world of music. His American tour has changed his perspective on quite a few things, and after six years of isolation, he is ready to get moving again. I take out my camera and begin to fire away at him. Still the same radiant magnetism. His face is still as youthful, his blue eyes still bright. He is wearing black jeans and a white tee-shirt. But as soon as he spots my Nikon there is a complete change: he breaks off in the middle of a song, turns towards me and looks me right in the eyes.

**"But why are you doing that?**

**"Don't you understand that that stuff isn't real, it's just an illusion?"** he shouts. Everyone is quiet and is looking at me. But Dylan has not finished. **"How much money are you going to get from these photos?"** At that moment one of the female organisers announces that all the press people have to leave. I make my way towards the door with the other journalists, but someone is holding me back by the arm. It is him. After all the fuss things get better. We get high together drinking wine, we talk to Dennis Hopper and the others. My secret plan is in place. Dylan feels more at ease. He moves around a lot and is full of energy. A little later on, a wallet belonging to the wife of Victor Jara, the murdered Chilean poet, is found to be missing. When it is located in a groupie's bag, Dylan gets angry: **"Why did you do it?"** She does not say anything, she just looks at him sadly and offers him a pack of hamburgers that she has just bought.

**"I don't want <u>any</u> of your hamburgers. I never eat meat,"** he says as she leaves.

When Dennis Hopper has finished reading some poems by Pablo Neruda, Dylan hugs him. **"That was your best ever performance."** Hopper just says "Shit, I felt in the mood." A friendship is born. Dylan tells Dennis that one evening he dropped off to sleep whilst watching one of his films on television. The he appears on stage to be greeted by a fantastic ovation. Accompanied by the other performers, he sings a bit, drinks some wine and delights the audience. **"It was better than Bangla Desh"** he says as he comes offstage. We leave the hall. **"Are you coming with us?"** he asks me. I was not about to refuse. Things happen.

Dylan has left his guitar in the dressing room and we stand around in the rain waiting for Dennis Hopper who has gone off to get it. And then there are too many of us to fit in a single taxi and Dylan suggests taking the subway. There we are, about ten of us, in the bowels of New York, at two in the morning. I am getting a bit bored – even in this company, the New York subway at two in the morning is not the best place to be! Dylan leans towards me: **"Are you gong to leave us?"** "Not before the end of the film." **"Talk to me in French."** "Je m'ennuie [I am bored]." He didn't understand…

In a really fashionable apartment there is a party for the musicians and the night's other stars. We arrive late with the guest of honour and are now more inebriated than the other party-goers. Dylan only wants wine. There is none left. We take refuge in a hallway and wait to see what happens…

Back on the streets of New York. It is still raining. But this time we are in a limo, a Mercedes 600 belonging to a Franco-American file director. There are fewer of us now and we have nowhere to go.

"Where are we off to?"

"A bar."

"Where are we?"

"Uptown."

"Let's go to the Kettle of Fish."

"That's downtown. It'll be closed before we get there."

François, the film director, suggests his mansion. He's got some wine. O.K. There the party resumes. An unknown singer that Dylan met that afternoon plays for his idol. When he has finished, Dylan tells him:

**"You're scared."**

"What do you mean – I'm scared?"

**"You're a guilty man so you're frightened. Can't you see that? Guilt means fear. If you're not afraid you can't be guilty. You, man, you're petrified."**

"That's absurd. I'm not frightened."

**"You're uptight. Look. You're wearing shades. Why?"**

"Man, you've worn Ray Bans for years."

**"Yes. But I let everyone see my eyes before I put them on."**

Silence. He always has the last word. He is always writing the next line before he has completed the one before.

We talk about France. He wants to learn French. He has bought some Berlitz records. In a paper bag he carries around with him a book on existentialism, essays by Sartre and Camus. At his home in the Village on a bedside table, he keeps poetry by Verlaine and a dictionary. He is translating the poems line by line, word by word. Now he talks about painting, Picasso, Matisse… Exhaustion overwhelms us. Dennis stays behind. Dylan, myself and a few others go out. The sun is coming up. François lends us his limo.

A few days later on the telephone:

**"Do you still have those photos of me?**

"I thought you didn't like photos of you."

**"I don't like them, but I need them."**

We fix up a meeting for the next day in town. But he calls me before at a girlfriend's house where I am staying:

**"Do you know a hotel in the neighbourhood?"**

"Yes, why? You've got an apartment, haven't you?"

**"Yes, but it's not really mine."**

"How do you mean, do you sublet it?"

**"Kind of, yes."**

"Listen, if you don't want to go to the hotel, come here, there's plenty of room."

A little later he arrives. He is wearing the same clothes as on the day of the concert but with the addition of a cap. He is still carrying his book around with him in a paper bag. He is dead on his feet. He has been working hard on his 'Before The Flood' album but at the same time he is delighted to be back in the hurly-burly of New York town. He doesn't like California. Later on when I ask him to come to California for an interview, he replies:

**"Why do you want to go there? It's a shit hole."**

**"My new record is great. I'd like you to hear it. And your photos are fine."**

"No delusions or illusions?"

**"Yes, loads. But no disillusion."**

He starts to read a book on painting. He is falling asleep on his feet. The next morning (very early) I wake up.
**"Where can I catch the bus?"**

I go back to the country. We talk to one another on the phone. I still have the idea of an interview in my head. He is reluctant.

**"I have nothing to say."**

"That doesn't matter. We'll do it in French and run it with the headline 'Bob Dylan has nothing to sayin French'."

(Silence. I change the subject).

"I saw Neil Young last night."

**"Get him to do an interview."**

One night on the T.V. news they show a photo of Dylan. It's his birthday. I call him up.

"How old are you?"

**"Not too old."**

"I hear you're setting up an autumn tour. Is that right?"

**"Yes, but it hasn't been sorted out yet."**

"Where will you go?"

**"I don't know. Probably to Europe. Or else the States again. What about that Chile concert? There was very little in the newspapers about it. It's always been that way."**

Later on I sent Dylan the photos. Two days before I leave the telephone rings. I immediately recognise the voice.

**"Andrea? Bob Dylan."**

"I'm going back to France. I've listened to 'Before The Flood', it's fantastic."

**"Wait until you hear the next one – the one I'm recording now. It's a shame, I would have liked you to hear my new songs."**

"Yes, it's a pity. We'll see one another again in France. We'll drink some good wine together."

# 22 July 1974, Ben Fong-Torres

Source: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Issue 168, 29 August 1974, Page 34 (full article pages 34-36, 38, 40).

The interview, an excerpt from an article on Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, took place in St. Paul, Minnesota.

**The Ego meets the Dove: The reunion of Crosby Stills Nash & Young**

At the St. Paul, Minnesota, Civic Center, the lights are doused, 19,000 voices rise out of the darkness and all you see are the blue fluorescent lights playing onto the Indian rug; it looks like a snowdrift onstage as Crosby, Stills, Nash and bassist Tim Drummond face off to establish the rhythm. Neil Young, in a Buick service department jacket and patched cords, is behind the organ. The power builds – it's "Love the One You're With" – and a floorful of people are suddenly shake-hopping in place. On "Wooden Ships," springing up from central casting, there's your clenched fist, front center, just as the chorus begins.

In the middle of the acoustic set, Young introduces "For The Turnstiles" by saying: "Here's a song I wrote a long time ago. There's a couple of really good songwriters here tonight; I hope they don't listen too closely." Minutes later it's Stills, and he, too, pays tribute to a songwriter in the crowd:

"This one's for Bob," he says, "because I know I've been that mad before." Head bowed and hands flailing, he flies into "Word Game":

> Would you knock a man down if you don't like the cut of his clothes
>
> Could you put a man away if you don't want to hear what he knows
>
> Well, it's happening right here…

Through most of this set, Bob Dylan, in cowboy shirt, jeans and shades, has been standing in the midst of a small group on the floor off to the side, behind backstage barriers. He stands, unnoticed by the audience, next to a woman in a drug help jacket.

Dylan is in his home state for a visit with family and friends. He's with Louie Kemp, his buddy from their childhood days in Hibbing, just north of here, and the word has spread quickly that he has taken an apartment in town, is moving back and buying some property just outside Minneapolis. In short, Dylan is coming back home to stay.

As the acoustic set makes its transition back into electric, Dylan wanders off by himself. He is willing to have a few words. Over Young's rock-star recall, "Don't Be Denied," Dylan shouts that he's in town to attend a funeral.

What about the talk that he's looking for some property here?

He flashes the half-smile: **"I'm always looking."**

I say I enjoyed hearing the album of the tour, which it sounds better than most of the nine shows I covered.

**"Wait 'til you hear my next album!"**

"How far along is it?"

**"I haven't started yet!"**

Dylan has been at the St. Paul Hilton that afternoon. Crosby broke away from an interview to have a visit with him. I ask Dylan how he's liked the CSNY show so far and he responds with questions about Frank Sinatra's problems in Australia and about the weather in San Francisco. A moment later, after he's absorbed some more music, he turns and shouts: **"I like to play *small* rooms!"**

"Your next record should be a comedy record," I yell.

**"All my records are comedy records!"**

Later that night – in fact, early the next morning – Dylan pops up again, into a 15th-floor suite of beautiful Midwestern women and weary rock & roll tourists. He talks briefly to Stills, eyes three guitars on the floor, picks up one and herds Stills into an adjacent room for a session of new Bob Dylan songs. The only other member of the audience, through the two-hour show, is bassist Tim Drummond.

"Aw, fuck!" Drummond laughs the next afternoon. He is staying behind while the tour moves immediately into Denver to allow Crosby, Stills and Nash to catch the Eric Clapton show.

"Dylan's got an album," says Drummond. "It's great and it's completely different from *Planet Waves*. It's gutsy, bluesy, so authentic. I heard eight or nine songs and it's the first time I've sat in a room and liked everything I've heard."

# October 1975, Larry Sloman

Source: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Number 201, 4 December 1975, pages 9, 18, 20.

The interviews took place at various locations just before and at the start of the first Rolling Thunder Revue.

### Bob Dylan and Friends on the Bus: Like a Rolling Thunder

New York – It was four o'clock on a brandy-soaked October Thursday morning in Greenwich Village as about 20 friends and assorted hangers-on gathered in the shuttered-to-the-public Other End to hear Bob Dylan and his friends pick a few tunes. They'd been going strong since 2:30 a.m. when David Blue finished his regular set, and by now the bulk of the audience had surrounded Dylan at the piano onstage.

An obviously well-fueled Roger McGuinn kept goading Dylan to sing his new "Joey Gallo" song by breaking into the "Joooey" chorus acapella every chance he got. Allen Ginsberg hunched over the piano, staring intensely, hanging on to his every word. Ronee Blakley, the *Nashville* neurotic, sidled close to Dylan, sharing his piano stool, playing the high keys and adding vibrant harmonies. Ramblin' Jack Elliott was rambling around in the back looking for some "tee-keela," while Bobby Neuwirth acted as ringmaster, directing this folkie circus. Everyone seemed caught up in some kind of high-energy harmonic hysteria and the drinks flowed faster and faster. Everyone was caught up, that is, but Lou Kemp, Dylan's Minnesota boyhood buddy and all-around factotum, who viewed the proceedings from a stageside seat with a wary eye. "I can't believe this," he told no one in particular. "We've been in town just four days, haven't been to sleep before sunrise, I'm totally wasted and we haven't even started this goddamn tour yet."

This "goddamn tour" is, of course, the "Rolling Thunder Revue," Bob Dylan's traveling band of gypsies, hobos, lonesome guitar stranglers and spiritual green berets. In just four days the tour buses would roll out from the Gramercy Park Hotel, where the "revue" had been holed up, and head up to Plymouth, Massachusetts, for the first stop of a whirlwind blitz of the Northeast, running from four to six weeks.

The tour was conceived at the Other End back in the summer, when Dylan was vibing out the Village street scene and cowriting with Jacques Levy positively New York songs. Like the hymn for "Joey Gallo" and the story of the "Hurricane," a plea for Rubin Carter, the onetime number one contender for the middleweight boxing crown who now languishes in Trenton State Prison, convicted of murder.

The idea behind the tour, Dylan said, was to **"play for the people,"** the people who never get the choice seats at a Dylan concert because they're occupied by flacks and celebrities.

"Bob decided he wanted to do it," said Lou Kemp, "but he didn't have anyone to coordinate it. I came back from Alaska where I have a salmon processing plant, and he asked me to help with the tour. So I hired Barry Imhoff, who'd already left Bill Graham, to be in charge of the technical aspects of the tour." Imhoff, while with Graham, helped coordinate Dylan's 21-city, 39-concert tour early last year. Kemp also accompanied Dylan on numerous stops during that tour.

Both Imhoff and Kemp declined to answer questions about the financial aspects of this tour. While Dylan had mentioned wanting to play mostly "clubs," the initial stops were at halls ranging from 1800 to 3000 in capacity – with ticket prices at a uniform $7.50 – and, in the tour's second week, there were dates at two 12,000-seat auditoriums, in Providence, Rhode Island, and in Springfield, Massachusetts. **"We gotta pay the rent, the expenses,"** Dylan explained. But he said there would be only **"one or two"** such concerts during the tour.

The Rolling Thunder Revue had also been planned as a spiritual reunion of the early Sixties Kettle of Fish folk crowd, the Dylan/Blue/Neuwirth/Elliott/Ochs axis.

"Bob's just an ordinary fucking guy," David Blue said, "a great songwriter who got swept up in this whole fame thing and was smart enough to know how to control it, who rode with it and was shrewd, damn shrewd. And now he's just paying everyone back with this tour. It's like a family scene."

But the cast mushroomed, especially since Dylan becomes effusive when he's bar hopping and winds up inviting every bouncer, bartender, juggler or otherwise kindred spirit he meets to come along. Joan Baez was the first addition to the basic Dylan/Elliott/Neuwirth show, followed by Ronee Blakley, on the basis of her strong showing at the Other End jam. Allen Ginsberg came next, with his fog, his natural adrenalin and his harmonium. Roger McGuinn, who was concentrating on a bottle so hard that he didn't hear Dylan the first two times he was invited along, has dropped a few bookings, hopping aboard with his 12-string and banjo. In fact, the only picker who met up with the Thunder crew and didn't get swept up into it was Lou Reed.

Baez's story is typical of the tour additions: "Bob called up and asked what I was doing for the month of November. I had a tour lined up. Usually I'm not working with a dollar sign in front of my face, but this time I was, so I had to give it considerable thought. But I'm bright enough to know what this tour will mean. I didn't trust a lot of it. I said, look, what if Ramblin' Jack decides he wants to live in a freight train for the month of November instead. I've known these guys for a long time and I love them dearly but everybody *is* slightly unstable. But it's delightful working with Bobby again. He's relatively impossible to follow and that's a challenge, but I need that."

In Dylan's words, the revue is playing in places other than large auditoriums because **"the atmosphere in small halls is more conducive to what we do."** Still, it seemed natural that the proceedings should be filmed for later distribution, so Dylan called up his old friend Howard Alk, of *Eat the Document* fame. **"That film was a project we did to rescue a bunch of garbage footage that ABC shot on our 1966 tour,"** Dylan explained. **"It was never released because the film didn't have much to do with anybody. The whole thing fell through, but Howard and I, we got together and decided if we ever got the chance again to shoot good footage before we get to the editing room – some things that we can make into a fantastic movie on the screen – we'd do it. There's so much we got here already. We'll probably end up making four or five movies, and the public can definitely be into this one."**

So it came as no shock to show up at a surprise birthday party for Mike Porco, the owner of Gerde's Folk City who gave Dylan his first paid gig in 1960, and be greeted by a four-man film crew who explained their presence to Porco with a cover story of "filming for NET." Word was out on the streets that Dylan just might show up, and before midnight the normally sparse weekday crowd was elbow-to-elbow. Phil Ochs had a head start on everyone and wandered around, drink in hand, lecturing about "the Jewish Mafia" and the strange case of Sonny Liston. Patti Smith shyly slunk into one corner, while Commander Cody showed up with two limos full of shitkickers. Roger McGuinn sat outside in his Sunshine limo, never one to arrive too early. Then, just past 1:00 a.m., a red Cadillac Eldorado pulled up and Dylan strode briskly in, followed closely by Kemp and Neuwirth. They greeted Mrs. Porco, hugged Mike and retreated to a far corner of the club. Then with the inevitable tableside introduction, "Ladies and gentlemen, the greatest star of all, Bobby Dylan," Dylan found his way up to the stage, grabbing Baez on the way for a duet of "Happy Birthday" and "One Too Many Mornings" – but the music stopped abruptly when bassist Rob Stoner's bridge snapped right out of its mooring.

Jack Elliott joined in onstage and Dylan seized the opportunity to shout, **"Let's turn the stage over to Ramblin' Jack Elliott,"** and headed back to the semisolitude of his table. Jack did a hauntingly beautiful ballad, "South Coast Blues"; Bette Midler fell onstage to duet with Buzzy Linhart; Allen Ginsberg sang some poem/songs backed by female guitarist Denise Mercedes. Then Eric Andersen and Patti Smith harmonized a bit. Finally, Neuwirth, looking like some turn-of-the-century Cuban porno star in a black eye-mask and cowboy hat, grabbed the stage and sang a touching "Mercedes Benz" for "someone who couldn't be here with us tonight."

It seemed over but then Phil Ochs, who's been battling some of his own private phantoms recently, performed a moving medley of folk and country, stuff like "Jimmy Brown the Newsboy," "There You Go," "Too Many Parties" and "The Blue and the Gray." Everyone at Dylan's table was standing, gaping at this poignant moment.

Ochs spotted Dylan heading for the bar. "Hey Bobby, come up with me," he shouted. **"I'm only going to the bar, Phil,"** Dylan replied reassuringly. "Well, here's a song of yours that I've always wanted to do," Ochs answered, breaking into a dirge-like "Lay Down Your Weary Tune." But things lightened up when Ochs stumbled off the stage into the waiting arms of David Blue, who, with Kemp and Neuwirth, were part of an ambush designed to retrieve the cowboy hat from Ochs that Dylan had worn in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*.

By the next day, Friday, things were really rolling. A session was planned to re-record "Hurricane" to be released as the tour begins. The idea was born at the Kettle of Fish when Dylan was talking animatedly about Rubin Carter and the need for publicity about his case. He had written "Hurricane" in the summer, recorded it and performed it at the retirement tribute to Columbia Records' John Hammond, taped for the *Soundstage* PBS-TV show. But that show won't be seen until December. **"We gotta get the song out, we gotta get it right out,"** Dylan had said, slamming his fist on the table.

So Tuesday, Dylan, Kemp and his camera crew, after a filmed scuffle with security guards at the CBS building, barged into the offices of CBS Records president Irwin Segelstein and CBS Records Group president Walter Yetnikoff and demanded rush release of the "Hurricane" single. Late that night Dylan entered Studio E, pre-empting a Janis Ian listening session, with his band – bassist Rob Stoner, drummer Howie Wyeth, violinist Scarlet Rivera, percussionist Luther and backup singers Steve Soles and Ronee Blakley. Four hours later, producer Don DeVito was left with the task of mixing, mastering and getting the story of the "Hurricane" out on the streets, in Dylan's words, **"as soon as possible."**

The reason for the recutting of "Hurricane" was the subject of some speculation, most of it centering on an allegedly libelous line about a person involved in Carter's arrest. Ken Ehrlich, producer of *Soundstage*, said he talked with Dylan's attorney about snipping parts of Dylan's taped performance "to avoid libel." The attorney,

David Braun, has refused comment. At Columbia Records, Segelstein said only that "it's a very conventional name confusion, he had to correct a lyric. I do not know the details." And DeVito, a Columbia executive who produced the session, said Dylan made changes "just like last year with *Blood on the Tracks*. He's just totally unpredictable."

After the re-recording session, Dylan reflected on Rubin Carter. **"The first time I saw Rubin, I left knowing one thing, that this man's philosophy and my philosophy were running on the same road, and you don't meet too many people like that, that you just kinda know are on the same path as you are, mentally. I never doubted him for a moment. He's just not a killer, not that kind of a man. You're talking about a different type of person. I mean, he's not gonna walk into a bar and start shooting. He's not the guy. I don't know how anybody in their right mind is gonna think he was guilty of something like that."**

"Hurricane" is an eight-minute rocker, a scorching defense of Carter and an attack on a system that allows an allegedly innocent man to rot in a cell for nine years. Carter's is the kind of situation that spurred some of Dylan's greatest protest songs years ago. **"There's an injustice that's been done and you know that Rubin's gonna get out,"** Dylan said. **"There's no doubt about that, but the fact is that it can happen to anybody. We have to be confronted with that; people from the top to the bottom, they should be aware that it can happen to anybody, at any time."**

Rubin Carter, for his part, is thrilled with the song. "I listened to it at first and thought, eh, it was just another song to me," Carter said in his cell at Trenton State Prison in Trenton, New Jersey. "I ain't got no time for music in here. This is not a place to be soothed. But the more I sat there and listened to it and really understood what he was saying, I said, 'Wow, man.' I mean, he took this case, this nine years of whatever, and put it together, wop, like that, and covered every level, every facet of it. I said, 'Man, this cat's a genius. He's giving the people the truth.' And it was inspiring to me. I told myself, 'Rubin, you got to keep pushing, 'cause you must be doing something right, you got all these good people coming to try and help you.' "

More rehearsals followed and on Monday, October 27th, three chartered buses pulled out for Cape Cod. There, the troupe settled into the Seacrest Hotel and ran through three additional days of rehearsal in the hotel's indoor tennis court.

The tour opened October 30th on a cold, damp New England night in Plymouth, advertised only by handbills that included a photo of Dylan and by random radio mentions in Boston. The 1800-seat Plymouth Memorial Auditorium sold out but it took almost 24 hours to do so. But it was evident in the opening moments of the show that this crazy-quilt tour and its music – "the new sound is Plymouth rock," was an often heard comment – was working. It seemed that the pre-tour tensions between Neuwirth's gin-soaked, good-timey camaraderie and musical director Rob Stoner's slick professionalism had been resolved into a balanced mixture of sound.

"Welcome to your living room," Neuwirth announced onstage, and it was true. There was none of the forced ambiance of the last Dylan tour with its sofas and Tiffany lamps onstage. All the tour participants – Elliott, Blakley, McGuinn, Neuwirth, Baez, Dylan – got their moment in the spotlight, in front of the basic band of Mick Ronson, T-Bone Burnette, Stoner and Soles. After Elliott's four-song set, Neuwirth introduced "another old friend" and Dylan ambled onstage in a black leather jacket, jeans and the *Pat Garrett* hat. The audience gave him a warm welcome, but there was little surprise in the air. Dylan and Neuwirth opened with a slow version of "When I Paint My Masterpiece," Dylan singing harmony and Neuwirth taking the lead.

They harmonized on "It Ain't Me, Babe" and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," and then Neuwirth left and Dylan brought out violinist Scarlet Rivera to lead the band through "Durango." Then it was Dylan alone to sing "Isis" – no guitar, no accompaniment, just Dylan at the mike gesturing dramatically as he told the story of the goddess. **"See you in a few minutes,"** he said, and went off to a standing ovation.

After a short intermission, the curtain crawled slowly up to the strains of Dylan and Joan Baez singing "The Times They Are a-Changin'." After "Never Let Me Go" (an old Johnny Ace tune) and "I Shall Be Released," Dylan left, patting Baez on the head and leaving her to do a seven-song set. Roger McGuinn took her place for "Chestnut Mare" and then gave the stage back to Dylan for "Mr. Tambourine Man" and, from the next album, "Oh, Sister."

**"This is,"** said Dylan, **"a song about Rubin Carter,"** and behind him a screen slowly whirred to the floor and the band went into "Hurricane," the single that would be released the next day – October 31st. A huge picture of Carter in boxing gear was projected onto the screen and that was the extent of Dylan's comment on the song. "One More Cup of Coffee" was next and then Dylan broke into "Sara," a bittersweet song to his wife:

I'd taken the cure
And had just gotten through
Staying up for days
In the Chelsea Hotel,
Writing 'Sad-Eyed Lady

of the Lowlands' for you
Sara oh Sara
Wherever we travel
We're never a part
Sara oh Sara
Beautiful lady
So dear to my heart*

He wound it up with "Just Like a Woman" and then the entire cast gathered for "This Land Is Your Land," with even Allen Ginsberg joining in. The three-hour show was over, the audience responded with a ten-minute standing ovation. The second Plymouth show, again a sellout, drew a quieter crowd, one almost polite toward its elders onstage. The show was virtually the same except for the substitution of "I Don't Believe You" for "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "Mama, You've Been on My Mind" instead of "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll."

From Plymouth, the buses and campers rolled on to North Dartmouth, Massachusetts, to Southeastern Massachusetts University. The crowd of 3000 had been prepped. A week before, an advance party, accompanied by the ever present camera crew, descended on the dorms at 10 p.m. to pass out Rolling Thunder handbills.

The night before the buses rolled, Dylan had been sitting in the bar of the Gramercy Park Hotel, sipping Remy Martin. He was asked by someone on the tour why it was called Rolling Thunder. Dylan thought for a minute. **"I was just sitting outside my house one day,"** he finally replied, **"thinking about a name for this tour, when all of a sudden, I look up into the sky and I hear a boom. Then, boom, boom, boom, boom, rolling from west to east"** – Dylan punched at the air, like a prizefighter – **"then I figured that should be the name."**

Dylan got another drink and the questioner asked him: "You know what Rolling Thunder means to the Indians?"

**"No. What?"**

"Speaking truth."

A pause. Dylan shifted his hat and rocked back. **"Well, I'm glad to hear that. I'm real glad to hear that, man."**

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# November 1975, Larry Sloman

Source: DVD: *Rolling Thunder Revue - A Bob Dylan Story By Martin Scorsese*, The Criterion Collection, 1062, 2019. Transcript published in *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 80, Winter 2024, pages 41, 43-44. Transcribed by Alan Hoaksey.

Interview by telephone at unknown locations.

**Dylan: Hello?**

Sloman: Bob?

**D: Yeah.**

S: This is Larry.

**D: Yeah Larry, how you doing?**

S: You gotta minute? I gotta do a story in an hour, and I just need about two or three paragraphs.

**D: Okay.**

S: Are you up?

**D: Yeah, sort of.**

S: What do you want to… Why don't you just talk about the music, okay?

**D: What do you wanna know?**

S: I've never seen you so fucking great on stage. I've never seen you so loose. How come?

**D: Jesus Christ, you really got me early in the morning man, I can't even think. Uh… well it's just the element I work best in, you know? You seen those Italian… those Italian troupes that go around in Italy, those Italian street theaters…**

S: Yeah.

**D: …the wagon… the wagon troupes, commedia dell'arte?**

S: Yeah, right.

**D: This is kind of an extension of that, only musically.**

S: Music commedia dell'arte?

**D: Yeah.**

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S: Tell me a bit about the spirit of the tour… 'cause you're doing new songs, right?

**D: Yeah.**

S: And a lot of people in the audience expected the old songs.

**D: But Ratso, you know, that's the first… one of the first rules…**

S: What's that?

**D: The expectations, you know? If you have big expectations, you're gonna be let down. You can't have any expectations.**

S: But people do have preconceptions.

**D: That's their problem, Ratso. That's their own problem. We can't account for everybody who's walking around, you know. Like having expectations. I mean who gives a shit?**

S: Yeah.

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**D: I got the book.** [*The Sixteenth Round*, by Rubin "Hurricane" Carter] **I read it. I, you know, made a mental note that if I was coming East, or if I was East, I would visit him. We were there for, you know, most of the day, as far as I can remember. We got there in the morning and then left him when it was dark. I realized the man's philosophy and my philosophy were running on the same road, you know, and you don't meet too many people like that, you know, that you just know that's kinda on the same path, mentally, you know.**

S: Yeah. So you got back, and you had the germ of an idea to do a song?

**D: Yeah.**

S: Why? I mean, you know, is this a return to protest… I mean… You know, is this "Hattie Carroll" revisited?

**D: Um… there's an injustice that has been done, you know. And the fact is that it can happen to anybody.**

S: Mm-hmm.

**D: You know? And we have to be confronted with that.**

S: So… So…

# Late 1975, Nat Hentoff

Source: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Number 204, 15 January 1976, pages 34-38.

Comments made at various points along the route of the 1975 Rolling Thunder Tour. Not strictly a Dylan interview but contains some Dylan quotes that may have come from interview situations.

**The pilgrims have landed on Kerouac's grave**

Backstage at the Rolling Thunder Revue, Allen Ginsberg (who has just dedicated his book of *First Blues* to "Minstrel Guruji Bob Dylan") asks the convener of these revels, these winds of the old days, "Are you getting any pleasure out of this, Bob?"

The convener, who can use words as if they were fun-house mirrors when he's pressed, fingers his gray cowboy hat and looks at the poet. The first he had ever heard of Allen Ginsberg and the kind of people he hung out with was in *Time* around 1958 while he was still a kid in Minnesota. ("I'm Allen Ginsberg and I'm crazy." "My name is Peter Orlovsky and I'm crazy as a daisy." "My name is Gregory Corso and I'm not crazy at all." That had broken up the kid in Minnesota.)

Now, here on the road with this hooting, rocking carnival of time present and time past, both perhaps present in time future, is Allen, who has survived serene and curious, in a business suit.

**"Pleasure?"** Dylan finds the word without taste, without succulence. **"Pleasure? I never seek pleasure. There was a time years ago when I sought a lot of pleasure because I'd had a lot of pain. But I found there was a subtle relationship between pleasure and pain. I mean, they were on the same plane. So now I do what I have to do without looking for pleasure from it."**

"He is putting you on," said a friend to whom Ginsberg, later in the tour, had described Dylan's exorcism of the pursuit of pleasure.

"No," Ginsberg said firmly. "Bob's attitude is very similar to the Buddhist view of nonattachment. The belief that seeking pleasure, clinging to pleasure, evokes pain. It stunned me when Bob said that. It meant that he's reached a philosophical level very few come close to. And it's a long-range, practical, workable, philosophical level. Bob has grown an awful lot. He's alchemized a lot of the hangups of his past. Like his insecurity, which has now become," Ginsberg laughs, "an acceptance of and an ability to work with continuous change."

On the other hand, a musician in Minstrel Guruji's band tells of an epiphany early in the tour:

"Joan and Bob are doing a duet. I forget the name of it, it's one of his old tunes. She's really moving. I mean dancing. She starts doing the Charleston and the audience is digging it and we're digging it. Dylan though, he's plunking his guitar, moving his eyes around quick, like he does, looking at Joanie, looking at us, looking at the audience. Like, 'What the hell is she doing that's going over so damn big?' It's over, and Joan walks offstage, grinning, sees a friend in the wings, and says to him, 'You won't be hearing *that* number again from this little old duo on this tour.' And laughs because neither the friends nor the others standing there can figure out what she's talking about. But she's right. Bob's never called for that tune since. He couldn't stand the competition. Big as he is, in some ways he's still a kid scrabbling for his turf."

"Not true," says Joan Baez of the kid characterization. "Or, not as true as it used to be." She had once described Dylan as "a huge ego bubble, frantic and lost, so wrapped up in ego, he couldn't have seen more than four feet in front of him." But now, "Bob has learned how to share," Joan told me one night after a three-and-a-half-hour show in Waterbury, Connecticut, at an old rococo movie theater that reminded me of Depression nights as a boy when we would go to just such a place to feel good anyhow and come home with some dishes besides. No dishes this time, but the most mellow feelings I've had from a concert since the Duke Ellington band on an exceptionally good night. The kicks were from the genuine mutual grooving of the music makers; but it was Dylan, as shaper of the thunder, who was responsible for lifting the audience and keeping it gliding.

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A bounteous dispenser of thunder was Dylan this time around. At least three and a half hours *every* night, sometimes longer. (The first concert in Toronto, one of the tour's more exalted evenings, ran close to five hours.) And yet always, or nearly always, the pacing, though relaxed, didn't go slack.

The right mix of a backup band, driving strong but sinuously so it never sounded like an assault. If you could keep T-Bone Burnett, Steve Soles, Howie Wyeth, Mick Ronson, Luther Rix and David Mansfield together – I was thinking as a once and former A&R man – you could have one hell of a house insurance band. Especially

with Mansfield, 19 and the kind of natural whom conservatory students prone to neurasthenia should never be allowed to hear or see. Mandolin, pedal steel, dobro, violin – Mansfield makes them all sing, for God's sake, as if he were the sorcerer, not the apprentice he looks like.

Up front Rob Stoner, who doesn't get in the way, and the authentically raffish Bob Neuwirth who may, he says, be in the movies soon. Finally a Rhett Butler for our time. Put another way, I think you have to see Neuwirth to remember his singing.

Then the substars. Ronee Blakley, who earnestly needs direction, as her albums and her musical aimlessness on this tour rather painfully indicate. Roger McGuinn, who has become a large, jolly, historic rocker, almost right for a Christmas mime show. And surprisingly, most impressive of all in the second line some nights, Jack Elliott. With his rambling white cowboy hat and folk collector's glasses, Jack is real serious, however idiosyncratic, and on this tour quite moving in his seriousness. Watching and feeling what "Pretty Boy Floyd," let's say, still means to him, I started thinking of Cisco Houston. Not that they sang alike, Cisco being more of an original, but they trained a lot of memories. And Jack is still spreading seeds.

All the way up front, Joan Baez and, as she calls him, The Kid. Her voice has lowered and so the bodiless sound of medieval caroling in a cathedral is also gone. But now there is more warmth and flesh and survivor's humor ("Love is a pain in the ass"); and still that surging vibrato which is so strong that when Joan sings a cappella, the vibrato becomes her rolling rhythm section.

In her duets with Dylan, Joan, most of the time, is a secondary strand. She could overpower him because her timbre penetrates deeper and because she is more resourceful with her voice than he is, but Joan is content to orchestrate Dylan. And Dylan – less coiled, even dancing from time to time – cannot ever be called relaxed but now is so in charge that even he believes he's in charge. His singing, therefore, is more authoritative than ever before. That is, the anxiety in his delivery has to do with the story he's telling rather than with the way he's telling it.

It feels good to him, this tour. The itch was there last summer. One liquid night, if you believe Bob Neuwirth: "Me and Bob and Ramblin' Jack decided we were going to go out and tour in a station wagon, go out and play Poughkeepsie. That didn't turn out to be possible. So we did this instead. And this ain't no Elton John show, you know. This ain't no fucking one-fourth of the Beatles show or nothing like that. This show, we got it all, man. Between us we got it all. And it just gets better and better and better."

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"The feeling is good," Joan handed me her glass of wine, "because everybody has some room onstage. Bob made sure of that. He didn't have to and I argued against it. I thought it would slow things up. But Bob insisted. He said the guys in the band have to work day and night, and so each of them ought to get some attention. Not that, as you saw, Bob has sworn off attention for himself."

He no longer seeks pleasure, he says. But what of the pleasure of attention? Why, that comes, it just comes.

*Blood on the Tracks* has been released and Allen Ginsberg, listening close, is moved to write the poet about a rhyme in "Idiot Wind": "idiot wind blowing like a circle around my skull from the Grand Coulee dam to the Capitol."

It's an amazing rhyme, Ginsberg writes, an amazing image, a national image, like in Hart Crane's unfinished epic of America, *The Bridge*.

The other poet is delighted to get the letter. No one else, Dylan writes Ginsberg, had noticed that rhyme, a rhyme which is very dear to Dylan.

Ginsberg's tribute to that rhyme is one of the reasons he is here with Bob and Joan and the rest of the merry motley. It was, says Allen, "one of the little sparks of intelligence that passed between Bob and me and that led him to invite me on the tour."

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Joan, in faded jeans and multicolored, boldly striped cotton shirt, is talking with amused affection about Dylan, about the tour, about herself. The Ghost of Johanna still marvels at the sparks that never cease coming from this "savage gift on a wayward bus." Throughout the tour, although Lord knows she knew his numbers well, Joan would slip into the audience to hear Dylan's sets or, if she were weary, she'd sit down backstage to listen.

"Bob has so powerful an effect on so many lives," Joan says. She has been saying this for some 13 years; and at the beginning, before his pop beatification, she pushed mightily to press that savage gift on those who had come to pay homage only to her. Dylan was the "mystery guest" unveiled at her concerts, lurching onstage to break the spell of high-born doom across the seas in someone else's history as he rasped about freak shows right outside.

"I'm still deeply affected by his songs," Joan says. And by him? "Well, of course, there's that *presence* of his. I've seen nothing like it except in Muhammad Ali, Marlon Brando and Stevie Wonder. Bob walks into a room

and every eye in the place is on him. There are eyes on Bob even when he's hiding. All that has probably not been easy for him." She says this entirely without her usual irony.

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**"Sometimes,"** Dylan says to me on the phone in 1966, **"I have the feeling that other people want my *soul*. If I say to them, 'I don't *have* a soul,' they say, 'I know that. You don't have to tell me that. Not me. How dumb do you think I am? I'm your *friend*." What can I say except that I'm sorry and feel bad? I guess maybe feeling bad and paranoia are the same thing."**

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Onstage, all during the Rolling Thunder Revue, Joan had put her arm around Dylan's shoulders, wiped the sweat off his forehead, kissed his cheek, and looked into his eyes, giving rise to a frisson of voyeurism among those in the audience who yearn for *Diamonds & Rust* to have a sequel, several sequels, for where else these days can you find that old-time mysterious rhapsody in the romances of the famous? "It's on again," a woman behind me whispers eagerly as Dylan and Baez intertwine in close harmony onstage. "It's on again."

Later I ask the question and Joan laughs. "This is a *musical* tour for me. Actually, I don't see much of Bob at all. He spends most of his time on that movie he's making. The movie needs a director. The sense I get of it so far is that that movie is a giant mess of a home movie."

Joan, sitting back on the couch, as spontaneously straightforward as Dylan is cabalistically convoluted. And as he figures in who knows how many sexual fantasies of how many genders, so she is erotic, still freshly erotic, but probably stars in somewhat straighter fantasies. But who knows?

And she is funny, especially in self-defense. As on the day she showed up for her first rehearsal for the Rolling Thunder Revue.

**"I'd like to hear that song off your new album,"** Dylan asks the once and former girl on the half-shell. **"You know, 'Diamonds & Rust.' "**

"You want me to do *that* on the show?" Joanie looks at him in solemn question.

**"Yeah."** There is a distinct collector's gleam in Dylan's eyes. **"Yeah, I do."**

"You mean," the ex-madonna grabs Dylan by the chin and looks him in the eye, "that song I wrote about my ex-husband."

Dylan has been aced. "I have to keep him spinning," Joan says of the rout, "in order to keep my balance."

"Those duets," Joan says of what she's sometimes been thinking while also wiping Dylan's brow and looking into his eyes, "are a hazard. It's hard singing with him because he's so devilish. There are times when I don't know what song he's plucking on that guitar until he starts singing. And he can be tricky. On one song, we'd been doing two choruses all along the tour but one night, just as I'm about to belt the second chorus, the song was all over. Done! Thanks a lot. Bob had worked out the new short ending with the band and hadn't told me. Oh, he's a lot of fun onstage."

▼

Curtain! The second half of the nonpareil Rolling Thunder What-Might-Have-Been-and-What-Has-Been-Point-to-One-End-Which-Is-Always-Present Revue is about to start!

Under the cowboy hat, the *klezmer*, the Jewish hobo musician with roots – roots by the centuries – turns to the sad-eyed lady from Chavez country. That lady who, he used to say, **"proved t' me that boys still grow."** Dylan looks up at Baez and says, **"Don't upstage me."**

She smiles her luminous smile and says, "I'm going to use everything I have to do just that."

▼

"I'm back from goose hunting in Maryland," [said President Ford.] He was disappointed at only bagging one goose in six hours. Shifting to the subject of country music, "Joan Baez really grabs me," Ford admitted. Party host Senator William Brock (R-Tenn.) agreed. "I wish I could get her to campaign for me… at least in some areas," said the senator.

– *Women's Wear Daily*, November 19th, 1975.

▼

The campaigner is still very fond of the *klezmer*. "I used to be too hard on him. I used to be too hard on a lot of people." Baez grins, sipping wine. "Well, I'm not as stiff as I used to be. I've lightened up on people. I don't expect Bob to champion my causes anymore. I've learned he's not an activist, which does not mean he doesn't care about people. If that were so, he wouldn't have written 'Hurricane.' "

Having shrived Dylan of her moral burden ("Singer or savior it was his to choose/Which of us know what was his to lose"), what does she want for him now?

"I'd like to see him keep making music, keep creating. Why, I would like him to be happy."

It all depends, of course. Or, as Jane Ace once said to Goodman Ace, "*If* it makes him happy to be happy, then let him be happy."

And what does she want for herself?

Joan Baez speaks to the wall. "There must be something I can do with my life that will be worthwhile."

You talk, I say, as if you've been a sybarite or a government official up to now.

"Oh, I've already done a fair amount of things; but in terms of what has to be done, how do you measure what you still ought to be doing? And maybe what I did wasn't done as efficiently as it could have been. Screaming at people may not be the most efficient way. I'm going to stay back a little from now on. I'm learning how to listen to people instead of preaching at them so much. And learning to listen to myself again. I'm 30,000 words into a book, an extension of *Daybreak*. And the songs. I'm going to write more personal songs. If they come. I go through some very long dry periods. But it's fun when it happens."

▼

She likes to laugh, always has, though in the past, as she knows, she has sometimes come on like Carry Nation, wielding her ax, with, as they used to say, an "achingly pure soprano."

At the start of rehearsals for a television show in 1960, she announces what songs she will not sing; with whom else she will appear in her section of the program (no one); the amount of time she will need; the kinds of sets behind her she will not permit. She is not negotiating. She is stating irreducible demands and looking toward the door.

The producer, Robert Herridge, a prideful maverick and wildly ecumenical intellectual who is too honest to last long at CBS, is morose, frustrated. He turns to me, who has brought him this burning bush, and snaps, "The bitch is only 19 years old and she thinks she's Thomas Mann."

She also thought that singing wasn't enough, wasn't nearly enough, and as the Sixties went on, she went on the stump for tax resistance and draft resistance, went to jail twice for helping block induction centers, marched for civil rights North and South, arguing with Martin Luther King much of the way. (King was proud that black bands were coming out of the "revolution," pointing out to Joan that "the black keys and the white keys on the piano are out of tune. We have to get them in tune, and this is one way." And Joan, the still burning bush, pointed a long, graceful finger at him and said, "But the whole fucking orchestra is shot, so what good are black bands going to do?") And she worked with Cesar Chavez before all the articles and books made it modish to switch table wines and peer at the crates the iceberg lettuce came in.

No other performer came anywhere close to Joan in terms of being continually on the line in those already blurred years. And as the most deeply knowledgeable popular circuit rider for active nonviolence, it was Joan who became a pariah among certain "revolutionaries" pushing holy violence because she insisted early in that self-indulgent game that Tolstoy had been right: "The difference between establishment violence and revolutionary violence is the difference between dog shit and chicken shit."

As she kept getting braver and as her radical pacifist thinking grew more rigorous, Joan was also growing into a woman who loved falling in love, just as in the old songs, and who kept learning how to move on, just as in the new songs. Nearly 35, the mother of a six-year-old son, she's still moving on, in a number of directions.

"There are four of me, right?" Joan says. "A mother, a woman, a musician and a politician. For a long time, I always put politics first. When Gabe was born, being a mother and being political took on coequal importance. Music, like before, kept being shoved into the background. And the me that is a woman kept coming and going, depending on whether there was something going on in that part of my life.

"Then," she goes on, "I went broke, so broke I couldn't even fly East for a demonstration. I had done a series of political albums which hadn't sold and so I had to put music up front, I had to stop being part of everybody's political campaign and I had to go out there and entertain. That was last summer's concert tour. I was frightened. What would they think, the people who came to hear the political Joan Baez? At first, I was so apprehensive, I'd announce during a concert that I was on vacation. But you know what they thought? They thought I was human. And *I* liked it too. I found myself *dancing* during the concerts and I love to dance. I'd never been so spontaneous onstage. The audiences were having fun and so was I."

So, in the middle of the journey, the newsreel footage of the Sixties having been locked up somewhere, which of the four Baezes is going to be in the forefront now?

"It's still getting sorted out," says Joan. "I'm always going to be involved in nonviolence, I still feel very close to Chavez and the farmworkers, and I expect I'll be working again with Amnesty International. But on the other hand, I want to be with my kid. This is a very important year for him, a kind of transition year to when he starts moving away from as much need as he has now for his mother. I don't want to mess this year up. And then there's music. I can see myself getting more involved with the fun of the music, with allowing myself to be a musician for the sake of the music itself."

And the woman part of Baez?

She grins. "That comes and goes, depending on what happens. No way of knowing what's going to happen."

One part of Baez, interlaced with all the others, remains stubbornly intact. "I am," she says, "your basic camp counselor, I really am."

All campers are to be treated equally, with justice and fairness for all. Or else.

By the 12th stop on the Rolling Thunder Revue celebration of musical egalitarianism, the camp counselor is furious. She is preparing a pronunciamento and a graphic drawing for the tour's internal newspaper. She is protesting rank injustice in the heart of all this here cultural freedom.

"They make the security people, the bus drivers and the crew," the burning bush speaks, "eat at separate places and at separate hours from the rest of us. *That* is segregation."

Who is "they" – Lou Kemp?

"I don't know who it is. But this is going to stop. The drawing I'm putting in shows a pool of blood, and it's going to say that without these guys who are being segregated, one of us principals might be stranded, to say the least, in the wake of the Rolling Thunder Revue."

What if your protest is ignored?

"Then a lot of us," says Joan, "will go eat with the security people, the bus drivers and the crew. There are a lot of possible approaches to this kind of problem."

Is Bob aware of this segregation?

Joan, customarily spontaneous, customarily candid, weighs her answer. "I don't know," she says.

▼

Allen Ginsberg also speaks of protest, but as in a vision. Where once was a time to howl, now is the time to begin the harvest and to give thanks to the harbingers, then and now.

In Springfield, Massachusetts, Arlo Guthrie moves onstage to play and sing with his father's other son, the hard-wishing, hard-traveling, earnestly self-adopted Jack Elliott. Backstage, the midwestern *klezmer* (to whom Woody was his "last idol") watches and listens.

"That's a strong lineage, Woody's," says Allen Ginsberg, "and Woody, of course, was part of an older lineage, that old good-time Wobbly idealism. That's all still going strong right in this show. Joan sings 'Joe Hill.' And 'Hurricane' is part of that too, an old classic social protest song."

Sound the news of injustice and the people will awake. How else can we begin?

"And look how we end," says Walt Whitman's friend.

The end, a reasonably jubilant "This Land Is Your Land," everybody onstage, even Ginsberg-the-keeper-of-the-vision making silvery his finger cymbals, as Joan soars and swoops from the mountains to the prairies and Dylan, smiling, stands his ground, and all the rest move to the hearty beat of the American *Upanishad*.

"There was a kind of vision of community in the Sixties," Ginsberg says after the show, "and many people thought that once they'd had the vision, everything was solved. But as Jack Kerouac once said, 'Walking on water wasn't built in a day.' Another thing going on in the Sixties was just people digging each other, digging each other's texture and character, hanging out. You can't do that fast either. You know, there was a lot of hanging out in the Fifties too, in Kerouac."

Dylan had been braced and shaped, in part, way back then, by Kerouac. *Doctor Sax*, *On the Road*, *Mexico City Blues*. The day after the Rolling Thunder Revue came to Lowell, Dylan, Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky visited Kerouac's grave. Ginsberg had brought a copy of *Mexico City Blues* and Dylan read a poem from it. The three then sat on the grave, Dylan picking up Ginsberg's harmonium and making up a tune. When Dylan pulled out his guitar, Ginsberg began to improvise a long, slow, 12-bar blues about Kerouac sitting up in the clouds looking down on these kindly wanderers putting music to his grave. Dylan is much moved, much involved, a state of introspection closely captured by the camera crew that has also come along.

▼

Before Lowell, before Boston, before Plymouth, the day the Dharma Carnival was to leave New York, Allen Ginsberg meets Muriel Rukeyser on the street. This soft-voiced, slow-speaking, hugely honest poet, who of late has been in South Korea trying to stop the terminal silencing of an antideath poet there, is glad to see Ginsberg. She admires people with visions. She asks where he's going.

"I'm going on the bus," Ginsberg says cheerily. "It's a minstrel show!"

"But it's more than a minstrel show, isn't it?" she asks me the next day.

"It is a signal to the country," Ginsberg tells me on the road. "What happened in the San Francisco renaissance in the mid-Fifties was one of those signals that characterize the rise of a generation's poetic consciousness and

its sense of social rebellion. And that happened in the very midst of McCarthyism. Then, in the mid-Sixties, the peace marches and the rise of rock – the Beatles and things like that – were among the signals for a further rising of consciousness, a wider sense of community. Now, the Rolling Thunder Revue will be one of the signal gestures characterizing the working cultural community that will make the Seventies."

I would like to truly believe, I tell the poet, but where, except in wish, is the basis for such joyous tidings in a time of torpor?

"Have you read Dave Dellinger's book, *More Power than We Knew*?" The poet must resort to prose. "Dellinger shows that many of the demands that the youth generation or the left or the movement made in the Sixties have actually been met. Congress *did* cut off funds for the Vietnam war and who would have thought that possible in the mid-Sixties? Then there were all the protests about the police state, and a police state paranoia to go with them. Now a great deal of that has been confirmed and exposed in public investigations. Not that everything has been all cleaned up but the work of the Sixties *did* bear some fruit. It never was in vain.

"So now, it's time for America to get its shit together," the poet says idiomatically. "It's time to get back to work or keep on working, depending on who you are, because the work that went before *has* been good, even though people got discouraged. It's been as good as you can expect, considering what it takes to walk on water or reverse the machine age or deal with overpopulation or capitalism. Rolling Thunder, with its sense of community, is saying we should all get our act together. And do it properly and well." The poet, bouncing his vision, laughs. "Once you have a view of the right path, then you have to travel that path."

That means Dylan's getting his act together too?

"Having gone through his changes in the Sixties and Seventies, just like everybody else," Ginsberg says, "Bob now has his powers together. On the show, he has all the different kinds of art he has practiced – protest, improvisation, surrealist invention, electric rock & roll, solitary acoustic guitars strumming, duet work with Joan and with other people. All these different practices have now ripened and are usable in one single show, just as there is also room for Mick Ronson and his very English kind of space-music rock, Joan and her sort of refined balladry and Roger McGuinn with his West Coast-style rock. All of these different styles turn out to be usable *now*."

▼

"Do you know what Dylan is talking about doing?" a principal of the tour says to me. "Don't use my name, but he might start a *newspaper*! That blows my mind. It'll be like a community newspaper, but for a community all over the country."

I wonder who is going to be the music critic and, in particular, who is going to write about Dylan's records. Blind Boy Grunt?

▼

"I am not able to tell you any details," says Allen Ginsberg, "but this tour may not end as all other tours have. There is some desire among us to have a kind of permanent community and Dylan is stepping very, very slowly to find out if that can work. Recordings would be one way and there may be other ways. One must proceed slowly and soberly – unlike the Beatles when they tried to expand their sense of community. Remember John Lennon trying to put together that whole Apple enterprise as a sort of umbrella organization for all kinds of collective work? But he didn't have the right personnel and so it wasn't done soberly and practically enough. This would be. Keep watching. The thing is to keep the Rolling Thunder spirit alive."

Joan Baez's denunciation of class segregation aboard the Rolling Thunder Revue has appeared in the troupe's internal newspaper. Her sketch of some nameless star, lying on the ground with blood pouring out of his head, was not printed and has disappeared. But the accusatory text reads:

"We strongly suggest that the security people, the bus drivers and the crew be treated more like human beings and less like bastard children because without them one of the principals might be left dead in the wake of the Rolling Thunder Revue.

"[Signed], Joan Baez and a large supporting cast."

Did it work? I ask.

"Well," says the ceaseless strategist of nonviolent direct action, "things kind of came together a bit after that. A lot of people, each in his or her own way, began committing small acts of civil disobedience – like taking the bus driver to their table. So the tone has changed and the segregation has lessened." Some people, I am buoyed to see, are still overcoming.

▼

The tour is old enough for retrospection.

"When you got that call from Bob," an old acquaintance visiting Joan backstage says, "I suppose you got on the plane without even knowing what you were going to get paid."

Joan looks at the questioner as if the latter has just asked if the tooth fairy has gotten over its cold. "When I got that call," Joan says, "I had already planned my fall tour. So I told the people dealing with the money that although it seemed like fun, they'd have to make it worth my while to change my plans. Well, after my lawyers got involved and we worked out a contract, a very detailed contract, they made it worth my while. Sure, I'm glad I came. This tour has integrity. And that's because of Bob."

"Tell me," the acquaintance asks, "what are his children like?"

Joan hoots. "I've *never* seen any of them. They're like mythology. It does gather around him, mythology. And he certainly helps it gather. Mythology and confusion. Like some of the songs. *I* know who 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' is, no matter who *he* says it is."

"But at least we all know who 'Sara' is," the visitor observes.

"Dylan says," Ginsberg has overheard, "that song is about Sarah in the Bible." And Ginsberg laughs.

Mythology has become palpable. Sara Lowndes Dylan has joined the Rolling Thunder Revue, and with her are several Dylan children and a nanny. Allen Ginsberg is impressed. "Sara is very intelligent, very funny and I would say queenly. She's sort of aristocratic looking, like an old-time New York young Jewish lady who's been around a lot in the theater, which she has been. Sara and Joan," Ginsberg chuckles, "have had time to compare notes on Dylan."

"No, I had *never* known her before," Joan says of Sara, "and yes, we have been comparing notes, and that is all I'm going to tell you about that. But I will say that for me, Sara is the most interesting female on this tour. Why? Because she's not a bore. That's the best thing I can say about anybody."

Sara Lowndes Dylan has become part of the Rolling Thunder Revue Acting Company, adding her skills and fantasies to what Allen Ginsberg estimates to be more than 100 hours of film already in the can for the giant kaleidoscope being shot by Lombard Street Films, which is being financed – I am told for nonattribution by those close to Zeus – by Dylan himself. At least five or so complete concerts have been preserved and some special numbers, such as "Isis," have been filmed more times than that. And there have been scores of scenes enacted by diversely mixed members of the troupe. Sara Dylan, for instance, has now portrayed a madam in a bordello in which one of the nubile employees is enacted by Joan Baez in a brazen French accent.

Joan, at first rather standoffish about what she had earlier regarded as a huge mess of a home movie, has now become more involved. In another scene, for instance, she and Dylan are in a bar and the bartender is Arlo Guthrie. "My God, she has a lot of energy," says cinéaste Allen Ginsberg. "And what a marvelous mime."

Also intermittently involved are members of the band, virtuosic David Mansfield among them. As an educational insert in the bordello sequence, Allen Ginsberg is seen in his business suit, taking Mansfield (playing a chaste 14-year-old) to lose his cherry, as Ginsberg puts it in the old-time vernacular. This being, in part, a musical, Mansfield of course has his violin along.

Like many of the scenes in this gargantuan movie – which will purportedly be cut and edited in the spring by Dylan and Howard Alk, who worked with Dylan on *Eat the Document* – the bordello section started as quite something else. Ginsberg had suggested a scene involving a number of women in the troupe, in part because he is much taken with the notion that the dominant theme in the Rolling Thunder Revue is respect for the "mother goddess, eternal woman, earth woman principle." He points to the songs in the show, such as "Isis" and "Sara," and notes as well that Sara Dylan has diligently researched this theme in such works as Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*.

The women having assembled, there was much discussion as to the roles they would play – perhaps the graces or the goddesses of the nine muses. Somehow, however, as Sara Lowndes Dylan said, "After all that talk about goddesses, we wound up being whores."

"Nonetheless," says Allen, "Sara, as the madam, did talk about Flaubert."

▼

Dylan is consumed by this film. He conceives a good many of the situations, advises on the transmutation of others, does some of the directing, peers into the camera and works, picking up technique, with the film crew.

One day after much shooting, Ginsberg, wondering how Dylan keeps track of the direction of all this footage, asks him. Dylan wishes he hadn't.

**"I've lost the thread,"** Dylan, with some bewilderment, admits to Ginsberg.

A couple of days later, Ginsberg asks Dylan if the thread has been relocated. The singing filmmaker nods affirmatively.

"So what *is* the thread of the film?" the poet asks.

**"Truth and beauty,"** says his ever-precise friend.

Along with the Dylan children and their nanny, Joan Baez's six-year-old son, Gabriel, is now on hand, together with Joan's mother and a nursemaid for Gabriel. What would Kerouac have made of this way of doing the road?

Also suddenly, triumphantly materialized – a climactic reaffirmation of the eternal-woman principle – is Bob Dylan's mother, Beatty Zimmerman.

"A regular chicken soup Jewish mother," Allen Ginsberg says approvingly. "With a lot of spirit."

▼

Toronto. A cornucopian concert with Gordon Lightfoot and Joni Mitchell added to the Astartean cast. And also added in the fertile finale, "This Land Is Your Land" – Bob Dylan's mother.

Seated at the back of the stage, Beatty Zimmerman is pulled up and onto stage center and begins to dance and wave to the audience, none of whom, she is sure, knows who she is.

It is getting near the start of the second chorus and Joan Baez, chronically gracious, pulls Mrs. Zimmerman toward the lead mike, the principals' mike. "All of a sudden," Joan says, "Dylan kicks me in the ass. Gently. It was his way of saying, 'I think I'd rather sing this chorus than have my mother do it.' So I had to gracefully Charleston Mrs. Zimmerman back a few steps and then leap to the mike and sing with Bob."

And there, back a few steps, is Mrs. Zimmerman, arms flailing, dancing to Woody's song and the music of Woody's children and the music of her own child, of all things. The first time she's ever been onstage with that child.

▼

"Sara, Joan, his children, his mother," Alien Ginsberg meditates, "he's getting all his mysteries unraveled."

Not quite. Not yet. Earlier in the tour, listening to him as he chants what I took – wrongly, it turns out – to be kaddish for "Sara," there is that mysterious, demonic force, in and beyond the words, that will last a long while beyond the tour. That cracking, shaking energy which reminds me of another *klezmer* on the roof, another Tateh in ragtime, Lenny Bruce. But Lenny, who certainly had his act together, never learned how to get his defenses together. Dylan, on the other hand, has developed a vocation for self-protection. If he has a mania, it is for survival. ("I'm still gonna be around when everybody gets their heads straight.") And part of the way of survival is keeping some of his mysteries damn well raveled.

▼

One morning, as the caravan is about to break camp, a rock musician says, "You know what makes him different. He sees the end of things. The rest of us, we're into something, it's as if it's going to last forever. Dylan, he's in just as deep, but he *knows* it's not going to last."

▼

I am mumbling about a stiff singer who phrases, however authoritatively, like a seal and plays nothing guitar on the side. Why, then, do I once again (unlike the '74 tour) find him powerful? "It doesn't matter whether he's musical at all," I am instructed by Margot Hentoff, a writer on these matters. "He has in his voice that sense of the fragility of all things, that sense of mortality which everybody tries to avoid acknowledging but is drawn toward when they hear it. He's got it and nobody else has."

It was my wife (quoted in a *New York Times* epitaph I had written of the '74 tour) who had greatly annoyed Dylan, a friend of his told me. "He's not 'The Kid' anymore," she had said in print, "so what can he be now?"

A year later, having come upon the Rolling Thunder Revue, she has an answer: "a grown-up. Maybe a suspicious, secretive, irritating grown-up. But no longer a kid. He's lost that. And now, as he grows older, he'll get still more powerful because he'll reach the further knowledge that there is no way out of loss, and so he'll have a new truth to talk about."

▼

Late one night, at the Other End, before the trail boss was quite ready to get the wagon train going, Dylan and Bob Neuwirth and the rest of the gang are elevating their discourse.

"Hey, poet, sing me a poem!" one of them yells to Dylan.

**"Okay, poet,"** says the Minstrel Guruji.

Delighted, Allen Ginsberg is saying, "It's like in a Dostoevsky novel, the way they've taken to calling each other 'poet.' It's no more 'Okay, cowboy.' It's 'Okay, poet.' They're using 'poet' as an honorific, practical thing, and that means they've grown old enough to see that poetry is tough, that it's a lasting practice bearing fruit over decades.

"Dylan has become much more conscious of himself as a poet," Ginsberg adds. "I've watched him grow in that direction. Back in 1968, he was talking poetics with me, telling me how he was writing shorter lines, with every line meaning something. He wasn't just making up a line to go with a rhyme anymore; each line had to

advance the story, bring the song forward. And from that time came some of the stuff he did with the Band – like 'I Shall Be Released,' and some of his strong laconic ballads like 'The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest.' There was to be no wasted language, no wasted breath. All the imagery was to be functional rather than ornamental. And he's kept growing from there.

"Like he's been reading Joseph Conrad recently. *Victory* in particular. I found out when we were talking about the narrative quality of some of the newer songs – 'Hurricane' and 'Joey' and 'Isis.' Bob related the way those songs developed to what he'd been learning about narrative and about characterization from Conrad. The way characterization and mood shape narrative. Now he's asking about H. P. Lovecraft. I wonder what that's going to lead to?"

▼

It is near the end. In Toronto, Joan Baez is backstage. Onstage, Dylan is beginning his acoustic set. A member of Gordon Lightfoot's band begins to move some equipment. Baez glares at him and he stops.

"The jerk didn't know any better," she says later, "but I didn't want to miss a note. I didn't want to miss a word. Even after all these shows, the genius of The Kid was still holding it all together. I'd heard it all, every night, and here I'm sitting again as close to him as I can get. And not only me. You look around and you see every member of the band and the guys in the crew listening too."

What is it? What is it he has? I ask.

"It's the power," Joan says. "It's the power."

▼

"*Oh, I'm hurtin'.*" It is the next morning. Bob Neuwirth groans and coughs in a most alarming manner. "This is a rolling writers' show," Neuwirth manages to say. "Nobody on this tour who isn't a writer. *Oh, I'm really hurtin'.* Even the equipment guys, the bus drivers, they're all jotting things down. It's a goddamn rolling writers' convention. *Oh my God, I can't even cough.* It's going to be such a drag when this tour is over."

Joan Baez, mildly sympathetic when she's not laughing, says to the audibly aching Neuwirth, "Do let me describe what happened to you last night. Everybody has his own way of dealing with anxieties," she explains to me, "and his way was to get himself black and blue. He got very, very drunk and ornery and for an hour and a half four very large security guards were wrestling him in the hall because they didn't want him to leave the hotel and go wreck Gordon Lightfoot's house where we were having a party. Well, he got there anyhow and he did wreck the house just a little. But everybody had a grand time, and now Neuwirth feels fine too, except he can't walk very well.

"You see, it's going to be rough for all of us when this is over. And Neuwirth's way of handling that was to have an early blowout. God, it's depressing at the end."

▼

At the beginning, in Plymouth, Massachusetts, Elliott Adnopoz (long since transubstantiated into his vision, Ramblin' Jack Elliott) sees an old friend, the replica of the *Mayflower*, on whose rigging he, an expert sailor, had actually worked years before. Climbing to the top of the mizzenmast, Elliott explodes with a long, joyous, "Ahoy!" and waves to the Minnesota poet in the cowboy hat below as Allen Ginsberg proclaims, "We have, once again, embarked on a voyage to reclaim America."

At least it is steady work, especially for a minstrel.

# Before 25 April 1977, Unknown Interviewer (Time magazine)

Source: *Time*, US magazine, 25 April 1977, pages [47]-48.

Possibly a quote from elsewhere, but in any case taken from an interview at an unknown location.

**Hanging Out with the L.A. Rockers**

**Schmoozing Distance.** Malibu's colony is an exclusive enclave, but it is also a casual community of equals. Neil Diamond's beach house, Linda Ronstadt's $325,000 clapboard and the sprawling nine-bedroom house Guitarist Robbie Robertson took over from Carole King are all within schmoozing distance, as are the leased beach mansions of Mick Jagger and Ron Wood.

The exercise of unlimited wealth can be startling when it comes to life-styles. Los Angeles Architect David Tobin became aware of that form of exuberance two years ago when he undertook a $50,000 remodelling job for Bob Dylan. Says he: "I quickly realised that this guy had so much money that he didn't need to conform to any of the rules binding me." During his two years with Dylan, the $50,000 remodelling grew into a £2.25 million mansion. "I had to keep a straight face when Dylan said he wanted a living room he could ride a horse through," recalls Tobin. "It would have helped a lot to have been a shrink."

Dylan is almost indifferent to what his neighbours call his Taj Mahal. Says he: **"One hundred years from now I won't be judged for the house."** He is probably correct. One local geologist believes that the mansion is already slipping into the ocean.

# 24 January 1978, Santa Monica Press Conference

Sources: (A) *Bob Dylan – Meeting the Press*, by Robert Hilburn in: *Los Angeles Times*, US newspaper, 28 January 1978. The text reproduced here is from *Every Mind Polluting Word*, edited by Artur Jarosinski, September 2006, pages 582-583.

(B) *Dylan's Eastern promise*, by Harvey Kubernik in: *Melody Maker*, UK magazine, 4 February 1978, page 1.

(C) *The Daily Yomiuri*, Tokyo, Japanese English-language newspaper, 16 February 1978.

The press conference took place at Rundown Studios, Santa Monica, California.

(A) Robert Hilburn's report in Los Angeles Times

**Bob Dylan—Meeting the Press**

Bob Dylan opened his press conference this week with a question of his own.

Spotting a reporter whose story about the songwriter's much-publicized Malibu home once upset him, Dylan asked the writer icily: **"Do you want to talk about my house or my movie?"**

The remark reflected the media testiness associated with Dylan ever since his sarcastic encounter with a *Time* magazine correspondent in *"Don't Look Back,"* the decade-old film documentary.

But it proved a false alarm. Except for verbal jousting with an Australian-based writer who wondered if Dylan felt guilty for having changed his name from Bob Zimmerman, things went smoothly. Surprisingly so.

Sitting in the "playback" room on the first floor of a two-story Santa Monica rehearsal hall, Dylan waded patiently through nearly 90 minutes of questions from mostly foreign journalists.

The usually private Dylan has made himself available to the press in recent weeks to draw attention to his new *"Renaldo & Clara"* film. This week's conferences had been planned as a single session but so many writers showed up from Japan that a separate meeting was set up for them.

**"I've never been opposed to talking to the press,"** Dylan said, when asked about his general media hesitancy. **"It's just that I usually don't have anything to talk to them about."**

Though most of the questions centered on the film and an upcoming Japan-Australia tour, some touched on such classic fan magazine fodder as "What's your favorite food," and whether Dylan really pals around with Mick Jagger and Bruce Springsteen. Springsteen was hailed by some critics as the "new" Dylan.

The irony is that one of the themes of *"Renaldo & Clara"* is that attempts to peek into an artist's private life only tend to cloud the understanding of his art.

Rather than the sarcasm one might have expected in response to those questions, Dylan reacted with wry amusement. **"Whisky,"** he quipped, when queried about his favorite dish. Then, he changed it to ice cream. After assuring the writers he doesn't hang out with Jagger and Springsteen, he added, **"But Bruce does write some pretty good songs..."**

**"I think the movie is pretty self-explanatory."** Dylan told the first group of writers. **"It might seem vague, but it isn't. It's all got a purpose and it's all connected. It might be a little different from what you're used to seeing, but I think in time it'll prove true...**

**"If it's still around in 10 or 12 years, then it'll have done well. What happens on opening night isn't too important because everybody's not going to see it on opening night."**

Speaking far more concretely than in the recent, almost amorphous *Rolling Stone* interview, Dylan discussed the reported financing of the $1.25 million film and his future movie plans. **"I tried to get financing for a film I tried to do before this and it was impossible..."** the financiers wanted to know exactly what they were going to be getting for their money. **"We financed...** ('Renaldo') **… with the Rolling Thunder tour. The money that was coming into the box office was going out all for the movie."**

Dylan also explained why he distributed the film himself rather than turn to a major Hollywood studio. **"They wouldn't let this movie run long enough... If they released it and it didn't do well in three or four weeks, they'd take it off the market. It's not that kind of picture.**

**"Also, some of them wanted all music... some said it has to be an hour and a half. Others would say it has to be more of 'you' and less of everybody else. Everybody had something like that to say."**

Dylan said he'd like to begin another film this year, but said he'd probably shy away from the multiple roles of actor, writer and director that he undertook this time: **"I don't want to write it all. I wouldn't even want to direct it. I just want to help push it along. I'll be in it and I want to see a certain story... but I might get some help..."**

Moving to other aspects of his career, Dylan was asked why he stayed away from concerts so long in the late '60s and early '70s. He also was asked if he was surprised such a large, intense following was waiting for him when he did return to live shows in '74.

**"I** (stayed away because I) **had been touring so much: 10, 11 months a year. It finally got to me... And the sound wasn't right, anyway. The sophisticated sound equipment has just come into being the past few years.**

**"I was surprised** (at the response)... **I remember when we opened in Chicago... all those people there. But if they weren't there, I'd just have gone back to the clubs. I'm just up there being a servant to the songs."**

Dylan also said he was worried in '74 whether the old songs would be meaningful – to him and to audiences. **"Maybe I wouldn't feel like singing them anymore," he noted. "But they still felt right I felt that feeling from the rest of the people, too. The songs held up. The arrangements always change. That's gotta be expected. We've got some new arrangements (for this tour) that you wouldn't even think were the same songs."**

After the Japan and Australia tours, Dylan expects to record an album in L.A. Presumably, it'll be released in time for a late spring or early summer U.S. tour. The U.S. schedule will be a mixture of large and small halls, and may include some cities that he didn't reach on the Band or Rolling Thunder tours.

For the overseas dates, Dylan will be backed by a 13-piece band, including female backup singers. The rhythm section includes Rolling Thunder holdovers Rob Stoner on bass, David Mansfield on steel guitar/violin and Steven Soles on guitar.

(B) Harvey Kubernik's report in Melody Maker

**Dylan's Eastern Promise**

Bob Dylan is returning to the stage with a massive trek around Japan and Australia. Meanwhile, his film, Renaldo and Clara, has opened in America.

Dylan broke a long silence last week and talked to pressmen about the two projects.

- The touring band will be 13-strong and includes Rob Stoner, Steve Soles and Dave Mansfield from the Rolling Thunder Revue, plus Otis Smith, Billy Cross. Katie Sagal and Franny Eisenberg.
- The songs the band have been rehearsing with Dylan include "Maggie's Farm," "Don't Think Twice," "If Not For You," "It's Alright Ma," "Shelter From The Storm," "Love Minus Zero (No Limit)," "I Threw It All Away," "I Shall Be Released," "One Of Us Must Know," "All Along The Watchtower," "Forever Young," "Blowin' In The Wind," "Ballad Of A Thin Man," "You're A Big Girl Now" and "Winterlude," together with new songs, including "Sixty-four Dollar Question" and "The First To Say Goodbye."

As well as the new material, Dylan says he has re-arranged some of old material in drastic ways. **"The arrangements change, that's gotta be expected. We've got some new arrangements (for the tour) that you wouldn't even think were the same songs."**

After the tour, which starts on February 20 in Japan, Dylan plans to record an album in Los Angeles that should be released in time for an American Tour in late Spring or early summer.

While talking to reporters, Dylan was asked why he backed out of touring in the late Sixties and early Seventies.

**"I stayed away because I had been touring so much – ten, eleven months a year. It finally got to me and the sound wasn't right, anyway. The sophisticated sound equipment has just come into being in the past few years."**

When he returned to playing in 1974, Dylan was surprised at the strong reaction from fans. **"I remember when we opened in Chicago with all those people there. I was surprised at the response. If they weren't there, I'd just have gone back to the clubs. I'm just up there being a servant to the songs."**

He was also concerned that the old songs might have lost their meaning and impact, both to him and the audience. **"Maybe I wouldn't feel like singing them anymore, but they still felt right. I felt that feeling from the rest of the people, too. The songs held up."**

- Dylan's other project at the moment is his movie, Renaldo and Clara, which he recently finished at a cost of £1.25 million. **"I think the movie is pretty self-explanatory. It might seem vague but it isn't. It has all got a purpose and it's all connected. It might be a little different from what you're used to seeing, but I think in time it'll prove true. If it's still around in ten or 12 years, then it'll have done well."**

(C) report in The Daily Yomiuri, Tokyo

**Dylan Talks About Japan Tour**

Bob Dylan, once called the "god of folk rock" and who has much influenced young people today, is scheduled to visit Japan for the first time soon.

He is also known to hate journalists but he met several of the tribe from Japan, Australia and the US in Los Angeles recently. The following is a version of that interview, according to CBS Sony's materials.

Dylan has not given a concert tour in the US since May 1976, and outside the US since 1966. What made him decide on a Japanese tour this time? Dylan wearing a black leather jacket, blue jeans and basket shoes, said, "**Well, I've never been there before, and there are many fans there. I know they sell records in Japan. It seemed like a good thing to do. I play all over the world, so wherever there is a stage, I'll play".**

Asked about how he feels about performing in a non-English-speaking country for the first time, he replied: **"I make much of the lyrics. But what's important is the feeling, I guess they understand the feeling".**

For his show in Japan, he listed the musical backing he will use – lead guitar, rhythm guitar, trap-set drums. conga drums, organ, piano, violins and horns. Musicians he will bring with him include Andy Stein, David Mansfield, Ian Wallace, Bobby Hall Porter, Steven Stills and Alan Pasquale. The repertory he will perform in Japan would be a mixture of old and up-to-date tunes, he said.

Dylan will hold eight concerts at the Nippon Budokan Hall in Tokyo and three in Osaka. He said that he had never done eight concerts in the same hall before, excepting night clubs.

**"The show will change different nights, it won't be the same each night, though not a big change",** Dylan said.

Dylan also spoke about his future activities. He plans concert tours in Australia and the US this year and will make a new album whose basic concept is love, after the Japan tour.

In autumn he will direct a film on death and rebirth, he said. Asked about his favorite film directors, he listed Sam Peckinpah, Fritz Lang, Andy Warhol and Akira Kurosawa. He said that Peckinpah's "Bring Me The Head of Alfred Garcia" impressed him the most recently. More than 10 years ago, Dylan was the leading "protest" folk singer together with Joan Baez but recently he sings songs about love.

His Tokyo concerts will be given at the Nippon Budokan Hall on February 20, 21, 23, 28, March 1, 2, 3 and 4 at 6.30 pm. In Osaka, he will perform at the Matsushita Denki Gymnasium on February 24, 25 and 26 at 6.30 pm. Admission: ¥4,500 and ¥3,000.

# 24 January 1978, John Austin

Source: *The Sun*, Australian newspaper, 27 January 1978, page 21. The text reproduced here is from *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 197, 2018, page 33.

The interview took place at Rundown Studios, Santa Monica, California.

**'My movie's my Aussie tour'**

**The film is just like my Australian tour – there are a lot of things I will sing about during those two-hour concerts.**

**Some people will find the film incomprehensible. But that doesn't bother me. The film has to be felt. Like the weather, it's there. But I cannot, and will not, be subservient to what people are thinking. This is why I made the film and financed it myself.**

**The money would come into the box office at night (during the Rolling Thunder tour) and I'd take it out to do the film the next day. Renaldo and Clara is my first film and I had to finance it this way because I couldn't secure private financing. For some reason, all the financiers wanted something more definite than an improvisational film with just an outline and based on death and rebirth. This (death and rebirth) is the main subject of the film as well as my new album which will be released later this year.**

**I made the film for a specific bunch of people and myself, that's all. I did not, incidentally, make the film to receive critical acclaim. I don't want to be considered a great film maker and have that monkey on my back along with everything else. I just want people to see it. If the film is still showing somewhere in the world 10 or 12 years from now, I will consider that it has done well.**

Austin asked Bob why he had, "joined the ranks of capitalism to try to make money out of financing his own film?" The response, **"Well, this is America, everything changes."** Austin's article ended by claiming that Bob, "climbed into his 10-metre long yellow limousine for the ride back to his Malibu mansion."

# 24 January 1978, Julia Orange

Source: *Red Lockington Show*, on: *2GB*, Australian radio, broadcast 6 March 1978. Transcript published in *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 80, Winter 2024, pages 44-45, 47-49, 51-52. Transcribed by John Wraith.

This interview took place in Rundown Studios, Santa Monica, California, one of several one-on-one discussions following the Santa Monica Press Conference earlier that day.

JO: I just read a great poem by Elizabeth Bishop, do you… 'The art of losing', a great poem but… the process of life, of shedding things, sheading herds of people and art of losing. And I, it seems to me that you erm are a good loser in a way, I mean, I mean in a good confidence way. You don't [inaudible] aspect of your being in any way and I think a lot of people lose something and they get mesmerized by what they have lost and they can't ever quite re disperse themselves again. What do you think about? It is not really a question more of a ramble [laughs]…

**BD: Yeah**

JO: Something I think about a lot. [laughs]

**BD: Uh, huh… I don't know… the only thing is er… We… we just have to believe it if it is temporary.**

JO: Yes. What is the hardest thing for you to do in the whole experience?

**BD: Erm… well after a period of all that you get, sometimes you get beyond it. Then you can lose it, you know.**

JO: Yes.

**BD: It all, it all is the same after that you don't want anything anymore. So…**

JO: And give up acquiring…

**BD: Yeah, acquiring… that's difficult giving up acquiring because, you know, it just happens in life that people lay things on you all a sudden turn around and you are committed to something** [Yeah] **and you can't remember from where it came.**

JO: Yes

**BD: And er… you move things like greed or mistrust but you lose these attitudes. Attitudes are what you really have to either gain or lose but with those you can't have the material for whatever you can get from these but er… Once you gain the attitude you can gain the object.** [Yeah] **And once you lose the attitude you know, you can give up that extrema object**

[Don't Think Twice – Aircheck]

JO: … hero worship, is that true?

**BD: No, I think we need examples, you know,** [Yeah] **to follow but er… we need erm… people to show us the way. An' we need men and women to behave in a… in a way to inspire others that come after them but erm… I don't think it could end with a hero worshiper any kind of worship.** [Yeah] **But you can't help but admire certain people. And you can't help but worship others, at a distance. Worship is a… a bind really. It's not a physical erm… reflex.**

JO: Yeah. Do you worship anybody?

**BD: Yeah, I used to worship Woody Guthrie, Robert Johnson. I know what hero worship is but I also know that… that er… it's an enlightening thing.**

JO: In one particular occasion?

**BD: Right.**

JO: Something that makes you feel small?

**BD: Yeah, it is something that holds you back.**

[4th Street – Aircheck]4.06

JO: I read yesterday that you wrote your first song about Brigit Bardot, can you imagine why, what promoted that?

**BD: Well, you go back [inaudible] it would be like writing a song about Rachel Welch, you know.**

JO: [Laughs]

**BD: Brigit Bardot, I mean, I guess I wrote that song because, for me she had that little girl, baby quality an' that woman quality all. All in, all in the same lines.**

JO: Yeah.

**BD: I… I kinda say was attracted. [Laughs]**

JO: You like a combination of [inaudible].

**BD: [Laughs] Yeah a complete woman, you know.**

JO: All in the same flesh. [Laughs] Most women change a great deal, maybe the result of being married or just maturity?

**BD: Well, ah…**

JO: You know, when you think of the, oh Brigit Bardot and the change?

**BD: Right now, at this crossroads here, ah… I can let it be, you know, I can be attracted to it but I can also stay, stay away and keep my distance, which is… I can admire due to… like anybody else I don't enter. Do what I must to exit**

JO: Yeah. Do you, do you, erm… I mean, I can see how my, my way of thinking about men has sort of subtly changed, changes all the time and erm, I think that you, you learn to kind of bring the list into focus with what you need to survive and erm… So you be… if it's kinda it becoming more realistical and human about it.

**BD: That's like a priest, that's predictable I think like a priest. There is no predictable man or a woman er… but it's you know whenever… whenever you share it with somebody, they're bringing out something within you, if you are looking for it. If you're looking for a woman or you're looking for a man, you're not really looking for a woman or a man you are really looking for somebody to bring something out of you which is buried.** [Yeah] **And once that person brings that particular aspect out of you, you become familiar with it, and… and er… they arouse you, that is the way you want that quality out all the time. Then you stick with that particular person.**

JO: Yes. Yeah, that's true.

[Sara – Aircheck]

JO: You've been quoted as saying, when you set out to write a song, what you intend to accomplish very rarely coincides with what comes out. But you think that recently that these are coming more closely aligned, is that true of that song?

**BD: Yeah.**

JO: Why do you think that is?

**BD: Maybe lack of experience with the inner self, lack of experience with the material. Not knowing the… not setting it up enough in advance and just basing on the initial flow, first line.** [Oh Yeah] **Songs I tend, songs you tend to write off the first line.** [Yeah] **An' then you'll take it, you know, off the first line and it is usually good.**

JO: Yeah, see what comes first?

**BD: Ah, hah. But er na, you can't do that in the movies, you know. You must have a beginning, a middle and an end. And the songs now… I used to write some songs with that first line then maybe another couple of lines and maybe another verse but, no later than that I would go right to the last line and tell you what I'll just… does this song end up anywhere or, or is this song taking, a ride somewhere, where I don't really know where I'm ending up. So, I would want t know where I was ending up before I go there, then I could see how it ends.** [Yeah] **You know, but er… some of the times I would write it just verse after verse and the last line would just appear and it would all make perfect sense.**

JO: Do you feel in a state of high tension when you write?

**BD: Er… ah it happens at a er… no predictable moment.**

JO: I mean after that first lovely flash of 'yes, that is going to be that last line' do you have to flesh the whole thing in?

**BD: Do I feel a relief?**

JO: No, I mean when you have go the line that may make it make sense but got to work at it like a craftsman, you know, er…

**BD: I don't lke to work at songs like a craftsman.**

JO: Don't you?

**BD: No, I don't do that. I did a bunch of songs that way. I did the 'John Wesley Harding' songs that particular way and it worked but it's difficult for me to do that anymore. You have to be in Tolstoy's position to be able to do that like a craftsman.**

JO: Has there been one song for you in which all the elements came together most perfectly and most naturally? And you felt emotionally for them

**BD: Many of them.**

JO: Can you name some?

**BD: Yeah. 'Ramona', 'It's Alight Ma', 'Simple Twist Of Fate', 'Just Like a Woman', 'Blowin' In The Wind'.**

[Blowin' – Aircheck]

JO: Why did you rewrite 'Lay, Lady, Lay'?

**BD: I do rewrite a lot of my songs.**

JO: Oh, you do?

**BD: They're not total whitewashes but they're more, sometimes when I have phrases that weren't the right ones now do make more sense to me. Now I know what the songs are about, much clearer than I did when I wrote them. And so, if it's at all possible when I'm performing the song to bring it up to a clearer reality, I'll do that without thinking - twice.**

JO: That must be rather satisfying in a way because you can see the picture better.

**BD: I'm real satisfied if the songs live and… I've been chosen to write them all, these songs that I have and it pleases me. I've also been chosen to perform them and I'm subservient to those songs. I'm not out there as a performer performing like a dance team. I'm just out there to deliver the best songs and to expose that feeling and the feelings are still true even after all these years.**

[Lay, Lady Lay – Aircheck]

JO: Is it possible to come close to loving someone else like you love your songs?

**BD: Yeah, it… but that love is, is… Okay two people who are in love can't be in love with each other, you know. Because they just can't be in love with each other there has to be a third element involved. Unless love's that third element. The third element is an idea.** [Yes] **But they must both love the same idea,** [Yeah] **you know, and that they must share that love and then through the circular motion of that they would be in love. Not just with their selves, no they would be leaning on each other and dragging each other down or bringing each other up but not too much.** [Yeah] **It's not love it's need, just need.**

JO: Can you say at all what kind of subjects you're addressing in your new songs?

**BD: Same old subjects but in a different place. In a real different place.**

JO: Can you define 'place' at all?

**BD: No. It defines itself. It's who I am at this time, which I don't think in all these interviews is coming out. But it does in my work.**

JO: You don't want it to come out in these interviews?

**BD: There's just no way. If I could explain it to you I would do that and then I wouldn't have to.**

JO: Then you'd be talking in tongues as far as normal conversation is concerned. But I'm surprised, I thought you'd be much harder to talk to, you know.

**BD: [laughs]**

JO: Do you feel that you're keeping an interview... you hate the thought of doing interviews?

**BD: No, I made a commitment to do them and I stuck to it and I'm doing them. This is the last one.**

# 17 February 1978, Tokyo Press Conference (Melody Maker)

Source: (A) The text of a transcript from two overlapping tapes taken from *Every Mind Polluting Word*, edited by Artur Jarosinski, September 2006, page 591.

(B) A report entitled *Dylan Adds Extra Budokan Concert*, published in *Mainichi Daily News*, Tokyo, Japanese newspaper, 20 February 1978.

(C) A report entitled *Bob Dylan's Press Conference*, published in *Mainichi Daily News*, Tokyo, Japanese newspaper, 25 February 1978.

(D) A report entitled *Dylan Zaps Japs*, published in *Melody Maker*, UK magazine, 11 March 1978, page 1.

The press conference took place in a hotel near Haneda International Airport, Tokyo, Japan.

(A) Text of Transcript

Ladies and gentlemen, we proudly introduce you to the world famous superstar, Mr Bob Dylan!

Q: I'm sure you are very tired, but we are very welcome to you, very welcome to have you in Japan.

**BD: Good.**

Q: We haven't had any concerts in the recent two years and what is your motive for holding these concerts in Japan?

**BD: What is my motive?**

Q: What motivated you to come to Japan?

**BD: No motive, just… that's a place we always wanted to come to play.**

Q: For the Japanese tour you have rehearsed for about two months – is that right? – do you always do that?

**BD: Well… we are always rehearsing. We're rehearsing to record an album. We're always rehearsing. We never stop rehearsing.**

Q: Are you going to introduce any new songs in these concerts?

**BD: Maybe.**

Q: What is the title to the songs?

**BD: Oh, various titles, some don't have any titles yet.**

Q: At the press interview in Los Angeles you said you were on your new album already…

**BD: Uh-huh.**

Q: …and that the theme for it is "love". What is your concept for love?

**BD: There are different reasons (??)**

Q: ??? (dismayed) Is there any difference between your love and the love that Beatles sing, or you're going to sing about love?

**BD: Huh?**

Q: Is there any difference between their idea of love and your idea?

**BD: They might be… of a different point of view.**

Q: What are the differences?

**BD: My point of view is less abstract than their point of view.**

Q: I see… Up till now you used to sing the protesting songs, right? How do they come about for making the theme love this time?

**BD: Well, protest songs are really love songs, too. They were my most brilliant love songs.**

Q: [Japanese only]

**BD: Well, I'm not a god of folk songs.**

Q: Then what are you?

**BD: I'm just a person.**

(B) Mainichi Daily News, 20 February 1978

## Dylan Adds Extra Budokan Concert

One more concert has been added to the schedule of the almost legendary folk-rock singer Bob Dylan in Japan by Udo Artists and Kyodo Tokyo who are jointly handling his performances here.

The advance sale of tickets for the previously announced 10 concerts (seven in Tokyo and three in Kansai) began in December last year. All these tickets are sold out.

The additional concert will be at Nippon Budokan Hall in Tokyo on Saturday, Mar. 4, at 6.30 p.m. (4,500, 3,000 yen)

It is considered remarkable for one artist to be able to fill the spacious Nippon Budokan Hall for eight concerts (Feb. 20, 21, 23, 28 and Mar. 1, 2, 3, 4).

The Osaka concerts are scheduled at the Matsushita Electric Industrial Company's Hirakata Gymnasium on Feb. 24 and 25 at 6.30 p.m. and Feb. 26 at 2 p.m.

The 37-year-old American singer, a prime mover in the evolution of popular music, flew into Tokyo Friday to begin the performance tour for the first time since he travelled across the United States on the Rolling Thunder Revue two years ago.

This is his first overseas engagement in 12 years since he played before Paris and Stockholm audiences, except for an appearance at a mass rock festival on the Isle of Wight in 1969.

Dylan will also perform in New Zealand and Australia in March before a coast-to-coast stateside tour which will last until the end of August. And, according to his press agent Paul Wasserman, Dylan may revisit Europe in October – London, Paris and some cities in West Germany.

Why did Dylan pick Japan as the first stop when there is a general belief that he is reluctant to play in a non-English-speaking country?

**"Japan was just a place I always wanted to come and play,"** mumbled Dylan to the more than 200 newsmen who packed a room at the airport hotel.

Answering questions in short sentences, he also let it be known that he had auditioned most of the accompanying musicians and they had rehearsed for over two months.

"What do you feel about being called the god of folk song?", Dylan was asked. **"I'm not the god of folk song,"** he said. "What are you then?" **"I'm just a person".**

When asked to give a brief message to Japanese fans, **"No. We just came here to do the show … not the message."**

(C) Mainichi Daily News, 25 February 1978

## Bob Dylan's Press Conference

Bob Dylan – now 36 years old – who started out as a folk singer and turned into America's premier rock star, rolled into town on Friday evening of last week and promptly was subjected to a Japanese-style press conference. For this august occasion, the promoter pre-selected three persons (from among the approximately 150 media people who attended), and only these three relatively inexpert persons were allowed to ask questions – thus, effectively cutting off the possibility of sharp, probing or thought-provoking questions. Mr Dylan, who apparently had already been angered by the presence of a large battalion of photographers – in violation of his agreement with the promoters – when he got off the plane, did a double take when the first question he was hit with was the following: "What is your *motive* for holding this concert (sic) in Japan?"

Mr. Dylan, looking alternately bored and ill at ease while nervously playing with his fingers or stroking his face or hair, had to sit through a 20-minute barrage of mostly nonsense questions. In answer to a question about what kind of movie his four-hour film "Renaldo and Clara" is, Mr Dylan, who produced, wrote, directed, stars in and is distributing this movie which is rumored to have cost $1,250,000 to make, shot back: **"It's my favourite movie!"** He was then asked, "Would it be possible to bring the movie to Japan?" . He answered, **"Oh, yes!"**. Then the questioner fearlessly inquired, "Would you promise that?" "Yeah. I hope so!" asserted Mr. Dylan. When one of the interviewers commented that at a press conference held in Los Angeles in January Dylan had said that he would like to meet some **"mountain people"** when he came to Japan, Mr Dylan interrupted to say, "All the interviewers who came to L.A. were 'mountain people.' " The questioner (I believe, a Mr Oyama of NHK) incredulously responded, "Are we included, too?" Mr Dylan's quick response: **"If he says so".**

Besides these frivolous exchanges which set the tone for much of the press conference, a couple of interesting statements were made by Mr Dylan. In one of the few serious remarks he made, he defined the word "love" as **"the ability to reason,"** a concept perhaps born out of the breakup of his marriage which involved a particularly bitter divorce battle. Mr Dylan rejected a categorization of his early songs as protest songs and his later songs as love songs by insisting that **"the protest songs are all love songs too … They were my most brilliant ones"**. Asked if he found anything to protest about at the present time, Mr Dylan, whose movie explores the relationship between reality and illusion, replied, **"No, not now".** Since Mr. Dylan is well known for his continuing activities on behalf of controversial causes, this answer demanded a follow-up question, which unfortunately was not forthcoming. When one of the questioners mentioned that Dylan had been characterized as a god of folk song, Mr Dylan emphatically responded: **"I'm not a god of folk song … I'm just a person".**

(D) Melody Maker, 11 March 1978,

## Dylan Zaps Japs

After the swingeing American reviews of his debut as a film director with Renaldo And Clara, Bob Dylan has had a warmer reception on his tour of Japan.

Dylan, who may come to Europe later this year, has played a total of ten dates in Tokyo and Osaka before going on to Australia and New Zealand. At least 90 per cent of the tickets have been sold, and media interest has been enormous – 150 reporters met Dylan and his entourage when they flew into Tokyo from Los Angeles.

He is said to have been paid in advance 350 million yen (£751,000) by the Japanese promoters; money, it has been rumoured, that he needs to pay off the costs of his film and his recent divorce from Sara Dylan.

He has been using an eight-piece band that has become known as The Far East Thunder Revue. It consists of Steve Douglas (sax and flute); Rob Stoner (bass); Steve Soles and Billy Cross (lead guitars); Ian Walles (drums); Alan Pasqua (organ); Dave Mansfield (violin) and Bobbye Hall (congas). He has also been supported by three black female singers.

There have been no great surprises in his programme, although several songs, like "Mr Tambourine Man" and "Love Minus Zero", have been given a reggae arrangement. And Dylan has been incommunicado, as usual, staying mainly in his Tokyo hotel and only venturing out in public for a concert by the Electric Light Orchestra.

At his press conference, questions were put to him through a translator by three pre-selected journalists. Dylan put on dark glasses. Without the glasses, newspapers reported the following day, "the god looked gentle".

He was asked what he thought about having been worshipped as "the god of folk song".

**"I'm just a person,"** he replied.

# 12 June 1978, James Johnson

Source: *Evening Standard*, UK newspaper, 12 June 1978, page 1.

This interview took place at Heathrow Airport, London, England.

**Dylan brings it all back home…**

Bob Dylan arrives at Heathrow today without his traditional air of secrecy and mystique – and blaming the weather for his nine-year absence.

**"It's great to be back again… I feel like I'm coming home,"** he said at the airport where, to the surprise of record company officials, he joked with other travellers, signed autographs and shook hands with passers-by.

Dylan, who has not visited Britain since the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival, said: **"Sure it's been a long time since I've been here. It's the weather, nothing else."**

When Dylan first emerged from his Los Angeles flight with an entourage of 44 people, scuffles broke out between Press photographers and hysterical record company executives while Dylan smiled and nudged a pretty girl.

After he cleared customs he said: **"Hey man, that was good. It's like a circus here."**

As he signed autographs he added: **"I'm surprised these people recognise me with all these heavies gathered around me. I reckon it is going to be great if everyone at Earls Court is half as friendly."**

Dylan and his band are expected to spend the next two days rehearsing before they play the first of six concerts on Thursday.

After touring in Europe he will return for an open-air concert at Blackbushe Airport on July 15.

# 12 June 1978, Unknown Interviewer (Daily Mail)

Source: *The Daily Mail*, UK newspaper, 13 June 1978.

The interview took place at Heathrow Airport, London, England.

**Welcome back Robert Allan who..?**

In dark glasses and leather jerkin, Robert Allan Zimmerman arrived in Britain yesterday, nine years after he vowed never to return.

**'I'm surprised anyone recognised me,'** said Zimmerman at Heathrow amid a crush of photographers, record company people and his own entourage of 44.

He said that the English weather had kept him away since his appearance at the Isle of Wight in 1969. But a matter or not less than £600,000 apparently managed to sway him.

**Protest**

That is what he is reported to be receiving for six concerts at Earls Court starting on Thursday. Tickets are said to be changing hands on the black market at up to £150 a seat.

He will also play his songs of trouble and protest for 100,000 people at Blackbush airport in Surrey on July 15.

He will appear, of course, under his adopted name, Bob Dylan.

# 12 June 1978, Unknown Interviewer (Unknown Newspaper)

Source: Unknown UK Newspaper, published 13 June 1978. The text reproduced here is from *The Dust Of Rumour* edited by Dave Percival, 1985, X-ASITY, page 115.

The interview took place at Heathrow Airport, London, England.

**Dylan Returns - For A Fortune**

The itinerant American poet, who changed his name from Robert Allan Zimmerman to Bob Dylan and became a messiah to a generation, arrived in Britain yesterday nine years after vowing he would never return. The rock seer in dark glasses and black leather is here for a series of concerts where he will perform for 94,000 people over six nights.

Tickets are currently said to be changing hands on the black market for up to £150 a seat, and the enigmatic Mr. D is reportedly receiving not less than £600,000 for his labours in the UK. Little wonder there was a broad smile for everyone when his jet from Los Angeles arrived at Heathrow. Dylan joked that it was the English weather that had kept him away since 1969.

After clearing customs the singer cooed: **"Hey man, it's like a circus here. I'm surprised anyone recognised me with all these heavies around."**

# 12 June 1978, Unknown Interviewer (The Guardian)

Source: *The Guardian*, UK newspaper, 13 June 1978, page 3.. The text reproduced here is from *The Dust Of Rumour* edited by Dave Percival, 1985, X-ASITY, pages 115-116.

The interview took place at Heathrow Airport, London, England.

**Executive Antics Amuse Dylan**

Folk singer Bob Dylan arrived in Britain yesterday, and immediately upset his record company by poking fun at his reception committee. He emerged smiling from a scrum of photographers and hysterical record company executives saying: **"Hey, it's like a circus here."** His chatty casual approach to fans seemed to be not quite what they had planned.

Dylan, who arrived from Los Angeles with a 44-strong entourage, has not been in Britain for nine years. He said: **"It's great to be back. I feel like I'm coming home."**

Asked if another British tour was planned, he said: **"I don't know, I might do. So far all I've done is thoroughly enjoy myself. I just sort of stand around and watch everyone else get upset."** With that he sauntered outside to where a coach was waiting to whisk him and his party off to a secret destination in London.

# 12 June 1978, Unknown Interviewer (The Journal)

Source: *The Journal*, UK newspaper, 13 June 1978, page 2.

The interview took place at Heathrow Airport, London, England.

**Scuffles – but Dylan keeps his cool…**

Bob Dylan arrived in London yesterday laughing and joking after a nine year absence – and blamed the English weather as the reason he hasn't been here since the Isle of Wight festival.

He shrugged aside a scuffle between Press photographers and record company executives at Heathrow Airport and said: **"Sure, it's been a long time since I've been here. It's the weather, nothing else. But it's great to be back."**

While the photographers and record men jostled each other in the airport lobby, the folksinger, in Britain for a series of concerts, smiled on and nudged a pretty girl.

Dylan, who flew from Los Angeles with a 44-strong entourage, is to play six concerts at Earls Court, London, before leaving for Europe to appear at open air festivals in Rotterdam and Nuremburg.

He returns to London for an open air show at Blackbushe Airport on July 15.

# 12 June 1978, Mandy Bruce

Source: *Evening News*, UK newspaper, 15 June 1978.

This interview took place in London, England.

**Do I need the money? We all do, says Dylan**

Bob Dylan today denied that he is playing his London concerts because he needs the money.

The 37-year-old American folk singer, who is being paid a reported £350,000, said: **"There's lots of other reasons for playing concerts, apart from money."**

When asked if he needed the money Dylan appeared flustered.

Savaged

**"If I talk about this I'm going to get myself into trouble,"** he said as his bodyguard interrupted: "Everyone needs money."

Dylan said: **"You tell me what other reasons there are."**

Maybe because he enjoyed playing his music?

**"Yeah,"** he said, **"that seems logical, don't you think?"**

Dylan, wearing dark glasses, shirt, trousers and a leather jerkin, has rarely been seen on stage in recent years. He began a world tour earlier this year.

He is now divorced from his wife of 12 years, Sara, the mother of his four children. The divorce settlement was said to be five million pounds.

The star who wrote songs like The Times They Are A-Changing and Like A Rolling Stone, explained why he has not appeared before his British fans since 1969.

**"I've been out of it for some time. My film Renaldo And Clara took me a long time to make."**

The film, starring his ex-wife Sara and former girlfriend Joan Baez, was savaged by American critics.

Dylan, who is staying with his 44-man entourage in one of London's less luxurious hotels was escorted to his Roll-Royce.

He was taken to a private party given by his record company, CBS, at Covent Garden's latest nightclub, The Club Next Door at 17 Russell Street.

Tonight Dylan plays the first of his six sell-out concerts at Earl's Court. Tickets were being sold on the black market for up to £150.

# Before 16 June 1978, Robert Shelton

Source: *Time Out*, UK magazine, 16-22 June 1978, pages 10, 13, 15-16.

This article includes Dylan quotes from various interviews some by other interviewers at various, mostly unknown locations. The interviews conducted by Shelton appear to have taken place over a wide range of dates, but some of the quotes are said to have been from 'recent' discussions.

**The Man In The Bob Dylan Hat**

If you don't underestimate Bob Dylan, he might not underestimate you. On the eve of his first British performance in a very long time his friend and biographer, Robert Shelton walks into the room with a pencil in his hand…

The ever-changing weatherman – who's given us rain, wind, hurricane, fog, thunder, lightning, storm-shelters, carpenters' wives, guilty undertakers, handle-vandals, 362 dreams, 'wild cathedral evenings' and restorative new mornings – begins, this week, his first European tour in 12 years.

Predictably, the newest Dylan, at his six sold-out Earls Court concerts, will be familiar to us, but also different. On the evidence of the 120 shows he's given from Chicago to Auckland since he stormed back onstage in 1974, Dylan will be echoing his past while dramatically reflecting the present. A crucial process in Dylan's art is change: he is always busy being reborn, always busy remaking himself as an artist.

This year, he appears ready to go almost anywhere. Amid unusually virulent controversy, he launched last January his ambitious film, 'Renaldo and Clara'. On February 20 he began a series of 23 concerts in Japan, Australia and New Zealand, playing to a quarter of a million people. He returned to a West Coast studio in April to complete his up-coming album, 'Street Legal', then did a week's concerts in Los Angeles. Now, with his eight-piece backing group and a female vocal trio, he's about to perform for possibly as many as 400,000 Europeans, returning to Britain on July 15 for an eight-hour open-air grand finale. Called 'The Picnic', it will be held at Blackbushe Aerodrome near Camberley, Surrey and feature Eric Clapton, Joan Armatrading and Graham Parker.

If you're a strictly '70s person, I'd suggest that Dylan's constantly renewable performing styles can be as fresh as the Newest Wave. If you're a nostalgic ambience-chaser, then watch him balance the past, present and future. Dylan is the most daring, imaginative, influential and mutable figure in popular culture. A few careers ago, he told me: **"If you're smart, you just gotta keep going; you're just not going to stand still. What hangs everybody up is that I'm not *stopping*."**

'I just don't like the obvious.'

Some of his five previous working visits to England were pivotal in his remarkable career. This time, we may hear some of the nine new songs he's just taped. We're certain to hear, in new arrangements, some of the classic songs which have irradiated pop for a decade and a half. But which ones Dylan only knows. He once said to me: **"I just don't like the obvious. Obvious things are a step backwards. Nobody should step backwards because nobody knows what's behind them. The only direction you can see is in front of you, not in back of you."** Discussing his new film last winter, he said it was about **"not being manipulated, controlled or devoured by the past"**.

But *we* can step and look back through the time he's referred to as both an enemy and an ocean, to speculate on which Bob Dylan is coming to London. He used to scoff at labels by mockingly 'defining' himself as **"song-and-dance-man… ashtray-bender… rabbit-catcher… dog-smoother"**. He wants, I think, to keep his options open; not to be tagged 'spokesman of a generation', 'poet of the electric age', 'Homer in denim' and all that. **"When people believe that I am *this* or *that*"**, he said once, **"already there is a misunderstanding, a barrier, between them and me."**

Even when considering his work, which is the kind of attention he prefers, we have to ask, "Which Bob Dylan?" A Woodstock friend of his says: "There's so many sides to Dylan, he's round." To a reporter in 1973, Kris Kristofferson said of Dylan: "He's a dozen different people." Recently linking his film-directing to his composing, Dylan declared he'd learned **"as much from Cezanne as I have from Woody Guthrie"**, adding that his songs are **"basically songs of realism. To play upon the realism and draw the abstraction out of the realism is what I do."**

Whatever realism, abstraction, excitement, splash and energy Dylan will be bringing to Europe, these appearances can only reveal part of his artistry. For many, that will be reward enough. You don't have to be a Dylan freak to accept that his influence on things going on all around us has been monumental. He's changed the consciousness of even those quite unfamiliar with his work. No one, it seems, has a greater gift to inspire worship, emulation, study – and animosity and envy – than he.

Dylan's visits to Britain in 1963, '64, '65 , '66 and '69 each displayed his talent to conquer and to disturb. A noisy minority of English mouths and typewriters did some damage to those visits, yet only a few months ago he told a visitor at his home near the Pacific: **"One morning, on the Isle of Wight, I sat on a hill and watched the sun rise. I don't know if it was passion or grace, but it was the most intensely pleasurable moment of my life."**

The breadth of this man's influence has become proverbial: many of the 80,000 people involved in the Anti-Nazi Carnival on April 30 may have thought that the marriage of pop music and protest (in the likes of Tom Robinson and the Clash) was a new idea. Of course, Dylan didn't invent that, but he certainly made the marriage fruitful. Today's resurgence of agit-rock certainly makes part of the Dylan legacy immediate.

'Changing the face of pop music is not necessarily changing it s metabolism.'

I once lamented the continuing mindlessness of some pop, despite his stamping of intelligence on its face. He replied: **"Changing the face of pop music is not necessarily changing its metabolism. I didn't change the metabolism. All I did was just open up… doors."**

Scores of Dylan lines have entered our community well of speech; scores more should. 'We see this empty cage now corrode', he sang in 'Visions of Johanna', telling us about illusory, hollow entrapments. In 'Tarantula', with 'I… am sick with captivity', he flayed vacuums of thought and feeling. 'I was hungry and it was your world', in 'Just Like a Woman', captured the outsider's defencelessness.

Dylan, as the self-taught 'roads scholar', has written highway blues in the great tradition of American mobility: the roads of Whitman, Guthrie, Kerouac and countless black Delta singers dreaming of escape and transfiguration. He wrote so often with such compassionate force. He heard apocalyptic chimes:

> '…Tolling for the deaf an' blind, tolling for the mute
>
> Tolling for the mistreated, mateless mother, the mistitled prostitute
>
> For the misdemeanor outlaw, chased an' cheated by pursuit…'

Which Bob Dylan? The inventor of a cast of characters we know so well? – The armed orphan, the outlaw, ragged Napoleon, the Jack of Hearts, banker's nieces, the Drifter, the husband-brother of Isis, the Joker and the thief. Who lurks behind the mask of Doctor Filth, Miss Lonely, Mrs Henry, the landlord, Achilles, the pitiable immigrant, Cinderella, Johanna, Maria, Queen Jane, Mona and Valerie?

A recurring attack on Dylan has been made by those who like his myth-breaking, but find his own myth-making nothing but showbiz image engineering. The confusion partially stems, I think, from the many meanings of 'myth'. The mythology authority Joseph Campbell sees myths as 'public dreams' and dreams as 'private myths. Myths are vehicles of communication between the conscious and the unconscious, just as dreams are.' Robert Graves said the poet had to think *mythically* as well as realistically.

'It's like my voice is coming out of their dream.'

In this sense, Dylan has been myth-driven since he dreamed himself home from the Lybba cinema in Hibbing, stretching his vision 'past the city limits' (as he put it in the 1962 autobiographical sketch, 'My Life in a Stolen Moment'). If you can enter the complex weave of 'public dreams' in much of Dylan's world, you can see him people and dramatise a vast landscape of mythic figures. And the scope of these dreams has expanded well beyond that of his early models, James Dean and Woody Guthrie. On the Rolling Thunder Revue road, in late 1975, he was the Alchemist, brewing knowledge out of ordinary things. His 'Desire' album is a carnival of public dreams and private myths. One moment, Dylan's the Magician from the Tarot card deck; the next, he's Harlequin in white-face. Back in the 'Blonde On Blonde' days, he told me of how he saw himself in mythic dreamscape: **"I'm just a voice speaking. Anytime I'm singing about people, and if the songs are dreamed, it's like my voice is coming out of their dream…"**

I've always found Dylan a very human being – mercurial but consistent; vulnerable but confident; contradictory yet plausible; jealous, as is any artist, of his time and privacy, yet caring about people's suffering. He's always been impatient with small talk and day-to-day trivia, he's drawn heavily from the commonplace for his songs. Historically, he is a threshold through which can be glimpsed the turbulent discontinuities of the last two decades.

It is possible to see Dylan's quest as that of an archetypal American Dreamer who has repeatedly struggled for recognition, acceptance, identity and knowledge. He's always cast as a combatant. His existence as an

embattled star is a study in the price of fame and its toll on the genuine non-conformist who dares to remain an individual.

Which Bob Dylan? Charles Reich's 'true prophet of the new consciousness'? John Peel's 'the single most important force in maturing our popular music'? The *Saturday Review's* 'one of the few wise men of our time'? Alan Ginsberg's 'the most influential poet of his time'? Phil Spector's 'most piercing, most aware insight at work today'?

'No man can fight another like the man who fights himself.'

Dylan has become a suitable subject for study among historians, sociologists and literary critics. American universities have offered some 5,000 courses on popular culture, and, rest assured, Dylan is stage-center. One survey shows that about 100 courses in American university literature departments have focused on Dylan as poet. I've been studying dozens of as-yet-unpublished papers on aspects of his visionary Romantic songpoetry that tie him to the Western literary tradition.

Affinities, comparisons and contrasts in those papers link Dylan's writing to that of Yeats, Eliot, the Kabbalah, Whitman, the Old Testament prophets, the French Symbolists, Blake, Kafka, Kenneth Patchen and the Beats. Cambridge don Christopher Ricks has lectured widely on Dylan's poetics, calling him: 'A great amuser, a great entertainer, who belongs with the artists who've looked for the widest popular constituency, like Dickens and Shakespeare.'

But even in the face of such acceptance, he has chosen struggle as a way of life. A few months ago, he told Barbara Kerr of the *Chicago Daily News*: **"Each man struggles within himself. That is where the fight is… No man can fight another like the man who fights himself. Who could be a stronger enemy? … You can either do yourself in, or do yourself a favour. If you deal with the enemy within, then no enemy without can stand a chance."**

Dylan may be wrestling with as many memories of England as we'll be wrestling with memories of him. His first visit, in January, 1963, was to appear in a BBC-TV play, 'Madhouse on Castle Street'. Philip Saville, the director, told me that he'd cast Dylan as "an anarchic young student who wrote songs". But, Saville said, Dylan wanted to rewrite all his lines. Bob recalls: "It was amazing to see what I did – nothing… I didn't say anything except one line – "The old man says you're the only person in the house who tells the truth"!' He did perform three songs, and Saville was so impressed with one he put it over the opening and closing credits. It was called 'Blowin' In the Wind'. Between rehearsals, Bob explored The Troubadour and other folk clubs. He did an impromptu show at The Establishment. As 'Blind Boy Grunt', he recorded with Ric Von Schmidt and the late Richard Farina.

Returning to the Village, he regaled us with surreal stories about England – the 'hooded guards who looked like George Washington' who carried his suitcase at a Mayfair hotel; how he walked out of that hotel the minute he'd seen his room; parties in chilly salons where fat American trendies and leading English hippies were doing The Twist 'by moving only one leg'. Warm friendships were kindled amid some harsh snubbing by old-guard poets and folk singers who treated him like an upstart.

He returned here for a sold-out Festival Hall concert on May 17, 1964. The *Times* praised his 'sheer personal magnetism'. It was the start of thronging crowds and quick getaways. In 1964 he taped two more BBC-TV programmes and one radio show, before heading off to a Greek village to work on the songs and poems for 'Another Side'.

'What I really meant was "don't look back over your shoulder".'

Although his spring, 1965 visit enormously widened his sway, the tour was highly problematic. The cameras were on him, filming 'Don't Look Back', a portrait of the artist he now regards ruefully. (Once, when reminiscing, I asked if the man who'd said 'don't look back' was ready to, he replied, with a smile: **"What I really meant was 'don't look back over your shoulder'."**) What happened here from April to June, 1965, helped change Dylan from a folk star into an international pop superstar. Although he played to only 50,000 people in eight concerts, shock-waves flashed back to America in a period when most pop trends were emanating from Britain.

'In a couple of years time, I shall be right back-where I started ...an unknown.'

Dylan wasn't too accurate a prophet when he told a reporter here that year: **"I've… seen all these crazes come and go, and I don't think I'm more than a craze. In a couple of years time, I shall be right back where I started – an unknown."**

His rooms at the Savoy were ridiculously crowded. Having befriended Martin Carthy and other British folk singers during his early visits, he was now beginning to establish a cameraderie with those rock musicians with

whom he seemed to share a common cause: the Beatles and the Stones, Alan Price of the Animals, Paul Jones and Manfred Mann, John Mayall and Eric Clapton.

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

Carthy told me how the crushing lack of privacy on that tour seemed to pain him: "Bob became very detached." Dylan was into his anti-interview truculence then, quite often twitting Jonesish reporters with black humour, evasions and satiric thrusts. One of his 1965 lines summarises his old jousts with the Press: **"I'm just trying to answer your questions as good as you can ask them."**

British audiences in 1965 acted "as if they were going to church", according to Fred Perry, his road manager. The *Guardian* reviewer in Sheffield confirmed this 'religious fervour' and expressed surprise 'when a poet and not a pop star fills the hall'. After the Liverpool and Leicester concerts, the *Melody Maker* proclaimed: 'Dylan fever is sweeping the country'.

Helped by pirate radio; Dylan sold more records for CBS in Britain from March through December, 1965, than any other artist in their catalogue. By May 12, right after a pair of Albert Hall concerts, Dylan's first four LPs were in the UK Top Twenty. After a quick holiday in Portugal, Dylan returned to London for the taping of two half-hour BBC-TV shows, which were aired on June 12 and 24. Aside from the cackling of some old folk hens, Dylan had conquered both the mass and the leadership of British taste. 'Dylan fever' here spurred a major promotion campaign by Colombia Records in the States. Dylan's international popularity soared. He went back to America for the famed Newport Folk Festival in July, heightening controversy by 'going electric'.

By that autumn, Dylan had won over most of the noisy American folknik purists. Folk-rock was everywhere and Dylan imitators were proliferating. His return to Europe in 1966, however, showed that conversion to the 'new music' was far from complete. Audiences in Stockholm (April 29) and Copenhagen (May 1) were surprised by the presence of 'The Group' (then The Hawks, and later The Band). The format for the remaining 14 concerts of the 1966 tour was established on May 5 at the Dublin Adelphi: half of the show with Dylan playing solo acoustic guitar, and the closing half with The Band. Some Dubliners erupted into abuse during the electric segment.

Resolutely, Dylan and The Band worked on from Bristol to Cardiff. Huffy walkouts in Birmingham, amid cries of 'Give us the real Dylan!' In Liverpool, a heckler shouted 'Where's the poet in you?'

At Glasgow on May 19, 1966, those who liked the new music shouted down those who didn't. At the Edinburgh ABC, the next night, the audience had warmed up by the time 'Like A Rolling Stone' was played. But Dylan's birthday concert at Paris's Olympia was clouded by a hostile press, before and after the show. A headline in *Le Figaro* announced 'The Fall of an Idol', and *Paris Jour* was even ruder: 'Bob Dylan, Go Home'.

'You're gonna have to get used to it.'

After the famous Albert Hall concerts of May 26 and 27, he did. Many walked out during the final shows there. From their box, The Beatles roared at the hecklers: "Leave him alone – SHUT UP!" Despite cries of 'Judas' and 'rubbish', the musicians soldiered on. Then, unforgettably, Dylan hit back, with a 'message' for the hecklers in 'Rolling Stone' as he stressed the line: '…you're gonna have to get used to it'.

Although he'd resolved not to return, by 1969 he was ready to forgive. Just before he starred at the second Isle of Wight Music Festival, he told a reporter that his English followers **"are the most loyal fans I have"**. An army of 200,000 crossed the Solent in what national papers called 'a second Dunkirk', 'D-Day' and 'The Isle of Dylan'. His ·appearance on Sunday, August 31, 1969, was to prove anti-climactic.

The music press had so churned up false and unauthorised expectations of a three-hour set (and a super-session with The Stones, George Harrison and Blind Faith) that an anticlimax was virtually inevitable. Back-stage, I jotted in my notebook that Dylan and The Band, had arrived, ready to appear, at 7.23pm. No one has satisfactorily explained why there was such a disorder of seating, timing and programming that The Band didn't make the stage until 10.00pm, or Dylan until nearly an hour later.

Dylan's set was gentle and somewhat introverted. By his third song, 'Maggie's Farm', he'd begun to draw the vast, exhausted audience toward him. With another high point on 'Rainy Day Women' which he also sang as an encore, things were beginning to kindle. But by midnight, after 18 songs, it was all over. Dylan told one querulous reporter to **"ask the producers… the fans were terrific"**. George Harrison thought the performance was "brilliant", while Lennon ascribed the 'let-down' to "everyone expecting Godot, a Jesus, to appear". The national press imagined that Dylan's departure from the stage had caused a near-riot. From where I was, there was just a fatigued slog back to the boats.

Which Bob Dylan will we see this time around? Certainly not the anarchic hobo of 1963, the emerging star of 1964, the new superstar of 1965 or the embattled master of 1966 or 1969. All of that is behind him. He's

taught most of us a lot about tolerance for all forms of music, all styles of presentation. Still, he's 'inside the Coliseum' and there are lions as well as lionisers.

One longtime Dylan-basher, Nik Cohn, wrote a Monday morning feverish piece in the *Daily Mail* last May 22. He reviewed Dylan's life, and didn't like the performance. He almost seemed to blame the continuing prevalence of war, injustice and hypocrisy on Dylan's failure to sing them all away in the '60s. He found Dylan a symbol of 'old, dead dreams'. But the *Daily Mail* Nik Cohn seemed to have forgotten that he, himself, had written in *New York* magazine on December 22, 1975, that at Madison Square Garden he'd never seen Dylan 'work with more intensity… the energy level never flagged… he rasped and roared, he burned… he caromed all over the stage, stomping, rocking, as if even a moment's silence or stillness would cause him to blow sky-high…'. Even the oldest of his material, Cohn wrote then, 'sounded reborn'. Perhaps it's not fair of one critic to taunt another for what he forgot he'd written, or for what he used to believe.

I believe in Dylan and his art. He has changed the face, and, often, the metabolism of pop music. He's brought poetry off dusty library shelves, remarried it to music, and put it on the turntables and the streets. He's redefined the word 'literature' and helped close the gap between popular culture and 'high art'. He's taught us to question nearly everything we see around us. He deserves our respect. If this tour's version isn't to your taste, your records will play you whichever Dylan you want.

I could tell you what Dylan did in Japan and the Antipodes and how exuberantly audiences and critics responded. But that would be to suggest that we should expect the same shows here. Let's wait for him to tell us, in his performances, why he's coming back to Europe.

Some press people would ascribe it all to commerce, quick to forget that the work of performers is to perform. I find a better clue to this world tour in a comment Dylan made to a Minnesota reporter last winter: **"Art is created out of flesh and blood and you must be able to interact with others' flesh and blood to create something that's dynamic in value."** Around the same time, Dylan said: **"Freedom only comes from knowledge and knowledge is power."** Perhaps what most unsettles people, pro and con, about Bob Dylan is both the awe and fear of that free, knowledgeable power of the greatest artists – to be capable of rebirth, past age and custom, and to make dormant dreams live anew in the artist's audience.

# 11 July 1978, Unknown Interviewer (TV1, Sweden)

Source: *Aktuellt* on: TV1, Swedish television, 11 July 1978.

This interview, by an unknown journalist, took place at Landvetter Airport, Göteborg, Sweden. Dylan is at his most taciturn (and that's saying something). No Dylan content really, but it's worth watching the online video – quite funny. This is addition to two similarly terse interviews at the airport that day by Mette Fugl and Nils Chöler, transcriptions of both of of these are transcribed in the online publication *Every Mind Polluting Word* (EMPW), edited by Artur Jarosinski, September 2006, on pages 658 and 659 respectively.

A major part of your audience belong to your own generation, I think. I don't think it would be entirely wrong to assume that they are driven to your concerts by a certain element of nostalgia. But when you sing your old songs, you sing them in new versions. Is that just an effort on your part to avoid being called by the nostalgia?

**"Uhuh."**

It is? Do you want to avoid over interpretation by singing your old songs in new versions?

**"Yes."**

Yes, that's all you've got to say about that?

# 6 to 15 November 1978, Pete Oppel

Source: A series of conversations which took place at various stops on the US leg of the 1978 World Tour: Denver, CO, Portland, OR, Seattle, WA, Vancouver, BC, Oakland, CA and Los Angeles CA. These were published in six parts by Oppel as '*Enter The Tambourine Man*', in *Dallas (Texas) Morning News*, 18-23 November 1978. The original articles have not been sourced, but the excerpts which are reproduced here were published in two articles:

● *Dylan's Mysterious Man Called Norman Raeben*, by Bert Cartwright, in *The Telegraph*, UK fanzine, Number 26, Spring 1987, pages 100-102, and

● *The Mysterious Norman Raeben*, by Bert Cartwright, in *Wanted Man: In Search of Bob Dylan*, edited by John Bauldie, Black Spring Press, 1990, pages 85-90.

**Telegraph #26**

[Norman Raeben] **"came to this country in 1930 and he made his living boxing."**

**"In the 30s in France he** [Raeben] **roomed with Soutine, the painter. He knew people like Modigliani intimately, Picasso and all these people."**

**"He** [Raeben] **was rewriting the dictionary."**

Dylan asserted that he studied with Raeben **"for two months."**

**Wanted Man**

[Referring obliquely to Norman Raeben] **"There ain't nobody like him . I'd rather not say his name. He's really special, and I don't want to create any heat for him."**

[Referring to a visit from several friends of Sara] **"They were talking about truth and love and beauty and all these words I had heard for years, and they had 'em all defined. I couldn't believe it… I asked them, 'Where do you come up with all those definitions?' and they told me about this teacher."**

[On visiting Raeben] **"He says, 'You wanna paint?' So I said, 'Well, I was thinking about it, you know.' He said, 'Well. 'I don't know if you even deserve to be here. Let me see what you can do.' So he put this vase in front of me and he says, 'You see this vase?' And he put it there for 30 seconds or so and then he took it away and he said, 'Draw it'. Well, I mean, I started drawing it and I couldn't remember shit about this vase – I'd looked at it but I didn't see it. And he took a look at what I drew and he said, 'OK you can be up here.' And he told me 13 paints to get… Well, I hadn't gone up there to paint, I'd just gone up there to see what was going on. I wound up staying there for maybe two months. This guy was amazing…"**

**"It changed me. I went home after that and my wife never did understand me ever since that day. That's when our marriage started breaking up. She never knew what I was talking about, what I was thinking about. And I couldn't possibly explain it."**

[On Raeben's studio in Carnegie Hall] **"Five days a week I used to go up there, and I'd just think about it the other two days of the week. I used to be up there from eight o'clock to four. That's all I did for two months…"**

**"In this class there would be people like old ladies – rich old ladies from Florida – standing next to an off-duty policeman, standing next to a bus driver, a lawyer. Just all kinds. Some art student who had been kicked out of every art university. Young girls who worshiped him. A couple of serious guys who went up there to clean up for him afterwards – just clean up the place. A lot of different kinds of people you'd never think would be into art or painting. And it wasn't art or painting, it was something else…**

**"He talked all the time, from eight thirty to four, and he talked in seven languages. He would tell me about myself when I was doing something, drawing something. I couldn't paint. I thought I could. I couldn't draw. I don't even remember 90 per cent of the stuff he drove into me…"**

[On Dylan's impressions of Raeben] **"I had met magicians, but this guy is more powerful than any magician I've ever met. He looked into you and told you what you were. And he didn't play games about it. If you were interested in coming out of that, you could stay there and force yourself to come out of it. You yourself did all the work. He was just some kind of guide, or something like that…"**

# 15 May 1980, Pat Crosby

Source: KDKA television, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Available on-line at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QI3xRnihh4c.

This interview took place at the Hilton Hotel in Pittsburgh prior to the second concert at the Stanley Theater. There are two versions of the video, the first was broadcast on KDKA TV the same day, the second may also have been broadcast but at a later time. Each version consists of exactly the same introduction - film of disgruntled fans leaving the theatre early, complaining that this wasn't what they expected from Dylan. In each version, the introduction is followed by 2-3 minutes of interview but these are completely different one from the other. The first version is transcribed in *Every Mind Polluting Word* (EMPW), edited by Artur Jarosinski, September 2006, page 710; the second version was transcribed by Alan Hoaksey. The added text is in red font.

First Version (in EMPW)

PC: (Voice-over introduction) How and why did Bob Dylan recently stop singing the older songs and start singing gospel and about The Lord? He said he would talk to us about it...

**BD: Well, I can understand why they feel rebellious about it because up until the time the Lord came into my life, I knew nothing about religion; I was just rebellious and didn't think much about it either way. I never did care much for preachers who just ask for donations all the time and talk about the world to come. You know, I was always growing up with "it's right here and now" and until Jesus became real to me that way, I couldn't understand it.**

PC: So can you understand people's reaction to you when you come on stage and start singing about Jesus and they want the old stuff?

**BD: Oh, yeah, that's right, they want the old stuff. But the old stuff's not going to save them and I'm not going to save them. Neither is anybody else they follow. They can boogie all night, but it's not gonna work.**

PC: Do you still hold the same enthusiasm for the older material or is it gone?

**BD: Oh, yeah, I love that stuff. I look at it now and I hear it and it amazes me that it was me that even wrote it or performed it.**

PC: It was Bob Dylan who sang many years ago that "the times are changing". It is clear that those words are still true. I'm Pat Crosby, TV2 Eyewitness News.

Second Version (not in EMPW)

PC: (Voice-over introduction) Why is Bob Dylan now singing gospel and songs about The Lord? Earlier today, he said he would talk to us about it...

**BD: Well, Jesus was looking for me and finally… finally found me and said okay well… you've done all right and… but I'm gonna take over now. And… I allowed him to take over and once he took over… this is the type of show that he wanted going around, I guess.**

PC: Do you feel any pressure from fans…

**BD: Oh yeah.**

PC: …from record companies, from conglomerates, from corporations, say "hey, slip in some of those old songs"?

**BD: Um… yeah. I was offered certain, you know, amounts of money to do the old songs… or the old show we used to have with the old songs done in a new way. But I couldn't do it.**

PC: Why?

**BD: My heart wasn't in it. Commercially, it would have gone down well, I guess, but… you know, you can do things as an artist and know you're slipping. But the audience will buy it, you know, and… and it leaves you with a very unfulfilled, very empty feeling.**

PC: It was Dylan who sang, about twenty years ago, that "times are changing". Now, 38-year-old Bob Dylan sings that "you've got to serve somebody" and he is serving The Lord. I'm Pat Crosby, TV2 Eyewitness News update.

# 21 November 1980, Ernesto Gladden

Source: KPRI-FM radio (San Diego) broadcast 21 November 1980. Transcript published in *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 80, Winter 2024, pages 52-53, 55-57. Transcribed by John Wraith.

For this telephone interview, Dylan was in San Francisco and Gladden in the studio in San Diego, California.

**BD: Hello, how you doin'?**

EG: Hi Bob, just fine. We really appreciate you deciding to call us at KPRI. One of the things we want to talk to you about is some of the things you have planned on this year's tour.

**BD: This show kind of evolved out of the last show. It's got, you know, a lot of old songs and news songs, a bunch of songs I don't think anybody has ever heard yet. And er… basically it er… touches out of the same ground as the last show did and a lot of 'round the form on previous shows.**

EG: Your last show was really entertaining I thoroughly enjoyed it. Let me ask you something are you planning on doing 'Desolation Row' on this particular tour?

**BD: Well I don't know… once in a while… I don't know if we do that one, but er it is possible something like that be thrown in, it really depends on what the feel of the crowd at the time, you know. There are so many songs a lot of times I just come up at, at the time of the show itself, that's the was these things have been kinna goin' now rather than having a set routine. It may not be 'Desolation Row' but maybe erm 'It's Alright Ma' or 'Gates Of Eden' or you know, something like that.**

EG: KPRI From Desolation Row to the Gates Of Eden Music and Conversation with Bob Dylan.

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**BD: I can only maybe like do one or two at a time, you know.**

EG: I understand that. Your earlier years when you were touring with The Band it seems as if all the groups…

**BD: I was touring with The Band before they were The Band**

EG: Right. A lot of the groups you decided to tour with later on went ahead and had their own successful careers and for sure we hope that happens this time again.

**BD: Yeah, you see a lot of people pick up on a lot of stuff I've done and go ahead and have successful careers. I can think of a lot of people that have done that. I'm still doing that [Laughs] kinda like the same thing so, still doing it the way it was before they were doing it I think.**

EG: KPRI From Desolation Row to the Gates Of Eden Music and Conversation with Bob Dylan.

When we return, we will get into Bob's movie days as well as some of the earlier inspiration he had from Ezra Pound and TS Eliot.

*-----*-----*

EG: KPRI From Desolation Row to the Gates Of Eden Music and Conversation with Bob Dylan.

You know it's not very often that rock 'n' roll stars get the chance to get into the movies, it seemed to be a new idea many years ago. But once everybody saw Bob Dylan in his own motion picture it seemed to be almost understood that rock 'n' roll stars made good actors. Later it was found out not to be the case! But in Pat Garrett and Billy The Kid, Bob Dylan set motion picture history. Well, you have always been a trend setter even in your motion picture pre day Pat Garrett and Billy The Kid you even broke let's some usual rules when you dealing with cinematography. Did you enjoy doing that movie at the time?

**BD: That movie particularly the one with Peckinpah?**

EG: Right.

**BD: Yeah, I enjoyed that, er… I got be... to spend about three months in Mexico. [Laughs] Yeah, I enjoyed that.**

EG: That movie was a total inspiration to me and I think that it caught a segment of America Panorama that earlier had been missed by a lot of people when they were trying to portray Western life.

**BD: Yes, I… I was… I was somehow talked into being in the movie. Originally it wasn't planned that I be in the movie. I was just writing the music for it and I don't know no reason but I wound up being**

**in the movie and a lot of people tend to overshadow that part with the musical part. I didn't have any pretext about being an actor I just was… I enjoyed working with Sam and being, you know getting close there and watching how they make a big movie like that.**

EG: KPRI From Desolation Row to the Gates Of Eden Music and Conversation with Bob Dylan.

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EG: About the movie Pat Garrett and Billy The Kid the Sam Peckinpah flick that I guess that everybody enjoyed. We move to some of the men who have been inspirational to Bob Dylan in his lifetime.

So I'm familiar with your inspirational moments, in fact that you have been a very inspired person, not only to your self but that inspiration from within yourself has always been able to inspire others, even from the coffee house days in New York City. One of my personal questions, the definition of a particular rhyme and you said "Ezra Pound and TS Eliot fighting in the captain's tower". What image did you have in mind at that time?

**BD: Course, that goes back a while, doesn't it? Yeah, that way, I think… I wrote that song probably in California someplace between Big Sur and North Beach and erm at that time er, I was familiar with TS Eliot and Ezra Pound and somehow both these poets had come to represent something else to me at the time and what we were doing there was just, I think, using those names to represent something, two, two matters of opinion that were fighting on the same captain's tower, which was heading out towards the sea, if that makes any sense to you? It was all I think, er… kind of induced by er… like spirts of certain people at that time that were very much into those two people.**

EG: I er… since then picked up some TS Eliot, was inspired and picked up Ezra Pound and er… you know, thank you very much for turning me onto some very fine folks there. One of Ezra Pound's poetic lines is "starless in bible black".

**BD: Uh huh.**

EG: Which I guess brings us around to a new avenue of influence, which I have to say I totally agree with it's something that's not new at all, it's been around for a couple of thousand years and I think George Harrison was of this particular direction as early as ten years ago. And I totally agree with your new philosophy and the way you present it and I was wondering how rewarding it has been for you as of late?

**BD: Well, you know I just take it one day at a time so erm… you know I don't get ahead of that; I seem to be pretty contented. As long as I don't get ahead of that one day at a time, every time I start to stretch out I can fall into confusion rather easily so I'm just er… You know I don't really take into consideration anymore than I can look at and listen to at the very time I'm doing it.**

EG: What have you been doing recently?

**BD: I've been on the road a lot.**

SG What are your last tour dates on your way into San Diego?

**BD: Well we've been across the United States and back.**

EG: Uh huh. We'll be here this Wednesday night and we are really looking forward to hearing from you Bob.

**BD: Well I hope so, because er we get a lot of bad publicity up here in San Francisco, there's a couple of writers up here for some reason they did this to us last year, they did it to us this year, I mean they… as far as I think they should have, I would like to see their licences revoked, you know. They don't know anything about me anyway, because they just don't seem to be up to no good at all and they… San Diego this week, I know, picked one of those articles, it tends throw a dark shadow over the show, in saying it is something that it is not.**

EG: I understand that, I saw your last show in San Deigo and you were opinionated as usual but not to an overbearing degree.

**BD: Yeah, it is still musical.**

EG: Yeah it is still very musical, on this particular tour, I understand you are including quite a few older songs from the earlier band days and from the earlier coffee house days and I can understand that. You have to realise Bob, that critics are paid to be critics and sometimes they can understand a man that inspired by TS Eliot or Ezra Pound but when he elevates himself to higher prophets and higher points of inspiration somewhere in the back of their mundane minds it gets muddled.

**BD: All right, listen I'm looking forward to meeting you when we get down there.**

EG: Okay Bob. Mr Dylan, thank you very much for talking with us and we will see you this Wednesday night.

**BD: All right.**

EG: Have a good day sir.

**BD: All right, all right.**

EG: You are at your concert station FM 106, we hope that you have enjoyed this conversation with Bob Dylan a legend in his own time. Our thanks to Jeff Dane and Adrian Boult for technical assistance. From Desolation Row to the Gates Of Eden Music has been a joint communication effort of FM 106 and KPRI San Diego.

# 30 November 1980, 'Bill' (K-INK FM)

Source: Broadcast on K-INK FM 102, Portland, Oregon on 30 November 1980. Transcribed by Alan Hoaksey.

The interview took place in Seattle, Washington. The identity of the interviewer has not been established, other than Dylan referring to him as 'Bill' at the start of the conversation.

Bill: Yes speaking.

**Dylan: Oh Bill, this is Bob.**

Bill: Hi Bob. How are you?

**Dylan: Okay.**

Bill: How are the shows going on the tour so far? How do you feel about it?

**Dylan: Er… They're… They're okay. We kinda missed a plane going into Tucson but other than that they've been all right.**

Bill: How is it… How's the shows…?

**Dylan: How's the response?**

Bill: Yeah.

**Dylan: Er… the audience response has been okay with me… as far as this… audience has been good really. Maybe even better than last time.**

Bill: How is.. how has your show changed since the last time?

**Dylan: Well it's the same show but it just has… you know, more… more songs thrown in throughout it, you know the… playlist.**

Bill: I see, you've gone back a few years?

**Dylan: Uh-huh. Back a bunch of years.**

Bill: It seemed to me that I… that I read that you had… decided not to do any of those old songs anymore. Was that true or was that…?

**Dylan: Yeah well it was… it was last time we went out on the road… I was only doing the songs from *Slow Train Coming* and… and *Saved* which hadn't been recorded at the time.**

Bill: Right.

**Dylan: Er, it seemed to be what I needed to do at the time.**

Bill: I see. What made you change your mind this time?

**Dylan: Well, er... nothing really. It was just, er… it's not a matter of, er… not wanting to do the songs. It's just a question of if they meant anything, you know, if they still had any meaning or not. I wasn't sure if they did or they didn't.**

Bill: Do they still for you?

**Dylan: They stiil do.**

<plays 'Gotta Serve Somebody' and 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'>

Bill: I remember your um… the ad campaign that preceded your last tour… in which people discussed… it was a kind of a man on the street thing people discussed their reactions to…

**Dylan: Oh yeah.**

Bill: It seems like your your career has been that kind of a… that kind of a situation all along when you went electric. I mean there were people that were that were real upset about it and…

**Dylan: Yeah.**

Bill: Do you see any kind of parallel between that kind of reaction and having to deal with the audience and here …

**Dylan: Well.**

Bill: … as opposed to say Forest Hills in '65, as a fear…

**Dylan: Yeah there's some similarities but… well I never really sense too much of the, of the… people. I think a lot of it was made out of that which what… which actually if you were there er… wasn't the case at all. It kind of got distorted in the news and… like that Newport Folk Festival when we were playing at that time there really wasn't a whole lot of booing or… there was some but if you talk to people who were there at the time they'll tell you a different story than the legendary thing that has gone down.**

Bill: Yeah, that you left the stage and people were crying…

**Dylan: Yeah, there were some definite sound problems…**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: …things which never got into the news. There were a lot of different elements which you can just… you can say 'oh yeah well he got booed' and just leave it like that, but it was a little more complicated than that… at Forest Hills I don't know what that was all about. I know there was people running on the stage and there were people on the stage running to get them off the stage but… You just get to be oblivious to all that kind of stuff after a period of time. You just don't even… see it anymore. It's just what… whatever happens is happening out there. You can see it but it doesn't seem to register really. I've played in front of 200,000 people and seen all kinds of things which you know are happening right before my eyes that many thousands of people are doing. They can't see it because they're all in the crowd, you know, but if you're up on the stage you can look out and you see all sorts of things going on…**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: …and it… it's just, you know, the way people behave I guess, you know.**

Bill: You say… we'd say that maybe that the the legendary fear that was raised at that time was really more a figment of some journalists' imaginations?

**Dylan: No, no. It wasn't a figment of anybody's journalism, it happened… it, you know, what everybody… what they reported happened to… to be happening, did happen but… sometime you know they might just exploit one side of it rather than the other like I've never really looked at… at this as being my my career, you know. I don't really consider it a job it's… it's… it's my life you know I just play guitar and I like to do that kind of thing and that when people don't want to… me to they… when they don't want to hear from me anymore they just, you know, they won't show up and I'll know that I… I'll be just as happy doing something else.**

Bill: Well 20 years is… is quite a while to… to have messed around with a hobby and made a good living in it.

**Dylan: Yeah that's** [laughs] **I've never looked at it as a hobby though. It's never been a hobby for me it's always been very important. It's always been everything but a hobby really it's been, you know, when how it is… when you… when you're coming up… if you… if you… if you have a guitar, you know, you can always eat and find love and all those… all those important things in life, which we're all looking for, you know.**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: And that's all it's ever been to me. It's just been a way to get around. And it pulled me out of… oh God knows what what it would have pulled me out of. I don't know what happened and I guess working in a… in the mines or something like that, you know.**

Bill: Yeah, in Minnesota.

**Dylan: Yeah, but… but it just allowed me to get out of there and… and I'm still doing it because people still come to… come to the shows. If they don't come to the shows, I can't really say that I'd be just as happy doing something else 'cause I don't know what that something else would be. But… when they stop showing up would be the time I actually… I stop doing it.**

<plays 'All Along The Watchtower'>

Bill: … the kind of things that you were thinking about that you wanted to have happen when you went to New York the first time and back in 1960 or '61.

**Dylan: Well the biggest… the biggest difference that is… that… at that period of time and now is that there was a some kind of community at that time, across the the the whole United States as I remember but it was very strong type of community. There was a community, communal spirit or something like that going… going that you felt a part of, whereas… I don't… I don't know if that exists in that way today.**

Bill: Yeah if it is, it seems like it might be a little… lot more diffused than it than it once was but I know what you're talking about, Eric Anderson and Phil Ochs and all those people that it was kind of a center of energy there for…

**Dylan: There were just a lot of people there who'd come from different places just like I had and met up in New York. There were just all kinds of people. And then, of course, the same thing was happening in… Europe at that time too 'cause I… I've been there a few times and they were same type of people doing the same type of things.**

Bill: Did you think that uh being successful, being recording album…

**Dylan: No, no. It was it was just… it was just one of them fortunate things for me that I had been recorded by John Hammond at Columbia Records.**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: The labels that I wanted to record on wouldn't have me. I'd been refused by a bunch of other labels who, you know, come they… they see you around in town working here and there and there was labels at that time where…**

Bill: Vanguard Folk, Verve?

**Dylan: Yeah. Folk singers only record like on Tradition Records or yeah, Verve, jazz and folk music records. No one would even dream of… of a somebody like myself being recorded by a major label like ICA or Columbia Records at the time. Capital Records. It was just one of the things I walked into and it… it changed a lot for me and a lot… for a lot… for a whole lot of other people too.**

<plays 'Talkin' New York' and 'Shelter from the Storm'>

Bill: How has your approach to songwriting changed over the years? Are you as prolific as you used to be?

**Dylan: No. I can't say I am, as there were a few years there when I turned out a lot of stuff because I was really committed to it and really involved with… with it in a… extreme way. I'm not too prolific nowadays. I… I'll write something if I just feel like I… I must write it, because it's just a… line which comes to me which… which I'll have to finish.**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: Something will come to me, a song will come to me while I'm playing another song, even. and I'll just have to finish that song. I… I'll need that for something.**

Bill: Yeah. What kind of emotions does it take for you to… move you to do at this point?

**Dylan: Well, my best songs I write real quick. My best songs I've probably written in 5 minutes.**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: All of them the ones that… that I consider my best songs. Some of the ones I've labored over, I don't like to do that and… and then I'm never really satisfied with them. But… my best songs, yeah, they come real fast and… I'll just be playing that minute and they'll just all be there and I'll just have to get them down on a paper or something. I hope I can memorize it if I don't have a pencil.**

Bill: Do you have any favorite songs, or any favorite albums that you would like to be remembered by?

**Dylan: I hardly ever listen to my albums. I never hear 'em. Once they're made… I seldom ever come across them anymore. I never keep them in the house I don't like to hear 'em, you know. I just don't listen to them but, before they're made, I listen to them a lot and… I'm kind of not in touch with… with a whole bunch of ones from the early years because there's so many, you know. And the… the songs I remember off of them are the ones that I sing in the shows.**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: If somebody was to call out… sometimes people have called out for certain songs and… and I've had to… sometimes I haven't remembered the words to 'em, you know.**

Bill: Yeah I would… I could see that would be a problem.

**Dylan: Yes, I'll have to go and get, you know… somebody working there on the stage will have a… will have a copy of it, or have a record or something and I'll look at it and… Once I look at it once I can usually call it all back to memory very quick.**

<plays 'Ballad of a Thin Man'>

Bill: How do you see your role in… say in the lives of somebody who was 30 years old and the first music they listen to is you?

**Dylan: My thing, what I do is a development out of all the styles I've ever heard in my life…**

Bill: Uh-huh

**Dylan …and it's always been that way. Then it's… it's just a… I mean I just… really I still play just the same old way that I ever have. I haven't really managed to come up with any real tricky things or… or it's basically very, very simple. It's just a combination of a couple different kinds of music and…**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: … I've always wanted to tell people, you know, hey whatever you're listening to in my music, or whatever you're hearing, here's where I got it from.**

Bill: I see.

**Dylan: You can put it all together yourself. Well it hasn't all been musical, because some of it's been… some different poets in the old days did… did really catch my attention, you know and., and… as certain other different writers. There were so many people back then that… it was all going by so fast, too, that I managed to get free. And in a time when I was as surprised as… as anybody else was…**

Bill: Uh-huh.

**Dylan: …you know. It was like I was doing one thing, and then this would lead me into another thing so fast that the old thing hadn't gotten to be a chance to even digest it yet…**

Bill: I see.

**Dylan: …you know, and it… and it all happened real quick and all of a sudden I was doing things that no one had ever done before, and I knew it. And I was doing… when we were doing those albums, we knew no one… I knew no one had ever done them kind of things before. And it was too much to even comprehend. It was, you know, it… I couldn't handle it actually. When I was working, I was touring most of the time and living in hotels the other part of the time and… and making records the rest of the time and it all become rather…**

Bill: Blurred.

**Dylan: Yeah, just *real* fast, you know, just going by so quickly and I've… as far as the people that wanted to associate me with any kind of movement well I think they were just kind of… I don't know where that kind of talk came from. I mean, I was… singers never were part of any kind of movement, they *never* were the spokesman. I mean anybody knows that who was… was back then. I used to go all kinds of, you know, meetings and things like that, or organizations or different… You know, when… you'll sing anywhere, you know what I mean.**

Bill: Yeah.

**Dylan: When you're starting out as somebody says 'Come sing here', 'Come sing there', well you go there and you'll sing there and you may get a place to stay or somebody will feed you. That's the way it was back then, you know. And there was never any a whole lot of money to be made out of music. Like nowadays kids that buy a guitar and right away he'll think, I mean, I know young kids that do that that, they'll… they'll think that's their that's the way they're gonna earn their living.**

Bill: Yeah.

**Dylan: And I was trying to tell them that ain't the way, you know, that… that… very few people… very few people ever get to earn their living. And if you do… can earn your living playing your music well even that you… could just leave it right there and call yourself successful because there's so many people that can't.**

Bill: Yeah.

**Dylan: The people that wanted to put me in front of any kind of politic game, well those people were just irresponsible and they're just looking for somebody to take a fall you know someone who would… who could… who they could… who… who they could point to and… and hold up as some kind of a leader, you know. Powerful people remain always behind the scenes…**

Bill: Yeah.

**Dylan: …you know, so everybody's looking for somebody to put up there and… No I never was… I never was, you know, into being up there as any kind of spokesman. I don't know nothing**

**about politics, you know. If I'd come up with any kind of idea or something I would have run for Congress or something.**

Bill: [laughs]

<plays 'Blowin' In the Wind', 'Are You Ready' and 'Tomorrow Is a Long Time'>

# 27 March 1983, Mart Perry and Alan Ramey

Source: Comments on John Hammond in a video feature film *John Hammond: From Bessie Smith to Bruce Springsteen*, American Masters film, 20 August 1990.

The interview took place in Columbia (Studio) Offices, New York City, New York, with John Hammond present.

**John Hammond: From Bessie Smith to Bruce Springsteen**

**The fact that John had offered me the contract and an opportunity to record, that was just, uh, you know, a phenomenal thing back then.**

# 1985, Unknown Interviewer (MTV Spotlight)

Source: A video feature on MTV, American pay television channel, of unknown broadcast date.

The location of this interview is unknown.  Dylan is speaking about Dave Stewart.

**MTV Spotlight Dave Stewart**

**I liked '*Sweet Dreams*' and the last video he did.  But you know, it's important if you're gonna work with somebody… It's important to work with somebody who's got an authority… some type of authority on the scene.  And I just figured that he had that.**

# 8 September 1987, Kurt Loder

Source: *Unknown*, presumably Israeli newspaper. The text reproduced here is from *Isis Revisited*, UK fanzine, Nos 16/17, 1987, page 34.

The interview took place in Jerusalem, Israel.

**Dylan stirs controversy in Israel**

It was three in the morning, and Bob Dylan was sitting on the great stone balcony of his hotel suite, sipping a screwdriver and picking out ragtime riffs on a guitar. Spread out before him was the panorama of Jerusalem, with the nearby Jaffa Gate and the ancient walls of the Old City glowing under a luminous full moon. Dylan put down his guitar to savor the silence.

**"This is hip,"** he said. **"I don't know what else is going on in the world right now. They may be fighting up the coast; I heard they are. But right here, this is pretty hip. This is heavy. Holy, almost Yeah - the Holy City."**

Dylan was in high spirits. A few hours earlier he had completed the second concert of his first-ever Israeli tour - a ninety-minute set at the Sulatan's Pool, inside the Old City walls, backed by opening act Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers - and had brought cheers from the 9000-strong crowd at the sold-out show. Even the press had been moderately pleased.

So Dylan was happy - but not for long: the singer's Israeli sojourn, which had opened to universal press pans in Tel Aviv two nights earlier, would collapse in a welter of diplomatic recriminations, as he flew out of the country the following day to begin a fifteen-city European tour.

Dylan's initial problems in Israel could probably be attributed, at least partially, to jet lag. He flew from Los Angeles to Egypt to hook up with Petty and his band and then made the trip to Tel Aviv by bus. So by the night of his opening show, in that balmy Mediterranean city, on September 5th, he was still feeling fairly travel ravaged.

The set that night was rather perfunctory - the rhythms flat and the song selection puzzling to many fans who'd come to hear nothing but hits. Dylan and the band kicked off with "Maggie's Farm" and later connected with such classics as "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" and "Blowin' in the Wind." But a number of the set's seventeen songs were more obscure, and some observers were puzzled by the concluding tune, the folk staple "Go Down Moses." None of this sat too well with Israeli critics. Hanoch Guthmann, writing in the Jerusalem Post, said that many fans had been "disappointed" and that "a large number of spectators were seen leaving during his set."

The Jerusalem show two nights later seemed to more than make up for that opening catastrophe, but then politics entered the picture. Back in the States, newspapers were filled with reports from Israel that Dylan had offended his hosts by showing up in the country one day later than he'd been expected. He was accused of, among other offenses, canceling an audience with the Israeli foreign minister, Shimon Peres, as well as an official visit to the Wailing Wall. He was charged with failing to appear at a Sabbath dinner in his honor and on a national TV talk show for which he'd been scheduled. Since Dylan has never been much of a hobnobber, these accusations sounded faintly dubious - and as it turned out, they were. From Zurich, a Dylan press rep explained that the singer had "never agreed to any of these appearances."

**"I don't do these kind of things anyway - meeting dignitaries and stuff,"** said Bob himself. **"Television's not my thing, so I wouldn't do that, either. I can't see why everybody gets so mad over something that never would have happened."**

# 13 September 1989, Edna Gundersen (Painting his Masterpiece)

Source: *USA Today*, US newspaper, 21 September 1989, page 1D-2D. Supplementary sections were published in *On the Tracks*, US fanzine, Number 3, Spring 1994, pages 12, 14-15, 17..

The interview took place in Comstock Hotel, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, California.

**He's still painting his masterpiece**

LOS ANGELES – Bob Dylan, whose biting lyrics and cogent nasal vocals revolutionized rock, finds himself tongue-tied meeting the press.

**"These things usually make me clam up,"** admits the 48-year-old singer/songwriter shortly after arriving at a hotel suite for a rare interview. **"You feel you're supposed to deliver some kind of great profound statement. You can't push people to respond to you. They either do or they don't."**

Most do. Dylan, a musical chameleon, reluctant icon and willful nonconformist, has commanded attention since his first album was released in 1962. Less visible on charts in the '80s, he remains one of rock's most prolific and influential figures, steadily performing, recording and defying expectations.

*Oh Mercy*, out this week, is the 35th LP in his staggering catalog. *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, *Musician*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* have weighed in with raves. Critics also are applauding his trio-backed tour, which began in June and continues indefinitely.

Dylan and George Harrison are discussing a follow-up to last year's extraordinary *Traveling Wilburys* collaboration with Tom Petty, Jeff Lynne and the late Roy Orbison. Dylan, who lives in Malibu, is looking into film production opportunities and is stockpiling songs for his next LP. Clearly, the archetype of folk/rock is eyeing the '90s. The embodiment of '60s counterculture Is fed up with nostalgia.

**"From '66 on, I was trying to raise a family and that was contrary to the whole epidemic of the '60s,"** says the divorced father of five. **"Most people were running away from home and trying to get away from their parents. That was never intentional on my part, trying to run away from *anything*. My family was more important to me than any kind of generational '60s thing. Still is. To find some meaning in the '60s for me is real far-fetched."**

During 2½ hours, Dylan sips coffee, smokes six Marlboros and resists invitations to reveal personal details. Cagey, guarded and fidgety, he's also affable, polite and self-deprecating, speaking in a throaty drawl and sometimes wondering aloud if he's saying anything interesting.

He wears jeans worn at the knees, snakeskin cowboy boots, a turquoise sweatshirt and a black leather jacket he never removes. Tousled brown curls and a sparse beard frame a face set with penetrating blue eyes. Now and then, an engaging boyish smile melts his grim concentration.

A quarter-century ago, his *Like a Rolling Stone* and *Positively 4th Street* were high on the charts. Bobby Zimmerman of Hibbing, Minn., had become, literally, a folk hero. Not fond of reminiscing, he is hard-pressed to nail down highlights: a tent concert with ex-lover Joan Baez, maybe a 1978 show in England.

**"It's not a good habit to think, 'This was such a great show,' because you've got to play another one the next night. Maybe it *was* great, but so what? It's over."**

Dylan's early gems – *Maggie's Farm*, *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, *Mr. Tambourine Man* – are classic rock radio staples and the backbone of his shows. Does the focus on his initial work suggest he's painted his masterpiece?

**"An easy way out would be to say, 'Yeah, it's all behind me, that's it and there's no more.' But you want to say there might be a small chance that something up there will surpass whatever you did."**

**"Everybody works in the shadow of what they've previously done. But you have to overcome that."**

Since arriving in the limelight with an arsenal of brilliant songs, Dylan has been dogged by his myth – enigma, guru, protest prophet. In defense, he became a master of masquerades, protecting his privacy behind smokescreens. Now he shrugs at mention of his image.

**"It's been years since I've read anything about myself. (People) can think what they want and let me be. You can't let the fame get in the way of your calling.**

**"Everybody is entitled to lead a private life. Then again, God watches everybody, so there's nothing really private, there's nothing we can hide. As long as you're exposing everything to the power that created you, people can't uncover too much."**

Biographies and articles that speculate on his musical motives or love life are **"not even worth responding to,"** Dylan says. **"All that's important is who really knows you, who really cares for you. There's only a few people in your life you care to have know everything about you. It's not important to set the record straight. It's more important to keep myself together and be able to function."**

Dylan stoked curiosity and controversy from the start. He shocked folk purists by going electric at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. And the Jewish-born singer's conversion to Christianity in the late 1970s and subsequent trilogy of Christian-themed albums baffled all. The press labeled Dylan "born-again." His Dylanesque response now: **"If that's what was laid on me, there must have been a reason for it.**

**"Whatever label is put on you, the purpose of it is to limit your accessibility to people. There had been so many labels laid on me in the past that it didn't matter anymore at that point. What more could they say?"**

As for the content of those three LPs and subsequent releases, Dylan says, **"You'd never hear me saying that stuff is religious one way or the other. To me, it isn't. It's just based on my experience in daily matters, what you run up against and how you respond to things."**

**"People who work for big companies, that's their religion. That's not a word that has any holiness to it."**

Often declared pop's greatest living songwriter, Dylan considers himself a singer first. **"My reason for getting into songwriting was having something to sing. My songs aren't written for great singers. They're written for me."**

He jots ideas and lyric fragments in a notebook, and pares songs to skeletal simplicity. **"I make it as small or as narrow as possible rather than make it a big, broad, grand thing. By keeping it so narrow, emotion plays a great part."**

And he writes with performing, not recording, in mind. **"The song is going to live or die"** on stage, he says. **"On record, it's deceiving. You hear it in privacy, so it creates its own world when it plays itself for you. But when you see that person doing it live, you can tell if it's real or somebody up there wasting your time or faking it. Faking it is real popular."**

Though his set list changes radically, Dylan's signature *Like a Rolling Stone* crops up almost nightly. He's never tired of it. **"I always play as if nobody out there has ever heard of me. If you don't do that, you get too complacent and you can't read a crowd. You start assuming too many things."**

Dylan assumes audiences want to hear his songs, not his speeches, so he seldom utters a syllable, reasoning, **"It just doesn't seem relevant anymore. It's not stand-up comedy or a stage play. Also, it breaks my concentration to have to think of things to say or to respond to the crowd. The songs themselves do the talking. My songs do, anyway."**

Once mercurial and acid-tongued, he says time tempered his nature.

**"I feel like I've gotten a lot more tolerant of everything,"** Dylan says, laughing self-consciously. **"I don't ascend and descend as much – mood swings and what have you. I'm trying to stay away from anything that even has an air of getting under my skin."**

Additional extracts published in *On the Tracks*, US fanzine, Number 3, Spring 1994, pages 12, 14-15, 17..

Q: You were originally associated with traditional folk music, which seems to be enjoying a resurgence.

**A: There are more people that are seriously involved in folk music for what it is now than what there was 20 years ago. Singer/songwriters just recording their own songs with an acoustic guitar was passing itself off as folk music with little regard for folk songs. These days, you can find places all across the country where there are young people singing folk songs. Whether that's a growing movement or not is difficult to say. [Fans] didn't lose track of folk music or lose sight of it. It got swept away by fashionable things and British invasions and pop art and medium-is-the-message type of things. But it didn't die. All modern music is based on those forms and structural verses.**

Q: What separates your songs from the pack?

**A: In order to come up with something that rings true, you would have to stay out of the way of that information machine that everyone is plugged into. If you're plugged into the same information machine, then there's no point to write, cause then everyone knows the same thing.**

Q: What's your approach to doing cover songs?

**A: You can do cover songs but you gotta make it like it hasn't been done before. You have to make a cover song your own song. Otherwise, there's no point to making it, unless you're a Holiday Inn band that can get away with that. That's a different scene. People don't come to see me because they want me to sound like another performer.**

Q: Why haven't you released more live albums?

**A: The [record] company really doesn't get too excited about any live album from me. They were given a live album in '85 which sounded pretty good but they weren't too thrilled with that. Then they got the *Dylan and The Dead* album. That wouldn't really excite them too much.**

Q: How do you explain the popularity of the Traveling Wilburys record?

**A: Boy, you got me! You got me! It struck a chord, it certainly did. (Laughs.) My time on that record was very minimal because of this and that happening. It was an easy record to make.**

Q: Are you protective about your own songs?

**A: None of these songs are mine. Once you sing them, they don't belong to you anymore. It's a great honor to have anybody record your songs.**

Q: Does all the focus on your '60s period irritate you?

**A: It would seem to me the people in control of the media must be '60s people, and they'll continue to push forth the '60s until they're dead. Then a new group of people who were raised in the '70s will come in and we'll have a big '70s revival in the year 2000. The '60s will be forgotten. [Nostalgia for the '60s] is more of a mental thing. It has no ring of reality. It doesn't really have much to do with what's going on today.**

Q: How valid is or was the '60s sentiment 'Don't trust anyone over 30?'

**A: That was false to begin with, that statement. Look how much play it got. It probably sold a lot of tennis shoes and things people need from the accessory department. As far as playing music past the age of 20, everyone I ever liked was always in their 40s and 50s and 60s. John Lee Hooker turned 70. Look at Pablo Casals, Chuck Berry. It's good to get into it at a young age so you can learn all there is to learn, but you don't really get good at that age. It takes a long time to get good.**

Q: You've been performing non-stop the past couple years. What do you still get out of it?

**A: What does anybody get out of anything? It's just something to do, if you can do it.**

Q: Why do you never get tired of playing live?

**A: There's always new things to discover when you're playing live. No two shows are the same. It might be the same song, but you find different things to do within that song which you didn't think about the night before. It depends on how your brain is hooked up to your hand and how your mind is hooked up to your mouth.**

Q: Offstage, isn't touring a grind?

**A: It's not that difficult in America. You get the feeling after a while the whole place is like home. It all becomes familiar after you've done it a while.**

Q: What's your regimen on the road?

**A: You try to sleep as much as you can, depending how far the distances are. Some people take planes. It isn't great for my ears to go up and down in a plane. Flying is not one of my favorite things. So we stay on the ground.**

Q: How do you go about selecting sidemen?

**A: You look for people that understand the music, that listen to the same kind of music. You don't really find too many problems with only bass and drums and another guitar. G.E.** [Smith, leader of the *Saturday Night Live* band] **is very versatile.**

Q: How flexible is the show? The set list fluctuates almost every night.

**A: There's a set pattern to it, then it can change within that structure, and it does. That's not really something that we give a great deal of thought to, unless we want to play a certain kind of show. Sometimes you can feel out the mood of a crowd and play something you know is the right thing. There's been a lot of comments made that the band knows 200 songs. Some of them, we might just know the name and what key they're in. It's not like we rehearsed 200 songs.**

Q: Yet almost every show includes Like A Rolling Stone.

**A: We do play that one a lot. People seem to want to hear that one a lot. Whatever else goes down in front of it, when that comes on, it sort of clarifies everything.**

Q: People might suspect you're tired of performing it.

**A: You could say the same thing about Jerry Lee Lewis singing "Great Balls of Fire." Doesn't it ever get tiring singing the same song over and over again? No, it doesn't. That's the thing about music, it's not on the page. It's got a life of its own. Whenever you're doing that particular [song], it's got a new life to it.**

Q: Every critic seems to comment on the low-glitz staging, the spare set.

**A: When you get into lighting and all that, that's very expensive. It's more a question of economics than trying to create any effect. It's hard to say what it adds. We try to concentrate more on the sound system rather than the lights.**

Q: Do you ever suffer from stage fright?

**A: Only when it's somebody else's show. If you're a guest or some kind of walk-on, and you're doing somebody a favor usually, and it's not your system, it's not your stage, then things always go wrong for me. It's difficult for me just to walk on and play a few songs. It takes forever just to get accustomed to where you are.**

Q: Do any shows stand out in your memory?

**A: Yeah, one of the very first concerts Joan Baez and myself played at Westbury Music Fair in a tent stands out in my mind as a memorable show. She used to bring me on as a guest. There's one we did in Paris in '82 with one of my best bands – four singers. You could feel it. There was something special about that one. Outside of that, they just become a blur: different bands, different sets through the years. You don't get many of those that stay with you for a long time. Every so often, the moon is conducting the show almost. The moon is a powerful agent at night.**

Q: Tell me about being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

**A: What a drunken night that was! Trying to find the elevator button took half the night.**

Q: So you had a good time?

**A: Well, they tell me.**

Q: Bruce Springsteen gave such a stirring tribute.

**A: That was nice of Bruce to say what he said. He didn't have to do that. That was awfully touching, very moving.**

Q: How do you feel about musicians endorsing products?

**A: It doesn't matter to me what any performers do in their spare time. That's not a subject that has any kind of endearment to me one way or the other. It's foggy in my mind.**

Q: Your feelings on the war against drugs?

**A: You can't have people talking against drugs when in every city you see neon signs saying, DRUGS. Drugs are big. The president was speaking to schools trying to educate [students] on drugs. He should have been broadcasting to the Wall Street area. That's where people are taking drugs. Drugs have always been big. When you drank Coca-Cola in the '20s, it was like doing a line of coke.**

Q: What's the solution?

**A: If they were legal, they could be taxed. They should discuss that and really look at it. When you bring up the subject, it seems to manifest a lot of acrimony. If you taxed them you could probably wipe out the deficit overnight. Make 'em legal for one year, I don't know. Don't put it in the headline: 'Bob Dylan says legalize drugs.'**

# 13 September 1989, Edna Gundersen (Oh Mercy)

Source: *USA Today*, US newspaper, 21 September 1989, page 6D. Supplementary sections were published in *On the Tracks*, US fanzine, Number 4, Fall 1994, pages 10-11.

The interview took place in Comstock Hotel, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, California.

**Dylan on 'Mercy,' for the record**

LOS ANGELES – Bob Dylan's new album, *Oh Mercy* (Columbia), is being hailed by critics as his best in years.

And what does Bob Dylan say? The 10 songs were among the easiest he's written.

**"Most of them are stream-of-consciousness songs,"** he says, **"the kind that come to you in the middle of the night, when you just want to go back to bed.**

**"The harder you try to do something, the more it evades you. These weren't like that."**

Like Prince, Dylan is unpredictable and not given to explaining career moves or work habits. Rare clues are hungrily gobbled by fans and peers. He recently detailed the making of *Oh Mercy*, poised to sweep critics' year-end lists.

Last year's *Down in the Groove* included six cover songs. This time, Dylan chose to use only originals, partly to appease his label. *Oh Mercy* is the first record on a new contract, **"so it's good to have your own songs, at least on the first one,"** he says with a laugh.

He also felt compelled to recommit himself to songwriting and recording.

**"Some people quit making records,"** he says. **"They just don't care about it anymore. As long as they have their live stage show together, they don't need records. It was getting to that point for me. It was either come up with a bunch of songs that were original and pay attention to them or get some other real good songwriters to write me some songs. I couldn't find any other songs."**

At the urging of U2 singer Bono, Dylan teamed with producer Daniel Lanois (U2, Peter Gabriel) who in turn enlisted New Orleans musicians.

**"Bono had heard a few of those songs and suggested that Daniel could really record them right,"** Dylan says. **"Daniel came to see me when we were playing in New, Orleans last year and... we hit it off. He had an understanding of what my music was all about.**

**"It's very hard to find a producer that can play,"** Dylan says. **"A lot of them can't even engineer. They've just got a big title and know how to spend a lot of money. It was thrilling to run into Daniel because he's a competent musician and he knows how to record with modern facilities. For me, that was lacking in the past."**

**"He managed to get my stage voice, something other people working with me never were quite able to achieve."**

Generally, Dylan finds studios confining and artificial. Unlike colleagues of his stature, he is ill at ease with huge, budgets and long stints in **"factory-oriented"** studios.

**"The meter's running all the time,"** he says. **"The cost is unrealistic. I mean, you could put up a wing of a hospital!"**

Last spring in Lanois' New Orleans studio, **"Daniel just allowed the record to take place any old time, day or night,"** Dylan says. **"You didn't have to walk through secretaries, pin-ball machines and managers and hangers-on in the lobby and parking lots and elevators and arctic temperatures."**

Dylan also embraced Lanois' counsel, granting carte blanche in shaping the brooding atmospherics. Typically, producers cowed by Dylan's brilliance keep hands-off, which may account for untailored results in the past. Dylan prefers a take-charge, producer, **"someone who knows my music inside out saying, 'You could do better than that, you could surpass that.'**

**"Me being me is just one person,"** he says. **"You need help to make a record, in all the decisions that go into making a record. People expect me to bring in a Bob Dylan song, sing it and then they record it. Other people don't work that way. There's more feedback."**

Additional extracts published in *On the Tracks*, US fanzine, Number 4, Fall 1994, pages 10-11.

Q Are you uncomfortable in the position of role model or public figure?

**A There's a lot of people who like nothing better than to tear down someone the public adores. You have to be realistic about it. It's more important for me to keep myself together to be able to function rather than to care what other people are thinking of me.**

Q Do you keep track of all the inaccuracies reported about you?

**A It's best not to read about yourself. If you start reading about yourself, you're going to see good things and you're going to see bad things. And it's all just trash anyway. Not to comment on newspapers or anything, but it is trash. People read it and the next day they find something else to read about. If you're going to pay that any mind… you're going to be rope-tied.**

Q Why did *Hearts of Fire* bomb?

**A Your guess is as good as mine.**

Q Do you see many movies?

**A Very few. Hardly any at all. This year, I saw Parenthood, which was really good. I liked that a lot. It's hard for me to concentrate on the screen too long. I usually get antsy.**

Q Growing up, were your kids aware of your stature in the music business?

**A Naah, they didn't even know what their dad did. Yeah, they knew there was instruments in the house and people came over and played and that dad went off once in a while. But outside of that, they didn't have any idea.**

Q Are you ever plagued by writer's block?

**A I wouldn't call it writer's block. I think writer's block more applied to people who've got to generate some kind of idea for a novel. [A songwriter] never gets writer's block because you've always got material. Songs shouldn't really be written out of thin air. They should come to you. You shouldn't have to sit down and think, 'What should I write a song about?' If you don't have anything in your mind at the moment, you can always look in your notebook and find something. That usually works. I just jot down a bunch of stuff and throw it in a drawer and drag it out and look at it.**

# Early to Mid October 1989, Dan Neer

Source: *Bob Dylan: Up Close*, broadcast on: WNEW-FM radio, New York, 31 October 1989. The text reproduced here is mostly from *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 28, December 1989, pages 45-47 (transcribed by Derek Barker). However, several additions and corrections have been made (admittedly, some of them rather pedantic) and these are indicated in red font.

The interview took place in the WNEW-FM Studio, New York City, New York.

**UP CLOSE**

Oh Mercy:

**Those songs just sorta were like stream-of-consciousness songs. These songs, they're either there or they're not, which you know a lotta people say those are the best kinda songs. Why question it, you know, if that song wants to be written in five minutes that's okay with me, you know. Now there are some songs that have taken me like six months to a year to write. You know, if you asked any writer though how long it took him to write a song you'll get all kinds of answers. Some will say, you know, maybe a week. That's just a process which really can't be put into a nice neat place where, you know, it's always gonna be the same. I mean, but these particular songs, most of them, came to me rather quickly.**

Political World:

**Just because it's called 'Political World' doesn't necessarily mean it's a political song. You can extract any line from any song, you know, and make it into what you want it to be. You could do that with 'White Christmas', you know, 'Sleigh bells will ring', you could make a political statement out of that if you cared to, or a revolutionarily statement.**

Daniel Lanoir:

**Bono from U2 was instrumental in putting me together with Daniel** [Lanoir]**, and that's the whole story right there.**

**He's got a travelling type of scene that he can set up a studio in anywhere, any building, any place, any time.**

Don't Look Back:

**There are artists out there also, you know, to a certain point of course, that, they're not doin' it for the crowd, they're doin' it for themselves. Er… someone who's trying to recapture the past, they couldn't give a shit less what the crowd thinks, they're into recapturing their past, you know. And it's their trip, they're not condescending to an audience who would like to think they, you know, wanna go back to some time that happened in an instant for them somewhere. And er… usually, to my way of thinking, that doesn't work. It works the other way which you wouldn't think, it works like if there's an artist that doesn't really care about whatever he did in the past but is still doin' whatever it was he's noted to be doin' it for, well the people will automatically be taken back to the past. Whereas, if there's a performer that is constantly up there trying to bring people back to the past, they're going to be disappointed.**

Sincerity:

**Sincerity isn't really a quality to emulate, there are bigger things than sincerity, how do you ever know if you're sincere anyway. You gotta be constantly checking, your motives even if you go fill up your gas tank, you know, with your own pump. People have different motives, but sincerity it's like an over-used word, you know.**

Traveling Wilburys:

**It wasn't that difficult to make that record. There weren't really a lot of heavy decisions that went into it. Collaboration is great, you know, on something like that because, you know, you never get stuck.**

Before The Flood:

**There was a great demand for that tour. It wasn't a tour where a bunch of guys get together and say, "Let's go out and play". There was a great demand for that tour and there had been… it had been building up, so we went out and did it. You know, we were playin' at that point, you know, 3, 4 nights maybe at Madison Square Garden and 3, 4 nights at the Boston Garden but what justified that? We hadn't made any records. When we were playin' out there earlier in the… era we certainly weren't drawin' crowds like that.**

I Blew It For You, Free:

**Harmonica on the neck thing. The first guy that impressed me doin' that was Jimmy Reed, and er… he blew out, you know, a lot of times he blew out instead of sucking, in on it; and he had his own style of playin', you know. He'd only play like three notes, sometimes the whole solo would be three notes.**

That Good Old Mathematical Music:

**My music is structured. Nobody realises it, but it is… well musicians realise that it's structured but probably only musicians would because the vocals, they… don't follow the structure, but the rhythm is. And… it's not that difficult to put horn parts or… string parts on any of it as long as they follow the mathematical rhythm of the song. You know, everything has a certain structure but then there's pockets left open to do different things every so often.**

Backing Bands:

**You try to get er… people playing with you that can, you know, have a fundamental understanding of what you're doin' and er… then they can make shifts when different opportunities come up to do that.**

**Rehearsing for me and my band, might… in order to rehearse a song might only consist of knowing the title and what key to play it in. That's… if we can do that, that's rehearsing.**

Hero Blues:

**I guess it has to do with where I grew up, you know, admiring those type of heroes, Robin Hood, Jesse James, the person who always kicked against the oppression, that had high moral standards. I don't know if these people are right about half high moral standards, I don't know if Robin Hood did, but you always assume that they did. I think what I intend to do is just to show the individualism of that er… certain type of breed.**

The Charts:

**Makin' singles has never been my thing. Makin' singles is, for some reason, just not. It's not like an impossible thing for a Bob Dylan record to be a single, but people don't usually think of them that way. Then again er… you can make any song a single by the way it sounds, you know, and what you do with the song. Anything really can be cut as a single, but my stuff doesn't really get… get too much play in the singles area, or on top of the charts or that kinda stuff, you know. It would be great if something did but it… it sort of hasn't happened. Once in a while, a single will break through, you know, but not as a habit. Look at 'Lay Lady Lay' that was a big single.**

Recording, Relating To The Faces:

**I learned how to make records when I started recording going into the studio and making a record right then and there. I know the other way and I know a lot of people do it the other way and it's successful for them, but I'm not interested in that aspect of recording. Laying down tracks and then coming back and perfecting those tracks and then perfecting lyrics which seem to wanna go to those tracks and songs are created in the recording studio. Where for me, see I'm a live performer, I have to play songs which are gonna relate to… to the faces that I'm singin' to and I can't do that, you know, if I'm spending a year in the studio workin' on a track. It's not that important to me, it's just… no record is that important.**

Is There A Definitive Dylan?:

**No, er… unfortunately not because er… there's so many different bands and… that have recorded with me and so many conglomerations of people, that it really can't be carried on any farther in there unless**

**you have the same people. Then it becomes just a record and however it becomes translated after that is another thing.**

Oh Mercy:

**New Orleans is, you know, is a town where if you need a musician in the middle of the night you can get one, and quickly, and er… that environment produced a lot of people just kinda comin' and goin', you know, at different times. Nothin' was locked in to my knowledge, on… you know, on anything, real specific where everybody had to be there.**

Long Black Coat:

**There was another line in there, the beginning of the line was, in the beginning was, 'people don't live or die, people just are.' That was the line in that song for the longest period of time. It never rhymed though. [laughs] It was tough trying to come up with a rhyme for that, and then finally gotta just give in and make it rhyme, and you know, find another word and make it rhyme.**

Making A Record:

**At a certain point when you become conscious that you're making er… a record, and er… this is just my process, … others have different er…methods. This is one of these records that… that was, you know, we became conscious we were makin' a record, and we had something like, you know, maybe six eight… six eight songs for it. Then it becomes more a process of well what do we put with these eight songs out of all these songs that we got, you know, comin' up. And er… some songs then either don't get cut or some songs kinda did get cut but we, you know, maybe need to be done again and that don't really fit the picture of what has evolved on its own, that happens.**

**Somebody actually told me [laughs] that someone has got a gig goin' 'round sequencing records. That's good to know in case you get a record and you don't know what to do with the songs. [laughs] They got experts for everything.**

The Hook:

**My songs don't really have that much of a hook line. They sorta, kinda, just bulldoze their way through on just rhythm and vocal phrasing and content. When you start putting a hook into the song and making it like so super important, er… then, you know, you're goin' to get a song that's not goin' to really… I mean there's enough things that already super that… that you already have to pay attention to, like the song itself. You know, like and, in a… at the end after you… you go out and do them, it's… it becomes a matter of how long the song is gonna last, and how long its gonna mean anything, so, if you've got that and which you have to do, then besides that putting in a real strong hook… I mean there are people who do it, Elton John does it, you know, quite regularly. You know, Neil Diamond used to have songs, everyone of them had a strong kinda chorus line to it, you know, because that's what people remember.**

Real Live:

**We'll fit those new songs, some of the new songs, you know, into this… into my twinin' department, but er… which ones they'll be… that remains to be seen also. They have to work in terms of what my total thing is. There's a lot of them that work live, you know, we try and stick with those. As long as they work live, there's no sense to rock that boat really.**

# 21 October 1989, Adrian Deevoy

Source: *The Wanted Man*, in *Q*, UK magazine, Number 39, December 1989, pages 62-65, 67-68, 71-74. The lengthy introduction to the interview plus a single paragraph at the end is not included in *Every Mind Polluting Word*. They contain nothing of the interview itself but are well worth reading. They are reproduced here in red font. N.B. the pages in the magazine are printed out of sequence.

An additional section of the interview, not included in the *Q* magazine article, was published in *The Telegraph*, UK fanzine, Number 36, Summer 1990, page 66. This exchange is appended, again in red font.

The interview took place in Narragansett, Rhode Island.

**The Wanted Man**

As the New York shuttle touches down in Boston, Bob Dylan's manager, Jeff Kramer, arrives at a conclusion of sorts. "Bob," he declares, "is like a football game." Pleased with the inelegant analogy he continues. "You're never sure exactly who's going to be there and you never know which side is going to win out."

A close friend of the diminutive protest singer once said, "There's so many sides to him, he's round." Crudely translated, this reads: Bob Dylan can be a *difficult* old bugger.

We are en route to Narraganset [*sic*], Rhode Island, where Dylan is playing another night on a tour that has been doing the rounds, on and off, for the best part of two years – "The Never-Ending Tour". The purpose of the visit is to achieve some type of congress with the elusive song-and-dance man.

But expectations are at half-mast and with good reason. Hidden from the world by a security-obsessed network of nebulously-titled personnel, Dylan is notoriously difficult to meet. There's a theory that he deliberately puts determined journalists through the mill so that he might firstly test their conviction and secondly give them some understanding of his own personal search. Then there's the self-explanatory Reclusive Eccentric Theory. Either way, this is the *eighth* time in two weeks we've attempted to meet with the frustratingly impenetrable enigma they have come to call His Bobness.

The quest begins in Manhattan on October 10 where Dylan is playing the first of four nights at the 2,400-seater Beacon Theatre. Backstage, Jeff Kramer, black-eyed, skinny and bristling with nervous energy, is racing up and down the stairs to Dylan's cluttered dressing room seeing to his needs, asking whether he wants to see any of the people hovering outside. Kramer has been handling Bob's affairs for six months since Dylan, with mild bemusement but minimal fanfare (**"What does he *do* anyway?"**) split with Elliot Roberts, the infamous West Coast "cat" who had managed him since the early '80s.

Victor Maimudes, Dylan's friend since 1961, wheels his and Bob's mountain bicycles out to the tour bus. During the mixing of Dylan's latest LP, Oh Mercy, they often ran the gauntlet of yellow taxis and maniac New York drivers and rode to the studio together.

Victor's role within the entourage isn't too clearly defined: "travelling companion", "chess partner" and "personal assistant" are all possibilities but no-one is entirely sure – least of all, one suspects, Victor.

Upstairs, a small group has been admitted into the celebrated songwriter's presence. They encircle him clucking and pecking and saying remarkably stupid things. Dylan relies on his stock line of defence answering everything put to him with a question.

"I *luuurve* that jacket, Bobby!" shrieks an overwrought, overweight painter person.

**"You *do*?"** asks Dylan. **"Is it really *OK*? You like it?"**

"Are you gonna do Blowing In The Wind man?" whines another amazingly intimate "buddy" who Dylan doesn't appear to recognise.

**"*Should* I?"** Dylan asks again. **"What d'you think? When *was* the last time I did that? Let me see now…"**

Two of Dylan's sons Jesse, 20, and Sam, 19, mooch around looking fantastically fed up and not a little embarrassed for the old man.

Meanwhile, downstairs all action freezes as a security man announces that a woman calling herself Dylan is demanding to be allowed backstage. "Is that *Sara* Dylan?" asks another security man referring to Dylan's former wife.

"No," explains a girl who, it transpires, works in Dylan's New York office. "This is an obsessed woman who follows Bob all over the world. We don't know what she wants from him but we don't allow her near him. She works on false passports and fake credit cards and is *extremely* devious."

It soon comes to light that the unbalanced but fiercely efficient fanatic has booked 18 rooms at the hotel Dylan is staying in on a CBS booking account number.

Dylan's office, it is revealed, has 550 such people on computer. "They're the people who are potentially dangerous," she explains. "They've generally sent death threats or weird stuff…"

At 9:05 one of Dylan's two burly bodyguards sweeps through the backstage. "We gotta have this place totally clear," he booms. "Can everybody move out of the area." Once the last lingering ligger has been escorted out, Dylan and his three piece band – guitarist G. E. Smith, bassist Tony Garnier and drummer Christopher Parker – shamble through on to the dimly lit stage.

The first half hour is, frankly, horrible. Dylan stumbles about, ignores the audience, plays the wrong harmonica – badly at that – and generally seems determined not to give anything a beginning or an end, allowing one song to shakily segue into the next. In classical music this technique is known, a little pompously, as "abandoning traditional finality"; in rock music it's called "losing the plot". Even the most committed fans begin to feel uncomfortable.

The band strike up the familiar introduction to Knocking On Heaven's Door. Dylan, on the other hand, has other plans and plays a pointless and staggeringly unhummable instrumental number. The band exchange shrugs and attempt gamely but unsuccessfully to join in.

Dylan once told Mick Jagger, quite accurately, that he could write Brown Sugar with one hand tied behind his back but Jagger could never write Mr Tambourine Man. Now, as Dylan once again informs the gentleman with the strange percussion-styled surname that he'll come following him "in that jingle jangle morning", 66,000 air-punching New Yorkers are going crazy-ape-bonkers at Shea Stadium to the thrilling sights and sounds of The Rolling Stones' live extravaganza. For a moment, it all seems to have gone dismally wrong for Bob Dylan.

Then, to the audible relief of the audience, Dylan grins, looks up for the first time and produces, as if from nowhere, transcendent versions of Girl From The North Country, What Good Am I? and sings Love Minus Zero/No Limit like he had written it just that morning.

After that he doesn't, to coin a phrase, look back: a magnificently grungy Ballad Of A Thin Man (interestingly he has reverted to the Highway 61 Revisited enunciation of Mister *Jaaownes* as opposed to Mister *Jew-oones* off Live At Budokan or Before The Flood's downright peculiar Mister *Jaa-Honesah!*), a magnificent Everything Is Broken – during which his top E-string rather spookily "breaks" – and an unsurpassable version of It Ain't Me Babe.

He winds up with an uncharacteristically tight Like A Rolling Stone and a superlative reading of the new and genuinely moving Most Of The Time. A foot-to-the-floor All Along The Watchtower, a mumbled "thangyoo" and he's gone.

Exhilarated, bemused, dejected and elated, the audience file out. Although none of them will share the same opinion on the show they would all surely agree that if it weren't already Allen, and the rabbi didn't mind, Robert Zimmerman's middle name would be Perverse.

There was a slender chance that Bob would talk immediately after the concert. He doesn't. He trots straight out to his bus and heads back to his hotel leaving all but the inner sanctum – what Kramer calls "The Family" – to listen to Dylan's agent telling us that, "Every single note, every single thing he does out there is a statement, a *gesture*." The New York Times concurs with this view in the morning claiming in something of a whitewash report that "Dylan Dusts Off His Wit And Rage". The London Times is more honest, if a little brutal, likening the experience to an alienation workshop.

Even the unrufflable concierge at New York's $200-a-night Westbury Hotel raises an eyebrow as Dylan sways across the Axminster towards reception. Looking as though he may have just scraped the bronze medal in a Best Dressed Gypsy competition, he checks in under his own name. Such is the exclusiveness of the Westbury, George Smiley, Robert Milkwood Thomas, Elmer Johnson, Big Joe's Buddy – all Dylan pseudonyms – will not be called upon to make an appearance today.

Bob, we are confidently informed, thinks he may want to talk today. He doesn't. At two o'clock in the afternoon he is still asleep. At three he wakes up and heads off to soundcheck. Perhaps, Kramer offers, we can conduct an interview after that. We don't. Bob disappears after 20 minutes to have a wander around New York, an activity Dylan simply calls "driftin' ".

No matter, we are reassured, Bob won't be going to bed until late and there'll be plenty of time after the show. There isn't. Bob holes up in his room immediately after the concert and doesn't re-emerge until the following afternoon.

We arrange a meeting for four o'clock. Bob agrees to it. Then at a quarter to four he remembers that he had "a bad experience" with a British journalist in 1986. He wants to make sure that the journalist is "checked out". The checking out process drags on for 48 hours when, charges dropped, Bob agrees to "meet up… but no interview, not in New York… too many people to see".

So we return to the Beacon Theatre and his cluttered dressing room. There's an unpleasant sense of déjà vu – the room is full of people busily cementing platitudes and cliches with bullshit. Dylan's on the back foot again. ***"Really?* I said that? *Why* did I say that?"**

"Trying to do it in New York was a mistake," Kramer admits on the telephone to London. "He'll definitely do it in Washington. And Bob will commit himself to that." and he does, using a rather curious choice of syntax, he can be heard in the background. **"I *commit*."** He doesn't. He wasn't happy with all the shows in Washington and isn't in the right frame of mind but swears the he'll talk in Pittsburgh, "or maybe in Philly…"

Poughkeepsie – Po'kipsy to its inmates – is a dismal kharzi of a place in upstate New York. Local folk will regretfully tell you that it was a one-horse town until the horse got bored and moved out. But, horses or no, Poughkeepsie is the place where Bob Dylan wants to talk. In many ways, it is the ideal situation, lots of free time and no distractions providing the Baptist church jumble sale doesn't get out of hand.

Bob's got the afternoon free and nothing can possibly go wrong. He wants to sit down at two o'clock. He doesn't. He's depressed and Poughkeepsie isn't helping. As we arrive at the hotel the first voice we hear is that of the harrassed [*sic*] assistant manager apologising profusely: "Yes, I'm very sorry about that Mr Dylan, I'll have it sorted out right away. So sorry Mr Dylan, sir."

"You can talk to Bob if you want," shrugs Kramer, "but he won't be saying anything back. Did you ever see Don't Look Back? Remember the interview with the Time magazine journalist…?" He leaves the sentence hanging to allow memories of the near-inhuman humiliation the young Dylan inflicted upon the reporter to take full effect. After much debate, it is decided that the interview will take place after the show in Dylan's bus as he is travelling overnight to the next gig in Rhode Island. It can't go wrong. It does. Dylan would rather talk tomorrow when we arrive in Narragansett just a few miles up the road from where he flayed 'em at the Newport Festival in '64.

Dylan only ventures out of his dressing room once in Poughkeepsie. When he does, as ever, all activity grinds to a halt. Some people pretend they haven't seen him but can't for some reason continue their conversations; some cast surreptitious but regular glances in his direction; others just have an honest gawp and hiss "It's *him*!" to their friends.

The woman who he comes out of hiding to meet genuinely seems to be an old acquaintance. He clutches a cup of French red wine and talks to her intensely, staring with concentration, occasionally touching her hand. After a few minutes, he indicates that he has to go back inside and kisses her sadly on the cheek. She walks away slowly, shrouded in melancholy. As she does Dylan, some would say unromantically, expectorates with all the gusto of a consumptive pirate and heads towards the lavatory at a brisk clip.

Half an hour before Dylan is due onstage, three marketing executives from CBS New York are wheeled in to discuss a video for his first US single off Oh Mercy, Political World. One instinctively knows that there will be tears before bedtime. Twenty minutes later the trio reappear, white-knuckles wrapped around the handles of their aluminium briefcases. Their mission had been to persuade the camera-shy showman to star in the promo. Dylan suggested they use a photograph of him.

"You're here to *interview* Bob?" asks one tanned exec, and then laughs incredulously like you had just told him that Sylvester Stallone is, in fact, a schoolgirl.

Onstage, it soon becomes uncomfortably apparent that Dylan isn't wearing his chuckle trousers tonight. He issues terse commands to the band and glares for the most part at the floor in front of him. "Twice" he spits at G. E. Smith and tears into a blistering Don't Think Twice, It's Alright. Then he ambles over to the grand piano – to much cheering and jubilation as he hasn't tickled the ivories live for some time – and pounds out a stirring rendition of Ring Them Bells. The band are slightly non-plussed. They haven't rehearsed this one.

The set complete, Dylan stalks off into the wings and shouts loudly and quite frighteningly at Jeff Kramer. "Don't you *ever* fucking ask me to do that again. *Ever*," he yells. "Don't you ask me to play a song that the band don't fucking know, *man*, ever again." This is pretty rich coming from the man who often throws songs into the set that only he and some long-dead bluesman are even faintly aware of but Kramer wisely recognises that it possibly isn't the right moment to present this argument.

Dylan returns to the stage for a savage revision of All Along The Watchtower – inverting the riff, violently hitting open strings and muddling the verses. If the interview was due to happen tonight, it isn't anymore.

We drive back to New York with Kramer, Dylan's accountant – a small balding man from Los Angeles who has flown in for the evening to sort out a few financial matters with Bob – and the show's lighting designer. They talk affectionately about "The Commander" and his new album. They enquire excitedly about the renewed British fascination with all thing Bob. They are delighted to learn that Oh Mercy was, in its first week of release,

selling 9,000 copies purely on the strength of good reviews and word of mouth, having had precious little promotion (it's now sold 101,000 in the UK).

Producer Daniel Lanois is cited as having been vital in Dylan's reassuring return to creative form. Despite his formidable track record with U2, Peter Gabriel, Robbie Robertson and the Neville Brothers they were still pleasantly surprised by his shadowy, shimmering, ultimately sympathetic treatment of Dylan's best songs for years.

Bob's last two LPs, the woefully patchy Down In The Groove and the crock of sheer awfulness that was Dylan And The Dead are given short shrift. "The thing with the Dead was more of a document, proving that they'd worked together," says Kramer. "Musically it's not up to much. Bob doesn't consider it to be part of his catalogue. And Down In The Groove, well…"

Today, Kramer says as we wait in the departure lounge for our flight to Boston (a two-hour drive from Narragansett), he has a "strong feeling" about the interview. So powerful is this intangible emotion that he decides to "discuss the best way to talk to Bob."

It comes in several concise points:

- Don't treat it like an interview. It has to be a conversation. Bob will clam up or wander off if you fire a volley of questions at him. Try not, in fact, to ask any question.
- Do not treat him like a God. It wigs him out.
- Don't ask who Mr. Jones is or the motorcycle crash, any of that corny Dylanologist stuff. (Mr Jones, of course, is the cryptically unidentified central character in Ballad of A Thin Man. The crash, allegedly a cunning PR ruse to allow Dylan to recover from drug dependence post-Blonde On Blonde).
- Don't pretend you know about anything you don't. He'll see through you straight away.
- Don't attempt to get the ultimate Dylan interview. Do not attempt to delve into his soul. He finds it insulting.
- Don't ask what specific lyrics mean. Here Kramer gives an example of a recent radio interview. DJ: "Bob, there's a couplet in Man In The Long Black Coat – *People don't live or die/People just float*. What exactly do you mean by 'float'? Dylan: "I just needed something to rhyme with 'coat'."
- Don't dredge up old out-of-context quotes. He won't answer you.
- Don't use notes. Bob feels it inhibits the conversation. And finally, if you must use a tape recorder try not to make a big deal about it. He may not feel like having his voice recorded.

Was there anything, I wondered idly, that you *could* speak to Dylan about? "Sure," enthused Kramer. "Songwriting, his new record, old blues artists, music in general. Anything really…"

During the flight, Kramer talks intimately about Dylan. How he writes: "I'll meet him sometimes and his hands will be covered in black marker pen where he's had an idea but no paper." How he sleeps: "He seems to get by without much. But when he needs to he'll just go into the back of the bus and put his sweatshirt over his head and stretch out like a bum on a bench in Central Park." How he eats: "He's almost a vegetarian. Eats some fish. I think a little bit of chicken. We have a cook for him on the road and she makes sure he gets a balanced diet. I mean, the man is 48 and he isn't in bad shape." How he feels about publicity: "He hates it. Doesn't need it. He just turned down the cover of Rolling Stone magazine. He said they should get someone of the street and interview *them* about Bob Dylan. That'd be more interesting. They said, Great idea, Bob but that won't sell any magazines. He said, Exactly. Why should I prostitute myself to sell magazines for you?" How he spends his money: "He doesn't throw it around but he's very generous. When he first met my little boy, a parcel arrived for him the next morning. Bob had gone out and bought him a little hand-carved wooden chair and it had a note. To Matthew. Here's a chair for you. Hope you like chairs, love Bob Dylan."

We arrive at the seaside chalet where Dylan is staying in Narragansett just in time to see his tour bus pulling away into the sunset. For the first time yet, Kramer panics and instructs the driver to "follow that bus" and pull out in front of it in a manly Miami Vice-like maneuver. Amid much dust and screeching of brakes the bus is stopped and its doors opened to reveal one shaken driver but no Dylan. "We got him!" whoops Kramer. "He's *in his room*."

The room is low-ceilinged, wooden and so cramped Dylan would have to step outside to change his mind. Mercifully he does neither. The double bed almost touches the four walls. You observe that it has been subjected to some recent blanket-rumpling action. Outside, the ocean sighs. There is no telephone. A girl of handsome Scandinavian aspect sits silently in one corner, flaxen curtains of hair covering her eyes. A rhinoceros in a dog-suit – whose name is sometimes only known to Dylan and sometimes Late For Dinner – is curled up on the floor, casting a wary eye at the visitors, shifting occasionally because it is lying on a Wellington boot.

The Wellington – shiny and black with a red toe cap – contains, as does its fellow boot, Bob Dylan's leg. The legs are positioned maybe a foot from a vast, flickering TV screen. Dylan stares at the unfocused set seemingly engrossed in a program in which a fat lady is explaining the no-nonsense way to make a giant Swiss roll.

Then he look s up, smiles like a sleepy child and rises a trifle unsteadily to greet us. He is wearing a brace of anoraks – one waterproof and black, one hooded and leather. The sea-spray on the latter, the tousled tresses blown flat by the breeze and the exhausted dog, now asleep, suggest an energetic stroll along the beach earlier this evening. The small stain on the pale pastel sweat shirt alludes unfortunately to the recent ingestion of baked beans. His jeans, in the autumn of their life, are instantly familiar to any Dylan trouser-enthusiast worth his salt as those worn on the '75 Rolling Thunder tour. The narrow cheeks are unevenly thatched with sparse beard, his eyes are laughing and electrically blue. He is, dare one say it these days, quite beautiful. You can't help but notice also that his very famous nose – hooked and noble – is running.

He exudes a saintly dignity that fills this admittedly tiny room and possibly quite a bit of the adjoining bathroom. Whatever charisma is, you are swiftly made aware, Bob Dylan has it king size, on ice, deluxe, by appointment, club class, squared, plus VAT, with fries to go.

So what do you say to this legend? How can you impress upon him that your intentions are honorable, that you are on his side, that you deeply respect his immeasurable contribution to popular music, poetry, culture, the arts, your *life*? Crikey! Here goes.

How the devil are you?

Will he storm out? Will he rasp, "What do you mean *'devil'*?" and launch into a terrifying verbal assault? Will he mutter darkly about one-legged kings on a savior's chocolate moped? Funnily enough, he does none of these. Instead, he laughs, a coarse staccato giggle – *heh, heh, heh* – and extends a warm, remarkably soft right hand boasting a yellow inch-long thumb nail.

Then he speaks. **"Yeah."** he says, **"very good."** And he laughs again, revealing, if anything, a slight nervousness. The charming soft "r" sound – "*vewry*" – that launched a thousand speech impediments in the '60s isn't nearly as prominent in his speaking voice. Although it's reassuring to note later that, he does pronounce "bury" so that it rhymes with "marry" and actually talks in the strangely italicised manner you hear on his records, invariably choosing to emphasise the wrong word in the *sentence*.

**BD: You gotta sit here on the bed with me,** (he says innocently.) **We'll *talk* here.**

He smoothes the eiderdown and pats the space next to him. The girl perches on a pillow at the head of the bed. Kramer lies behind us. Dylan puts his hand on the tape recorder. "See what you need to do with this," he offers moving closer, "is this." He wedges the machine between our hips. "That should be OK there." By now he is virtually on my lap. He smells musty yet sweet, like a baby who smokes 20 a day. It's a ludicrous situation and not a little fresh for a first date.

AD: It's very good to meet you at last.

**BD: Thank you,** (he says politely and bursts out laughing.) **Heh , heh, heh...**

AD: Tell me about the live thing. The last tour has gone virtually straight into this one.

**BD: Oh,** (he begins establishing brief, cautious eye contact.) **it's all the same tour. The Never Ending Tour...**

AD: What's the motivation to do that?

**BD: Well,** (his eyes move back to the giant Swiss roll [now ready for the oven]), **it works out better for me that way. You can pick and choose better when you're just out there all the time and your show is already set up. You know, you just don't have to start it up and end it. It's better just to keep it out there with breaks, you know, with extended breaks.**

AD: Does that lend itself to reassessing stuff. The songs are being constantly reinterpreted almost.

**BD: Like which one?** (he ask s quickly.) **Like what? People do say that. To me it's never different. To me… there's never any change.**

AD: The live show is quite improvisational.

**BD: It can be,** (he smirks.) **Some nights more than others! Heh, heh. Some nights it's very structured. Some nights it just sticks right to the script and other nights it'll skip.**

AD: What makes it take off?

**BD: It's hard to say. It's hard to say. It's the crowd that changes the songs.**

AD: You stopped playing the harmonica for a while recently…

**BD: Uh… yeah,** (he looks confused.) **When was that? Oh yeah. Sometimes I do, yeah. Those are the things that get set up and it's hard to bury them. Once there's no harmonicas on the stage you don't play them. Then there's always some problem with harmonicas.**

AD: Like picking up the wrong one…

**BD: That can be very unfortunate when that happens,** (he frowns.**) You've probably seen that happen a few times. Heh heh heh. Very unfortunate. You can be playing an entire harmonica solo and**

**not be able to hear it and you'll be in the wrong key. You can usually tell by the faces in the crowd, you look and see if it's in the right key. If it's in the wrong key it's, Aauugh!** (He puts his hands over his ears and grimaces.) **Then you can make an adjustment to it. Heh heh heh.**

AD: What about your piano playing? (His technique has been likened to a man constructing a treehouse).

**BD: My piano playing is very, very elementary,** (he shrugs.) **It's either keyboard or guitar orientated. My stuff isn't too keyboard orientated but it can be. Can be. My tonality is very simple. It's very… uh… three chord stuff. It's not like Elton John where he can modulate within the same phrase or the same bar. That sort of stuff. It depends what you can hear in your head.**

AD: What about your voice? Are you pleased with the way it's sounding at the moment?

**BD: Mmmmm…** (he smiles inscrutably.) **Ah, that's a thing that's very hard to really pin down. You know, whether you want it that way or not. Trying to adjust the moods of the different songs can be tricky sometimes.**

AD: Do you ever feel limited by it?

**BD: By my voice?** (he's warming to the subject now.) **Yeah. Sure. My voice is very limiting. Vocally it's just good enough for me. It's good for my songs. It really is good for my songs. My type of songs.**

AD: You can't imagine Pavarotti singing one of your songs?

**BD: It wouldn't suit that kind of material in a big way,** (he deadpans).

AD: What was your relationship with Lanois like?

**BD: Very good,** (he has now settled into a pattern of unnervingly regular eye-contact. The Swiss roll is consigned to history) **My feeling and my hope is that we could work again together… because… he made it very painless.**

AD: Has it often been a painful experience?

**BD: You usually work with people who don't, with me anyway… you fall into working with people who for one reason or another *happen* to be there but don't have a great understanding of what it is that you're trying to do. They might know your name and they might know some of the songs but they don't really have a great understanding and the *heart* to be able to get *under* it and push it up and make something out of it. They'd rather say, Well show it to me and let's record it and let me think what else I can put on it.**

AD: Did you discuss the lyrics with him? Would he ask what certain sections were about? Would he need to know that to help create an atmosphere?

**BD: *Ah*,** (he pauses, fishes in his anorak pocket and lights his only Marlboro of the interview). **We didn't really do that. Some songs might have had more lyrics than necessary and he might have said which verse to keep, maybe whole verses. Generally there weren't too many problems in the lyrics. It was more… in fact there wasn't *any* problems with them at all.**

AD: They're very pared down. Were you particularly strict in the editing? There's no excess.

**BD: Daniel's real good at that,** (he says evasively, propelling a column of smoke floorwards.)

AD: Is that something you don't have the natural discipline to do yourself?

**BD: No. It's something which gets overlooked,** (he grins, apparently enjoying the cat and mouse game.)

AD: Prior to making an album are you constantly jotting ideas down, absorbing atmospheres, examining things?

**BD: Yeah, those songs on that last album were songs which had come to me during that last year and they were pretty much as you hear them on the record. There were some changes but not with the *idea* of the song picture.**

AD: Do you ever write something and think, No that hasn't captured what I was trying to say? That doesn't get across the emotion I was trying to convey?

BD: (He sits silently for a moment and then almost shouts,) **"Do *what*?"** Kramer had mentioned this device – he'll pretend he hasn't heard personal questions.

AD: (Once again.) After writing something do you ever think, 'That's not what I really feel?'

**BD: *Eh*?** (He pauses smiling.) **Oh, all the time. Yeah, it happens *all* the time. You don't know what it is you're saying anyway and uh… when you start, ah, *filling in*, the result might be something you'd never even thought about. And uh, you uh, it's usually easier to settle for that rather than to go back and find out why it's not what you wanted it to be to begin with.**

AD: But do you? Do you delve back into it?

**BD: Sometimes you *need* to.**

AD: Can it be a painful thing? There's a couple of raw-nerve things on Oh Mercy.

**BD: Well… only if there's a record deadline… *heh, heh, heh*.**

AD: Do you never think, I can't write about this. It's too sensitive at the moment?

**BD: *Eh?***

AD: Is subject matter ever too delicate at the time or are you ever too tender to write about a situation?

**BD: Ah.** (He stubs out his cigarette and strokes his beard pensively.) **No.**

AD: You plunge in?

**BD: Yeah, you usually plunge in *from* something… there's a hole there to begin with. And uh, without that there's no place to go. Rather than sit around and try to *concoct* something. It's usually just in there.**

AD: Is it easier to write when you're miserable? Is writing when you're happy more difficult than when you're unhappy?

**BD: Well, you try to do neither really. You really don't want to ah… as strange as it might sound… it's just as easy to write from a miserable point of view on something where you're projecting a great deal of contentment and in the same way it's as easy to write from a great deal of contentment about something that you're projecting a lot of misery into. The way you do it, that's a different thing. What style you use. What vocabulary and all the… verbal gymnastics that make up a song or a poem or anything.**

AD: Some of the Oh Mercy songs have a sermon-like feel to them.

**BD: Well, if they do, that must be,** (he laughs silently.) **If the shoe fits, you know…**

AD: Whilst on the other hand some have a very confessional feel…

**BD: Well maybe.** (He reaches down to tickle the dog who is snoring at his feet.) **It's *possible*….**

AD: On some you're hectoring and on others you're opening your heart…

**BD: Sure. Sure.**

AD: Was that something that was apparent at the time?

**BD: No not really.** (He raises his voice slightly above the increasingly loud and alarmingly human- sounding dog-snores.) **When the songs were put together that's the way they came out.**

AD: Does *anyone* intervene where the lyrics are concerned or is that solely your area?

**BD: No-one has ever said to me, Change that lyric. Make it more this way or that way. I mean, that might be an unfortunate thing that no one has ever done that, *heh, heh, heh*. Sometimes you wish somebody would!**

AD: Have you made your lyrics consciously less cryptic?

**BD: Well, uh, no. You see these songs weren't *consciously* anything. They were mostly just streams-of-consciousness stuff.**

AD: But is being cryptic in your writing something you've veered away from? Songs like Changing Of The Guard on Street Legal.

**BD: Yeah. Maybe. Maybe. We used to do that song Changing Of The Guard quite a few times, quite a bit a few years ago. And the more we did it, the less cryptic it became.**

AD: How do you mean?

**BD: Doing it night after night, it becomes a lot less cryptic to the person singing it.**

AD: What? Less cryptic to you?

**BD: To *me*, yeah.**

AD: It's a very dream-like song.

**BD:** (He nods vigorously.) **Yeah, *yeah*…** (Then reconsiders.) **It could have used some editing a song like that.**

AD: Do your different bands re-interpret songs? Not just musically, do they introduce new elements to you?

**BD: You know,** (he says leaning forward) **It Ain't Me Babe was on the radio the other day and it never really occurred to me how different it was as a hit to how it was in my repertoire.**

AD: Are there some that are "of their time" that you wouldn't perform now?

**BD: No. Not really. Because none of my song are what you call "top singles". Singles get dated. You hear a lot of groups, there's a lot of groups going around and they fall into an Oldies type bag, right? A nostalgia trip. Well, that's because all these people have had hit singles…**

AD: Which you've always cleverly avoided.

**BD: *Heh!* Cleverly *avoided!* That's a nonsense, isn't it? Who wants to *cleverly avoid* hit singles? Everybody'd like 'em. But it's just not been my lot to have them.**

AD: You never know, Everything's Broken might be a hit.

**BD: You know Times They Are A-Changin' was a hit in Britain** (he nods). **It was a Top 10 Hit. Here it wasn't but there it was and so** (Everything Is Broken) **could be a hit. It'd be good. It certainly *deserves* to be.**

AD: If you say so yourself.

**BD: Yeah,** (he giggles) **I do!**

AD: There's a good "buzz" about Bob Dylan in Britain at the moment. It's like 1965 again.

**BD: Well '61 was my first year in Britain. Yeah, '61.**

AD: You played in the Pindar Of Wakefield…

**BD: Is that a club?** (he starts clicking his vast thumb nail excitedly.) **Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger had a club and one night Martin Carthy brought me down there to play. At that time there was all those ballads and the only place you could get them was like Southern Mountain kinda ballads but they'd be one step removed from the real old time ballads that were from the old country. There were a bunch of people that helped me out with that stuff in the very early '60s: Martin Carthy, Bob Davenport… just a lot of folk singer type people who ran into me. It was before… well The Marquee Club was happening then. Who was playing there then? Alex? Alex Korner. Alexis Korner. That was happening. Blues. A lot of my early stuff was taken from all the stuff that those guys taught me then.**

AD: Are you one of the great white blues singers?

**BD: Probably not… if that's a category. Who wants to be called *that*? Jimmie Rodgers was that, if anything. People call *him* a white blues singer.**

AD: Do you still feel most at home with the blues?

**BD: Well only because the structure is so simple and you can say what you want to say in such an immediate kinda way. Just the two lines and the one line. And the form is rather attractive because it's so simple.**

A cork pops. The dog wakes up and stretches out to a quite startling proportion; Dylan pats its head and it settles again. The girl brings over two plastic beakers of champagne. Dylan sets his aside and doesn't look at it again.

AD: Do you remember playing Blackbushe?

**BD: Yeah!** (the nail starts clicking again) **That was a *big* show. Who was on that?**

AD: Eric Clapton, Joan Armatrading, Graham Parker.

**BD: *Graham Parker!* That was a good show. A lot of people. That was very memorable.**

AD: In your top hat.

**BD: Oh the *hat*.** (He winces).

AD: Can you remember your feelings when you went over to Britain in '65 and '66?

**BD: Mm,** (he screws up his face in concentration.) **'65? Naw. Not much. It's pretty much blocked out of my mind. *Blotted* out. I don't know. What was happening on that tour… *Donovan!* Donovan was happening. What else?**

AD: Have you watched Don't Look Back?

**BD: Oh many years ago. It's very hard for me to look at anything that has to do with me.**

AD: Have you seen Eat The Document? (an unreleased, much bootlegged film shot by D.A. Pennebaker on Dylan's '66 European tour, widely regarded as his most "psychedelic" period.)

**BD: A couple of times, yeah.**

AD: Do you remember at one point you're being ferried around London with John Lennon after a serious night's indulgence, Pennebaker's filming and you're about to be sick?

**BD: Oh…** (he chuckles). **In the back of a cab? Very sick, I was. It was an enjoyable ride but a very sick one! Bumpy. Very *bumpy!***

AD: Do you recall the exhilaration of the time?

**BD: No,** (he says dismissively.) **My memory really doesn't focus too well on cab rides.**

AD: No, not the cab ride, the whole period?

**BD: Oh that particular *time*,** (he laughs apologetically.) **No, they went by rather quickly. But it was an *exciting* time.**

AD: You still sing a lot of songs from that time.

**BD: My songs hold up for me.**

AD: Do you find, when you sing them now, that you realise things you didn't realise at the time?

**BD:** (The nail goes again) **Oh *sure*. You never… It's difficult to grasp the whole *picture* at any given time. You're always thinking of something you should have said or… something you should have done.**

AD: You've actually rewritten songs. You revised Tangled Up In Blue.

**BD: It did get re-written on the tour where Mick Taylor** (1984) **was playing the guitar.**

AD: Why was that?

**BD: Ah, I can't remember…** (This seems to be the truth) **Er… because the original lyrics weren't fair to me because they just didn't feel right at the time.**

**BD:** (Then something happens. Appearing both amused and deeply baffled he looks up and says,) **Hey, whatever happened to Max Jones?**

AD: *Mr* Max Jones?

**BD: Yeah, *Mr* Max Jones,** (he enthuses apparently laying to rest one of rock's great unanswered riddles.) **He was a journalist… wrote about jazz for the Melody Maker way back. I used to see him, then it stopped. Whatever *did* happen to him? Mr Max Jones…**

AD: Could Oh Mercy be described as a bleak record?

**BD: It could but then again it *needn't* be. A lot of that might have to do with the different textures of instrumentation on it rather than the songs themselves.**

AD: Whose idea were the crickets on Man In The Long Black Coat?

**BD: It wasn't *my* idea!** (Everyone in the room, even the girl, laughs) **If they *work*…**

AD: Has it become increasingly difficult to write? Or are you still as prolific as hell?

**BD: Oh no. Not at all. You know, the odd song will come to me every now and then and there'll be some kind of responsibility on my part to, you know, make it work, take it down. But a lot of my ideas don't even get developed anymore.**

AD: Why is that?

**BD: Daily life just sort of knocks 'em out of the way.**

AD: It's not as simple as it was when you were young?

**BD: Not really, no. When you're younger you got nothing else to do but just write.**

AD: Do you strive to change that?

**BD: Well, such is life, you know? You can't worry about it. You can't say… in no kind of way are you ever gonna to hear me say that there wasn't any chance for me to write enough songs.**

AD: Have there ever been blocks? Times when you've thought, I need to write but can't.

**BD: Maybe sometimes in the past but no more. There's too many more important things in life other than the *need* to write. Especially when you get on a little bit the need to write becomes less fulfilling. Things replace it and also there's the simple fact that you've written so much anyway. If you don't have it by now… My songs are to be done live. This last record here came out of nowhere really. There certainly wasn't any plan on my part to make any *statement*.**

AD: Where will it all lead? Apart from The Tour With No End, what's left?

**BD: Well you're always on a tour with no end… As long as the people are there. It's the people who decide when you should pack it in.**

AD: Do you enjoy life on the road? It's very divorced from the real world.

**BD: You've got to get used to it, you know?**

AD: But it isn't like real life.

**BD: In some ways it is and in some ways it isn't. It's nice to go back home every night and see the fireplace and bed, food on the table and things that you recognise around you.**

AD: But you haven't done that for some time…

**BD: No. But you never can tell. It could be around any corner.**

AD: You seem always to have been "on the road, heading for another joint," moving on from situation to situation, relationship to relationship. Has severing connections become easier or is it always difficult?

**BD: Moving around isn't really…** (he searches unsuccessfully for a word)… **it's not like it's that *difficult*. You can hold up connections. Connections will hold up if they're strong and meant to be held up. If they're not they won't.**

AD: That's a suitably profound note to end on.

**BD: Yeah, it *is*.** (He smiles broadly and touches my arm signalling the end of this interview.)

As the light begins to fade, the man Van Morrison calls this world's greatest living poet squints myopically out towards the cold, grey sea. He rubs his face, more than likely contemplating something too complex for mere mortals to ever comprehend. Then he sniffs, pulls out a crumpled tissue and blows his very famous nose.

ADDITIONAL SECTION from *The Telegraph*, UK fanzine, Number 36, Summer 1990, page 66:

proof read

AD: Mick Taylor was playing a version of the unreleased 'Infidels' song 'Blind Willie McTell' on tour.

**BD: He was? Maybe he heard it.**

AD: Why did you never release that song?

**BD: It just never came out for me. It never got developed.**

AD: It's quite an apocalyptic number…

**BD: It never got developed in any way that it should have been really.**

AD: Do you see it as related to 'Everything Is Broken' in theme?

**BD: Well, it had a more broad kinda landscape setting, didn't it? That's how it was envisioned anyway. It never really reached that proportion for me lyrically.**

AD: 'Blind Willie McTell' is a very bleak song.

**BD: But it doesn't have to be bleak. There's probably some things that should have been left out and some others that should have been added. But then you know, you get to the point when you can't even remember about it any more, so you just leave it.**

# October 1989, Rob Mango

Source: *A Millennium of the Mind and a Day with Bob Dylan*, in: *100 Paintings: An Artist's Life In New York City*, 2014, No Room For Doubt, Inc., New York, pages 130-131, 134-137.

The interview took place in Mango's studio, Tribeca, Lower Manhattan New York City, New York. Quite a long article and the Dylan quotes are fairly brief; arguably this is not even an interview, but well worth reading.

**A Millennium of the Mind and a Day with Bob Dylan**

One of my most ambitious works to date was inspired during my return flight from Venice in 1989. I was visualizing *Millennium* from my seat in the airplane; looking out at a BOAC jet engine on the wing, I hallucinated New York City under it, even though we were over the Atlantic. When I built and stretched a canvas seven feet high and ten feet wide, I did not have a firm idea of what I was up to. In a mood, I had a really strong need, an instinctive angst, that arose with a vengeance from my soul. I needed something transcendent that would inform me. The painting needed to answer a yearning I had. It felt like eight on the Richter scale rising up from deep below; plates were beginning to shift on the surface of my mind.

I sat for six days, staring at the blank rectangle of canvas. I felt fearless and had little trepidation. I had been to a distant realm on some previous outings; I knew the way there. If painting is anything, she is my muse. She would be my guide and would point the way again.

I have used painting as a place to hide and as my only friend. More than this, I have used painting as the portal to seek the deeper truths; who am I and where did we come from and where are we going to? I needed to know, and this painting would tell me. The inner workings of one's psyche can reach out to the universe. Creative action can be the means through which the psyche telescopes outwards. I've sensed it and was determined to describe it – now. I wanted to go there and come back with a painting that would tell the tale. There have been sojourners to that distant realm; Einstein, Egyptian priests, Krishna, Moses, Jesus, Michelangelo, Mozart, Van Gogh and other nameless pilgrims. They have left a trail of masterpieces behind. The naivete of a child is required for an artist to ignore the world. I am that child. Just to dare, one must let go of the world, let go of ego, profit and loss I was letting go.

I scooped out a huge piece of space on the canvas. I gave the viewer the point of perspective from a passenger seat of a jet flying over New York. He looks out the window and sees the super-realistically rendered British Air jet engine, the city below, and skyline beyond. The picture has a multiple perspective line of sight. I painted the jet engine in such a way that you could put your arms around it. Three temporal views of New York are reflected in the architecture: past (downtown), present (midtown) and directly below, the future (uptown). The Chrysler Building's sole occupant is "Sechret," reaching out with her manganese hand for the pharaoh Tutankhamun, who passes by. He is arising, peeling himself out of the metal of the airplane wing, a metaphor for his journey through time. She is his guide through the underworld, accompanying him to reincarnation somewhere in the future. Toward the horizon, a mighty humpback whale arises from the clouds, fulfilling an ancient text: When the leviathan breaches the heavens, time begins again. Its ascent was foretold in antiquity to accompany the dawn of the millennium.

The phenomenal behaviour of the clouds and sky was a feast of labor in oil paint. My intent was to let the radiant treatment of the sky gradually transform from a realistic rendering to a supernatural depiction, keeping one foot in reality for the viewer and myself. When conceiving this picture, I was working as a symbolist poet. My mind was spitting images, and I was not asking any questions. I was determined not to think them through. I felt I must trust the images and symbols once they jettisoned through the portal of my subconscious. I was functioning as a medium now – sky, ocean, architecture, sarcophagi, jet engine, steel I-beams, humpback whale. I hallucinated them upon the canvas and executed them in oil.

If you know me, you've heard me hail the unconscious as the trustworthy realm of the artist. I had long prepared for this moment. Had the imagery and symbols been interposed differently, the message would have been different too. The atmosphere and the movement and the scale of these symbols, how they are poised in the light, shade and shadow provides context and determines the meaning and the mood of the painting.

The primary thrill we seek when we look into a painting is escape. We might be seeking a truth or running from an unsatisfactory reality or searching for a verification of what we feel, In visual art, the escape or entry into the picture plane is achieved through illusionistic "space." Relief painting and sculpture provide real physical, three-dimensional space. *Millennium* and other of my paintings from 1989 create an illusion of imagined space. The terms of entry are set forth in a glance; the viewer interprets them and drops into the space described. I

strongly desired that kind of escape for the audience when they viewed *Millennium* – which is possibly why I invariably heard the "aha" sound when people saw it in the gallery. While standing in front of this picture, viewers seemed to lose their footing and fall in. It provided them an unexpected departure. It was still on my easel in my basement studio on the day I met Bob Dylan.

On a Friday morning in October, I was in Neo Persona, cleaning up after an opening party for the gallery artists and a solo show by Joe McNamara, a new exhibitor. Ann Marie was behind the counter when I saw a guy come to the door wearing an NYU sweatshirt with the hood drooped over his head. I turned to Ann and silently lip-synched his name to prepare her for a shock. Only a curly bonnet of hair and a legendary proboscis protruded out from the light grey hoodie. Bob Dylan carried a flat box under his arm, which turned out to be filled with his own watercolor sketches.

Bob did not respond well to Joe McNamara's super-realist paintings on the walls, but he was chatting up the attractive Ann Marie across the gallery counter. With a charming grin, he pointed at a shelf of folios with the artists' names on them and asked her to show him one entitled "MOCK" (we had an exhibitor named John Mock). Obviously, Bob, as the master of the literary mock in verse form, was being himself. He noticed a large triptych of mine on a side wall entitled *Merger in the Wings* – a satire of Wall Street that targeted the raucous corporate takeovers of investment brokerages of the 1980s. In the painting, merger mania is pictured as a shopping mall on 14th Street. This made him laugh, and when he laughed, so did the pair who followed him in, whom I surmised to be his secretary and his six-foot-five-inch bodyguard, disguised in an English three-piece suit. Bob and I sparred uncomfortably for several minutes as we walked the gallery, looking at McNamara pictures. The aesthetic philosophy of these realist paintings was antithetical to everything Dylan stood for as an artist. I told him, "I have been working on something very different – something dealing with subjects seldom seen in visual art. I summoned it from an unknown origin – could have been heaven, could have been hell." That seemed to pique his interest. So the four of us walked over to my studio just across the Duane triangle.

My first impressions of Bob Dylan: He was cagey, distracted and confrontational, his eyes searching, his mind seemingly always working; he had an agenda or two on this day. We walked into my studio where he silently stalked the perimeter, looking at pictures on the walls. Standing in the middle of the room were the bodyguard and secretary, saying very little. They had their roles, which were unknown to me, but I could see they were okay with what was taking place. Bob walked deeper into my space and approached *The Superman Theory*, eyeing the large cabinet of sculpted wood. I turned on the switch that illuminated the internal red neon and pulled the doors open. Dylan stepped back and took it all in. He seemed intrigued by its balancing act between pure theater; raw, expressive color painting; and fine detailed drawing. Its dual nature was both abstract symbolism and a narrative of the evolution of man from an animal of pure instinct through our intellectual and artistic giants – my chosen heroes of the century. If there was anyone on the planet who understood this tactic, it was the man standing before it. *The Superman Theory* balances inscrutability against a highly crafted object, lending it a classical feel that can't be quickly categorized into any standard genre. For most, its narrative is not immediately obvious – but apparently that wasn't the case with Bob. He stepped closer and examined the internal sides of the open doors. He saw all the supermen drawn in pen and ink detail and discovered himself, standing there playing the guitar, the stripes in his pants transmogrified from the veins in a large bronze skull held in the hands of Pablo Picasso. Those two men are my two primary artistic heroes; I consider them equals and arguably the greatest artists of the 20th century in their chosen medium but also accomplished in the other's. Ironically, Dylan is a superb painter, and Picasso wrote a formidable piece of poetry. "Hunk of Skin," which I feasted upon while in New Mexico. The sketch of Bob Dylan appears in an ascending grid of the supermen, just above that of Picasso, with the Spaniard cradling the muse of man, represented by the bronze human skull sculpture in his hands.

Apparently Bob was okay with the context I sketched him in. This may have been a turning point, and a rapport began to evolve between us. We walked downstairs into my painting studio, and when I flicked on the lights, his eyes immediately went to *Millennium*. To say Bob's mind works at light speed is not even a slight exaggeration. He instantly connected the dots: civilization, nature, future, past, the universal spirit represented by the Egyptian, the eternal muse and, of course, New York. We began to speak about the painting in a kind of code we both understood, but it may have sounded like gibberish to the others. His interpretative comments remain embedded in my mind and can never be divulged. Bob walked around the picture, which sat on an easel eight feet high by twelve feet wide by six feet deep and on wheels. He looked at the back of the picture and shook it. He stepped back next to me and asked if he could take it onstage with him. Bob had just finished the ethereal, agonizing, confessional, gorgeous masterpiece *Oh Mercy* and was gearing up for a concert tour. He said a few words to his assistant, and she wrote down my phone number.

Just an hour before, I'd had a mop in my hand and spider webs in my head. I wasn't particularly prepared for a once in a lifetime encounter with the artist whom I always considered to be without peer. We headed upstairs and began to talk about a wide range of things – only one of which I will impart to you now, as it changed my artistic perceptions. In a box under his arm, Bob had his own paintings. He put the box down, unbuckled it, and showed me several remarkable watercolors. Every inch of these pictures exhibited purposeful draftsmanship, emotion and expression. Absolutely every line and brush stroke were charged with an intent

that delivered a sensation. Bob seemed to have little use for a premeditated mark. My impression of his paintings: spontaneous, raw and as true as the human hand could impart. I told him so. He had a few things to accomplish while in New York. The early years Bob spent in New York City, in the Village, are legendary, and we still claim him as our own – he is and always will be one of us – but then so does the rest of the world.

Bob said he had an appointment with a publisher interested in publishing a book of his paintings. Bob asked me what I thought about the idea of putting out a book of reproductions of his watercolors and drawings. After we'd walked through my studio and hung out for an hour, his caginess had melted away. We were talking as artists, it was happening fast, but he clearly operates on intuition and seemed determined to always move straight ahead. I responded, "You're giving away your music and poetry. Do you really want to do that with your paintings? They're gonna want to publish them because you're you. Is that going to be good enough? How might you feel about it later?" My intent was to suggest he may want to retain them for himself, as he had apparently done for years.

Thinking back, I cannot believe I said that to Bob. Often, when one is in a spot where one needs to respond spontaneously, and it has to stand up, with no time for adjustments, one fails. Had I forgotten to whom I was talking? Yes, I had. I was just shooting from the hip. I guess I was putting myself in his shoes – those of an artist. His shoes, by the way, were well broken-in python boots with a western cut, pointed toes, and inch-and-a-half heels. The boots were tightly packed under stovepipe jeans that were tattered and gathered at the bottom.

Bob took in my statement without expression. We rambled on for a while at a quickening pace, with his bodyguard looking on and the stenographer taking an occasional note. At that point, Bob told me something I cling to as pure artistic wisdom, and for which I am very grateful. He was now putting himself in my shoes. (The shoes I was wearing were beat-up New Balance running sneakers.) He said, **"When you're painting a picture, don't adjust it too much, or at all. Just make the thing and leave it alone."** He then added something I will never forget and which is now a fundamental belief guiding my work: **"If you mess with it too much, it'll suck the life out of it."** I instinctively understood and took to heart his statement, which has found its way to the center of my artistic being.

Inevitably in 1989 in Tribeca, discussions turned to real estate. Speaking with Bob was no different; he too was intrigued with the neighborhood. Bob De Niro was still there, and I believe there was mutual respect between the two of them. Dylan asked me if I knew of any empty buildings we could take a look at. I did – by then, I knew everybody. That may sound like a generalization, but the density in in Tribeca compared to the rest of the city was very low. When I wasn't in the studio, I was on the streets. Since I'd been a carpenter, nightwatchman, building super and a much gossiped-about artist, I knew many developers as art patrons, friends or neighbors. One such building that immediately came to mind was the Zenith Godley building at 176 Duane; it was strictly commercial and now abandoned. As its caretaker, I had a key. So Bob and I headed out to look at real estate in Tribeca.

Zenith Godley had housed a thriving butter, egg and dairy wholesale operation for 80 years. The building at 176 fronted on Duane, and the backside had large garage doors onto Reade Street where several semi-trailer cabs and trailers were often lined up. The building's owner, Don Maclain, was in his late seventies and had lost interest in the business, which had been in the family since the 1890s. Maclain was eccentric and had an odd proclivity for never throwing away anything in disrepair. The upper floors of the five-story building were full of dozens of old cash registers, adding machines and telephones going back to the 1920s. Lower floors were littered with diesel engines retired from service resting on cinder blocks spilling oil, and still other floors had 30-foot-long original exterior signs, hand-lettered in rare typefaces reminiscent of a vintage American circus. Everything had the look and feel of a museum of old New York.

Bob had a nostalgic sensibility and loved old Americana. I would venture to say that he's somewhat suspicious of modern life in general and is drawn to a "worn" aesthetic. He was knocked out by the old cash registers and the look of the interiors, a place forgotten by time. But there was a problem: The neighboring building, a very low, two-story structure, allowed a view into the property that was lit from multiple surrounding windows. If you valued natural light, this was a plus, but it was a downside if privacy is paramount. He asked me, **"What would they take for the building?"** I gave him a ballpark figure (under two million dollars). He dispatched me to initiate negotiations. We went over a few more of his priorities as to how he would like me to proceed. He wanted the building "as-is" with old gadgets and machines included. I suggested that we go around to the Reade Street side and look at the rear exterior and a few other properties.

The sun was shining brightly and it was a balmy fall afternoon – it had rained the night before. So I hit the sidewalk with Bob, and his little group followed behind. Walking the streets of Tribeca with him was memorable. Ladies with baby carriages stopped, police on horseback nodded, seemingly everyone we passed stopped momentarily; they knew. He is a man who has become very important to three generations of Americans and he was identifiable despite his hoodie and sunglasses. I knew and he knew of the attention he was attracting, but he had a body language that provided a bubble of protection. He was accustomed to being

recognized. His look was at once street-normal and mythic. Most New Yorkers will leave you alone on the sidewalks, whether you're a vagrant or a legend.

We stopped on the corner of Greenwich and Reade Streets and were talking about how the neighborhood had changed since he'd lived on Hubert Street in the mid-'60s. Suddenly, a full-size sanitation street-cleaning truck with two large spinning brushes came around the corner, taking advantage of the previous night's puddles to scrub the curb. Standing at the edge of the curb, Bob and I didn't notice the truck approaching. The security guy and stenographer were five feet back, but Bob and I got sprayed hard by the spinning brushes. I had not yet been indoctrinated to delaying my reactions when in the company of one so influential. I laughed immediately, then turned my head quickly to learn how he was handling it – we were really wet. Dylan grinned broadly and exposed a very substantial set of ivories and an expressive mouth – the mouth that had sung so many great lyrics; we trudged on as if nothing had happened.

The bricks on the back of the building had a ZENITH GODLEY in faded hand-painted letters. Bob wanted that nomenclature preserved. Touring the neighborhood for an hour together, I encountered friends and associates along the way. They gawked or did double takes, but did not intrude.

We made our plans with regard to the building and my paintings, and he gave me the phone number of Naomi Saltzman, an associate of his former manager, Albert Grossman. Naomi and her husband Ben and I would become friends. Several days later, a limo with the Saltzmans pulled up to the studio and Helen and I got in. It was clear that Bob was a man who cared greatly for people in his past and treated them well. We cruised out to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, an outdoor venue, to hear Bob perform selections from *Oh Mercy*. We went backstage to say hello. My association with Bob continued through his colleagues. (In the end, Bob decided not to purchase the building.)

I did not expect to be so stung by Bob's advice: **"do not overwork a painting."** I embraced it and took it to heart; I live by it now. To this moment, I rely on it as an axiom. Of the many fascinating sides and dimensions to Bob Dylan, my impression of him from that first day remains intact – "Mr. Tambourine Man." Like may others, I followed… his artistic lead.

Soon after I met Bob, I signed *Millennium* front and back. As was my custom, I moved a newly finished painting out of my studio upstairs into "the real world" to evaluate it in a different light and context. I installed the painting in the large new area of Neo Persona Gallery. I had been communicating with Dylan's front office about his using the painting onstage. There was a problem, however. The central image in the painting was an awakening Egyptian pharaoh; in addition, his bejeweled attendant Sechret was pictured too. Naomi Saltzman informed me that there were those who counseled Bob on such things and gently administered some degree of influence, and they may have been worried that the Egyptians might be perceived as Arabs. Bob was a man of Jewish heritage who had shocked many Jews a decade earlier with his so-called "Jesus albums," *Saved* and *Long Train Coming* (I loved these records). Now the brakes were being applied to his use of *Millennium*. He expressed his regrets to me through Naomi.

Bob met people from all walks of life in America; our great poet and songwriter moves among us, as did his mentor Woody Guthrie. We met again briefly outside his forest-green trailer in which he crisscrossed the country; he preferred roads to airplanes at the time. It was in a parking lot behind a stadium after another New Jersey outdoor show. We had a few laughs and spoke briefly about art. He said he had decided against publishing a book of his paintings and drawings, and to keep them private for the time being. I told him I had seen a framed painting he gave Naomi, and we talked about the direct approach to painting, upon which his expressive paint handling was founded. I repressed my disappointment about *Millennium*, but I hoped the time would come when Bob would have a Mango painting in his midst.

# 31 August 1990, Edna Gundersen

Source: *USA Today*, US newspaper, 14 September 1990, pages 1D-2D. Supplementary sections were published in *On the Tracks*, US fanzine, Number 1, Summer 1993, pages 12-15.

The interview took place in Lincoln, Nebraska.

**Rock icon is happy with his place**

Lincoln, Neb. – On the opening day of the Nebraska State Fair, Bob Dylan is the star attraction, performing a rocking 90 minutes of mostly early hits. Most of the Devaney Sports Center's 6,000 cheering fans are college students who weren't yet born when rock's poetic revolutionary held a generation rapt with the show's climax, *Like A Rolling Stone*.

It's been 30 years since he left college himself to stake a claim in the Greenwich Village folk scene. How does it *feel*?

**"In some ways, it felt older to be 30 than to be 60 or however old they say I am,"** Dylan says after the show.

**"How old am I now?"** He's 49. **"That's what they *say*, but nobody knows my real birth date,"** he counters teasingly.

His take on aging: **"You just can't help it."**

Dylan, whose new *Under The Red Sky* album is out this week, is the only living rocker in *Life's* list of the century's 100 most important Americans. Still godlike to many, he admits he's less hungry these days.

**"You reach a certain place and that's sufficient,"** he says. "**Sometimes there is no higher. How much higher can Michael Jackson go? Or Madonna? You get your territory and you're content with that."**

Friendly and direct, Dylan talks freely about his work – in the present tense, anyway. He steers clear of ancient history (the 1960s), Dylan mythology or anything remotely personal.

**"People can learn everything about me through my songs, if they know where to look. They can juxtapose them with certain other songs and draw a clear picture. But why would anyone want to know about me? It's ridiculous."**

Informed that his childhood home in Hibbing, Minn., recently sold for $84,000 (twice it's appraised value), Dylan says only, **"Well, they better check the furnace."**

Clad in a crisp white shirt, cap, jeans and heavy black boots, Dylan clutches a cup of coffee backstage. Clearly tired, he's nonetheless witty and enthusiastic, even as he faces a 334-mile bus ride to Hannibal, Mo., for the next night's show.

For the third year running, Dylan has surfaced with a tour and album. *Red Sky* is the 36th in a canon dating to 1962. The Traveling Wilburys' second album – **"a whole lot better than the first,"** he promises – was recorded last spring and is due in October. A tour may follow, if Dylan, George Harrison, Tom Petty and Geoff Lynne can coordinate schedules.

**"It's not a drain at all,"** he says of this year's frantic pace. **"Billy Idol's got the right idea. It's a charmed life. It beats 9-to-5 now, it did then and it will tomorrow.**

**"You gotta stick it out, though. That's really all there is at the end of the line in this business. B.B. King and Chuck Berry are still working. Little Richard is as good now as he was then."**

Dylanologists debate whether the constantly evolving performer is as good now as when he transformed pop with his nasal singing, literary imagery and folk/rock meld.

"He doesn't have a problem living up to his past," says Ian Woodward, British author of *The Wicked Messenger*, the 10-year-old definitive Dylan newsletter. "People's expectations are the problem."

Woodward recently heard Dylan perform a staggering repertoire over six London concerts. "The range he covers is enormous. There's a strain in music that goes back to small-town America: rockabilly, rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues, folk and country. He's keeping that strain of music alive. I don't see anyone who could carry that baton."

Yet the most quoted songwriter of our time approaches his work with a journeyman's humble dedication.

**"It's just another record,"** Dylan says of *Red Sky*. **"You can only make the records as good as you can and hope they sell."**

*Red Sky's* 10 originals are less introspective than the atmospheric confessions of last year's *Oh Mercy*. Dylan's playful, minimalistic lyrics are set to bouncy rock, fleshed out by George Harrison, Elton John and the late Stevie Ray Vaughan.

The title cut, about a boy and a girl "baked in a pie," is a Grimmlike tale **"intentionally broad and short, so you can draw all kinds of conclusions,"** Dylan says. *TV Talkin' Song*, a wry attack on television and false gods, is based on a speech he and rocker Dave Stewart heard in London's Hyde Park.

The lighter fare, like the waggish romp *Wiggle Wiggle*, elicited a lukewarm review from *Rolling Stone*. **"Good reviews don't hurt you, but they don't help either,"** Dylan says dismissively. **"It's better to have a record the critics hate that sells 10 million copies than one the critics love that sells 10."**

Though a prolific recording artist, Dylan considers performing his primary outlet. He complains that Columbia has not adequately pushed his albums. The label told him *Oh Mercy's* title hurt sales because it didn't refer to a specific song.

**"They have a point, OK? But it's discouraging when you ask the vice president of your record company why he hasn't sold more of your records and he says, 'Well, the title isn't all that great.' "** Dylan laughs, **"Everybody gripes about their record company. I'm no exception."**

He *is* one when it comes to self-promotion. *Red Sky* songs were conspicuously absent in recent shows. (**"They haven't settled in yet."**) Cornering him for a publicity photo is impossible.

**"It rubs me the wrong way, a camera,"** he says. **"It doesn't matter who it is, someone in my own family could be pointing a camera around. It's a frightening feeling. It's not really an instrument that's been elevated to that world of art. It's a machine. Cameras make ghosts out of people."**

He's more at ease discussing music philosophy. **"People say music is intended to elevate the spirit. But you've got a lot of groups and lyrics projecting emptiness and giving you nothing, *less* than nothing because they're taking up your time."**

Music, he says, should aim for the soul not the groin.

**"It's not difficult to get people throbbing in their guts. That can lead them down an evil path if that's all they're getting. You gotta put something on top of that."**

He grins when told that Milli Vanilli declared themselves more talented than Dylan and Paul McCartney. **"Who is Milli Vanilli?"** Dylan asks, truly stumped.

Not every chart-climber is an artist, he says. But talk of art strays too close to the taboo topic of Dylan's unwitting sainthood. **"What kind of artistry is equal to the silver glisten on a river or a sunset or lightning in the sky? What kind of man's artistry can compare to the great artistry of creation?"**

On that note, he's heading for the bus. **"I got a lot of miles to go,"** he says. And like most Dylan utterances, something resonates beneath the surface.

Additional extracts published in *On the Tracks*, US fanzine, Number 1, Summer 1993, pages 12-15.

Q: *Under the Red Sky* is more direct and less haunting than *Oh Mercy*, which was recorded in New Orleans. Is location a factor in creating a sound or a mood?

**A: Yeah, it depends on the atmosphere where you're recording. In Louisiana, you get that eerie quality. This album was made in California.**

Q: An executive at Elektra suggested that you record the album with Don Was. Are you generally receptive to that kind of outside influence?

**A: It's hard for me to find producers on my own. Producers have [approached me] in the past, but it's always been with dollar signs up front, which takes a lot of air out of the mattress.**

**Believe it or not, after all this time being in the business, the recording studio itself is very foreign to me. The controls, the tape itself, the machinery is something that never really interested me enough to gain any control over one way or another.**

**It would seem to me you'd need somebody there who knew you, who could push you around a little bit. Daniel got me to do stuff that wouldn't have entered my mind. Don [Was] did the same thing.**

**Some people can do it all. Daniel Lanois can do it all. Neil Young is pretty good at it.**

Q: Why did you record *Under the Red Sky* so soon after *Oh Mercy*?

**A: My records take place when they do. If you're lucky enough to get a recording contract, you should start getting the records out of the way, so you can get another contract (laughs). [Columbia] is nice enough to keep sending me contracts. It's hard to explain why, [because] they don't sell my records very well.**

Q: Are you disappointed with the modest sales of your recent albums?

**A: You need a certain amount [of consumers] to buy your record if you want one of those chart-busting records. And sooner or later you just gotta face the fact; you either make records or you're a performer. One of the two's gotta keep you going.**

**With my records, some of them hit once in a while. All you need in this business is one hit. You can last the rest of your life on one hit. There's been a couple of them come my way, more than one. But nobody ever accused me of having more than my share. The Grateful Dead don't have hit records either. Neither did Led Zeppelin. It doesn't affect whether people want to see you or not. Maybe they're not even record buyers.**

**What do you buy? A record? You can't even find one of them. A tape? A CD? Now they're coming out with something the size of a postage stamp. It's OK if you want to mail a letter, but listening to music on a postage stamp takes a lot of enjoyment out of purchasing a record.**

Q: *Don't Look Back* is considered a landmark music documentary. Would you consider making another one?

**A: What's it worth? What's it worth to somebody to follow me around? You tell me. The Stones have people following them all over. You never know what they're going to do with that stuff. There's a certain advantage to have somebody following you around. You can always make money with it sooner or later, but it gets tiring just thinking about the money all the time. It's self-defeating.**

Q: Why do you oppose taping your live shows?

**A: Elvis never recorded his either. It's not that there's any policy on my part not to record a live concert... some of my records have been live concerts. Some people say Bruce Springsteen records every concert. If you record them, then of course you have to listen to them, and that can be incestual.**

Q: You said songwriting is largely an unconscious process. What are the mechanics? What do you start with?

**A: My stuff is just jotted down on scraps of paper. A certain percentage of them stay with me.**

Q: You're often described as a poet, and critics and fans seem to emphasize lyrics rather than melody. But you think otherwise. Why?

**A: What you see me doing is playing songs. These are songs, regardless of what people say. They might say the music isn't as significant as the lyrics. To me, that's not so. My songs can't be written without some kind of musical form.**

**Some songs of mine were written like poems, but not very many. A poem by Keats or Longfellow, you can hear the rhythm in your mind.**

(Straining to remember the lines of a Shelly poem, he gives up and shrugs.) **Ah, my brain is beginning to fade. It's been a long time since it made sense for me to memorize someone else's poem. The mind is a very fragile thing, especially my mind.**

Q: Do you think your lyrics stand up without music?

**A: They might, they might not. It depends on who's reading them, who they have to stand up for. You know who writes like a poet is James McMurtry. You don't really need the music to hear what he has to say. His stuff is poetry in a true sense.**

# October 1990, Edna Gundersen

Source: *USA Today*, US newspaper, 7 November 1990. The text reproduced here is from *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 34, December 1990, page 39.

The venue for Dylan's participation is unknown.

**On 'Vol. 3,' the Traveling Wilburys enjoy the ride**

The Traveling Wilburys, four graying rock heroes who founded a slap-happy garage band, defy all logic. Their second album bears the headscratching title Vol. 3. Rather than splash their considerably familiar names across billboards and Billboard, they lay low under mysterious aliases.

Two years ago, when Vol. 1 was embraced by fans and critics, they called themselves Lucky, Otis, Charlie T. Jr., Nelson and Lefty. Now George Harrison is Spike, Bob Dylan is Boo, Tom Petty is Muddy and Jeff Lynne is Clayton. The late Roy Orbison, to whom Vol. 3 is dedicated, was Lefty.

"People already think they've got us in a bag, so we decided to change our names," Harrison explains. Then he changes his story, suggesting that the first batch of Wilburys "are probably trying to do Vol. 2, but we may have to go help them. There's nine of us now."

This brotherhood is serious about its lunacy. Like last time, the Wilbies have concocted a loose, spontaneous rock 'n' roll record in record time. They wrote, recorded and mixed 15 songs (11 are on the LP) in six weeks. Speedy by industry standards, but a glacial pace compared to that of their Grammy-winning debut, wrapped up in 10 days.

**"Last time, it was a pretty rushed affair,"** Dylan says. **"A lot of stuff was just scraped up from jam tapes. This time, there was a whole lot left over. The songs are more developed. If people liked the first one, they'll love this one."**

Dylan, the most sceptical member originally, was the impetus behind Vol. 3. Harrison recounts this phone exchange:

Dylan: "When are we doing another Wilburys record?"

Harrison: "Why? Do you want to?"

Dylan: "Yeah, don't you?"

Harrison: "Yeah, I do."

Says Harrison, "I think everyone, particularly Bob, was more willing to do it this time. Never having been in a band before, Bob wasn't quite sure what the result would be on the first one. This time, we knew what to expect Bob was keen to do this one."

Because Dylan's demanding tour schedule limited his participation the first time, he was heavily utilized during last spring's sessions at Harrison's studio. Consequently, he handles most lead vocals.

"We said we'll get him to put a vocal on everything and decide later where the rest of us should fit in," Harrison Says. "But once Bob's vocal is there, it's hard to wipe off, he's got such an exceptional voice."

Another volume may gel in a year or two. Lynne says the group "could go on for a long time. It's a lovely thing, because it's almost like a sideline. All of us on our own would be much more picky and careful about making records."

As Wilburys, they feel none of the spotlight pressure they face in solo outings. "With four people who are all so able, you don't get as hung up on every little decision," Harrison says. "We share the responsibility and hide behind each other." How do four rhythm guitarists make music together?

"We sit around in a circle and just start strumming," Lynne says, laughing. "It is ridiculous. Somebody hits one good chord change and we're singing a little tune over it. It's that simple and quick. One day we did five tunes. Word-wise, Bob is a great person to have in the group because he comes up with lyrics in amazing speed."

Typically a lone writer, Dylan was comfortable collaborating with the Wilburys. **"There's very few people you can write with, so when you find those people, you have to have a gracious attitude."**

Every Wilbury contributed to each song on Vol. 3, a more integrated whole than the debut's revolving solo turns. "Now you can hear what Wilbury music is," Harrison says. "We definitely have a sound."

Some tracks were taped live with drummer Jim Keltner. "It made the album a bit more rocking," Harrison says. "It created such a good feeling, making a record the way it was done in the late '50s."

Orbison's death in 1988 robbed the Wilburys of its finest Voice, but the group never considered replacing him. "You can't replace Roy," Harrison says.

**"There's no telling what kind of record we could have made with Roy,"** Dylan says. **"Everyone missed him, but it wasn't like anyone sat around and talked about it."**

Says Lynne, "Roy's voice was the best ever. We were all a little intimidated. He'd sing a part and we'd all go, 'Oooh, I hope I don't have to come in after him.' "

Despite their warm camaraderie, the Wilburys probably won't tour. Road warriors Petty and Dylan are game, but Lynne is a studio animal, and Harrison is a homebody. "Touring takes a hell of a lot of energy, and you have to put the rest of your life on hold," Harrison says. "I don't see it at the moment, but I'm not against doing a few live shows."

Dylan, though, hints that the group indeed might take the stage. **"The Wilburys would be pretty good live,"** he says.

# 1992, Unknown Interviewer (Times-Sentinel)

Source: *The Times-Sentinel*, US newspaper, 1992. The text reproduced here is from *Bob Dylan in Concert*, 2005 tour programme, pages 12-13, 15-16.

The location of this interview is unknown.

Q: What about the movie Hearts of Fire?

**A: What about it?**

Q: How did you get involved in that? Did you ever see it?

**A No. I don't think it was ever released here.**

Q: How did you come to be in it? It wasn't a very good film.

**A: No, I don't think so. I don't see how it could have been. The way the script came to me was through Joan Hyler from the William Morris Agency. She said to look at the role of Billy Parker, that the director had me in mind to play that part.**

Q: The director?

**A: Yeah – the director Richard Marquand.**

Q: So you read the script?

**A: Yeah.**

Q: So what did you think after you read it?

**A: I thought it was a terrible script, a pointless story. There was nothing about it that rang true at all.**

Q: So why did you do it, then?

**A: I did it for the money. I mean, why else would I do it? They probably paid me as much as they paid DeNiro or Pacino to play a role. I mean, how could I not?**

Q: Did you take any acting lessons before they started shooting?

**A: No. I probably should have, but it wouldn't have done any good. The story made no sense.**

Q: Had you ever heard of Fiona before the movie?

**A: No but she and Marquand came to see me to talk me into doing the role.**

Q: And you said yes?

**A: Yeah, I said I was interested.**

Q: What did you think of Fiona?

**A: Well nothing, really. She was just a clear-eyed young girl. I assumed she must be a helluva singer because they were making this big movie around her. I assumed she could act, too. You know, like some undiscovered star or something. Just because I hadn't heard of her didn't mean anything.**

Q: How did Marquand define your role?

**A: Well, it was all in the script. There wasn't much to define. You took it at face value. It talked about a washed up rock and roller, or a retired one, or someone who was jaded by the business and stuff like that. There wasn't any back story to the guy or anything.**

Q: Did you feel excitement about doing it?

**A: Excitement, not really. I couldn't identify with any of the characters in the movie at all. Definitely not the guy they wanted me to play. Marquand said that he could easily guide me through the role but that didn't mean much one way or another. I did meet them though and had gone through the motions of listening but it just seemed so unreal. I wasn't anticipating anything but then Joan got a hold of me later and said that they desperately wanted me to play the part and that the money was ridiculous.**

Q: Were there rehearsals?

**A Oh yeah, in London where it was filmed there were some. The only guy that had any acting experience was Rupert (Everett). He was the only real actor on the set.**

Q: Did he help you at all?

**A: Are you kidding? We stayed drunk most of the time.**

Q: Really? It was that bad?

**A: Yeah, well it was a terrible script and we had no control over it. They were going to shoot it word for word.**

Q: Did you try to change it at all – like any of the dialogue?

**A: Oh yeah, we had tried that earlier, months before filming began. Me and Elliot Roberts, who was representing me at the time, had gotten Marquand and Joe Eszterhas, the screenwriter, to come and see us out on the road. I was playing a tour with Tom Petty at the time. We wanted to change some of my lines and Elliot and I had tried on our own… but we realized if we changed some of my lines the lines of the other characters would have to be changed. All we were trying to do was make the movie more understandable. It was fun trying to do it, but it was too complicated for either of us to actually pull off. We were just making a comedy out of it. We were hoping that Eszterhas could see our point and maybe rip the script apart… add a murder scene, some sex scenes or even a car chase. Anything to make the script come alive.**

Q: What was the response?

**A: Oh, I don't know. I can't really remember. But I think it was a couple of blank looks. Marquand was a Welshman, very proper. When he spoke, he sounded like Richard Burton. He was an elegant guy. Eszterhas couldn't have been more different. They called him the Mad Hungarian. He had written "Basic Instinct," "Flashdance" and some other stuff, hit movies. Eszterhas didn't look like anything you'd think a screenwriter would look like. He looked like a Hell's Angel. Like he just roared through the hallway of the hotel on a Harley. It was hard to imagine these guys even being in the same room together. I don't know what they thought of our little suggestions. But they didn't change anything.**

Q: What would you have wanted them to change? Do you remember?

**A: Oh, not really. Elliot and I had kicked it around a little bit and thought that maybe some character adjustments might be in order. Like the character that Rupert played.**

Q: James Colt?

**A: Yeah, James Colt. That was his name? God, you know this movie better than me. Yeah, Elliot and I thought that this character was based on a David Bowie type – a seventies Bowie type, so we thought why not make him overtly gay? You know, like put his cards on the table. It would have made his character mush deeper. And other would have related to him in a different way.**

Q: What about the character Fiona played?

**A: Yeah, who did she play?**

Q: Molly?

**A: Yeah, that's right, Molly. We dreamed up a few things for that character, too. We thought maybe if we gave her a back story like she'd been sexually molested as a child by a family member, it would have added a little bit more to her character, made her innocence not seem so innocent when she played scenes with either Rupert or me.**

Q: You mean Billy Parker.

**A: Yeah. Billy Parker. We dealt with him in a more primitive way. Like maybe his back story could have been something like when he was a big star, whenever that was, he married his 13 year old cousin and had fallen from grace, out of favor with both the record industry and the record buying public.**

Q: You're joking, right?

**A: No, I'm not joking. That would have given him a genuine reason to be so pissed off and jaded or whatever they expected him to be.**

Q: Your ideas fell flat…

**A: Yeah I don't think they heard. They just looked right through us. Basically I don't think they had any notion to change anything. They liked their movie as it was. They just came out to see us out of courtesy, really.**

Q: But you went ahead and did it anyway.

**A: Yeah. I mean, well, why not? It was the only way I was going to get to hear Fiona sing, you know what I'm saying?**

Q: I see. Do you think the studio had high hopes for this movie?

**A: No, no. It was some kind of death wish for somebody. The director himself, he died right around the opening night premier of the film in London. That always seemed strange to me.**

# 23 June 1993, Gino Castaldo and Paolo Zaccagnini

Source: *La repubblica*, Italian newspaper, 24 June 1993 (Castaldo) and *Il Messagero*, Italian newspaper, June 1993 (Zaccagnini). The text reproduced here is from *The Telegraph*, UK fanzine, Number 46, Summer 1993, pages 142-144.

The interviews were conducted by telephone with Dylan in Athens, Greece. The article published in *La repubblica* is reproduced in *Every Mind Polluting Word*. Both articles were originally published in Italian.

**Parliamo Italiano**

Dylan gave interviews to three Italian journalists back in June. Here's a summary of the published questions and answers, taken primarily from the pieces by Paolo Zaccagnini in Il Messagero and by Gino Castaldo in La Republicca. Hopefully, fuller versions of the conversations will emerge in due course; and bear in mind that these are translations of translations – hence the slightly weird tone:

Q Why did you choose to do a record like Good As I Been To You, all acoustic and all cover versions?

A **It was just by accident. I taped those songs very quickly because they didn't need much arranging. All those songs are important for me – they've been following me around for years. I didn't treat them like covers, just like songs.**

Q What's your favourite of your own records?

A **My next one.**

Q Is it true that they've asked you to do an Unplugged?

A **Yes, we talked about that, but right now I don't know when I'll get the time to do it. It's still possible, and it could happen in the future sometime.**

Q For the first time recently you appeared in support of a politician, Bill Clinton.

A **Well, when that happened he'd already been elected. I didn't take part in the campaign. Maybe it was the first time, may be not, but it was the first time anybody invited me to the White House.**

Q Considering your dealings with religion, do you think that religion is used as a weapon sometimes?

A **There's a lot of politics in religion. It's not possible to separate the two. Politics is everywhere.**

Q You know about what's happening in Italy at the moment?

A **Yes, I know. Politics is overflowing.**

Q Do you think that music can help here?

A **It depends what music. But for sure some music can transcend all barriers.**

Q As a musician, what does this Never-Ending Tour that you're doing now mean to you?

A **That's a mistake. I did the Never-Ending Tour in 1980 and 1981. Now I'm just touring. I don't think there's anything unusual in playing a lot of shows.**

Q What music do you listen to?

A **At the moment, most of the music I listen to is classical music. Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms. I'm thinking of doing something classical too.**

Q What do you mean? Arrangements of old songs with an orchestra?

A **No. I'm working on brand new music for a Philharmonic Orchestra. I don't know what will happen with that.**

Q Who's been the biggest influence on your writing?

A **Well, some folk singers influenced me, but I must say that I decided to start singing the first time I heard Elvis Presley. Woody Guthrie influenced me a lot in the folk tradition, but Elvis made it clear for me how important rock music was as a universal message. When I first picked up a guitar, I did it because of Elvis.**

Q What about literature - any influences there?

A **The Prince by Nicolo Machiavelli is my all-time favourite book, even if it has nothing in common with the stuff I used to write as a songwriter.**

Q Why Machiavelli?

A **Because he's very clear, very lucid, very prophetic. Other influences I could name: Edgar Allen Poe's The Raven, and the Beat poets - Gregory Corso - Gasoline, Lawrence Ferlinghetti - Coney Island Of My Mind. But I don't think they influenced me consciously.**

Q Are you nostalgic?

A **Who isn't nostalgic? I would be stupid if I wasn't nostalgic. But I have no regrets.**

Q Are you aware of the impact that your music and lyrics has had on American society?

A **Yes, there has been an impact, but I think all that stuff is exaggerated.**

Q Do you still have ambitions to fulfil?

A **I don't think so. In life, I've done what I wanted to do, which is make music.**

# 21 August 1993, Unknown Interviewer (MTV)

Source: *News At Night*, on: MTV, American pay television channel. The text reproduced here is from an item entitled *Not Enough Guns*, available on The Cinch Review website: **https://www.cinchreview.com/not-enough-guns-1993-mtv-interview-with-bob-dylan-and-carlos-santana/17847/**

The interview took place outside Memorial Stadium, Seattle, Washington. The interview was with Dylan and Carlos Santana, mostly the latter who was more responsive. The Q&A here only includes the questions directed at Dylan, who really didn't want to be there!

Q: Let's talk about the tour. Has it been enjoyable to be on tour together?

**Dylan: So far.**

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Q: Let's talk about current music. Is there any current music that you listen to, that you particularly like?

**Dylan: Ah, current music. What would that be? Ah, really, a lot of it sounds defective to me. It makes me restless.**

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Q: This is directed to Bob. You've given permission to have 'Like A Rolling Stone' sampled for the first time. How did that ever come about?

**Dylan: Who did that?**

Q: It's a group called 'Mystery Tramps.'

**Dylan: Oh.**

Q: Hip-hop version.

**Dylan: Really. Beats me.**

Q: Ok. Y'know, Bill Cutler, the producer of that, says that you being the first street poet, were really the first rapper. How do you feel about that?

**Dylan: Ah, everybody's the first somebody, y'know.**

Q: In the context of that, do you see the relationship between politically aware rap and some of the stuff you were doing years ago?

**Dylan: Maybe there's some kind of correlation but whatever it is it wouldn't be [inaudible] for me to say that.**

Q: It seems kind of ironic that Sinead O'Connor was booed off of your concert, it seems ironic because they're honoring someone who pioneered protest music and they seemed to be booing her for protesting. What do you say about that?

**Dylan: Y'know, she's grown-up. Y'know, people do whatever they want to do, y'know. Shouldn't really take it as an insult though, y'know, uh, Elvis even got booed. So, that's no big deal.**

Q: In the current issue of *Rolling Stone* one of the writers criticize a $65 top ticket and called it whopping and obscene and all of that stuff and says that you should suck on soap. How do you respond to somebody who writes something like that?

**Dylan: No kind of way. He never got up there and sing anything. Connoisseurs, y'know, they're all over the place, but, y'know, it's different when you're getting up there and you're doing it. Anybody can be talking about it.**

Q: Now –

**Dylan: How's that for a response?**

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Q: This is for a thing we're doing on violence. I'm going to ask some general questions. Do you think teen violence is a big problem in today's society?

**Dylan: Television causes a lot of that violence. That's my opinion. People see it on TV and they wanna do it. That's just my opinion. Whatever people see – TV in my mind forms people's opinions. Y'all know that anyway.**

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Q: Do you think the availability of guns is a big problem today?

**Dylan: I don't think there's enough guns.**

Q: What about guns among kids? Do you think it's just too prevailing?

**Dylan: Toy guns. They got more toy guns than real guns, really.**

Q: Where do you think kids get these guns?

**Dylan: They get 'em in a toy store.**

Carlos gives a politically correct and to-my-mind idiotic pro-gun control answer to a similar question (

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Q: One more question. Your new album is basically an acoustic album, done mostly in one takes. What led you to do that? Is it the unplugged trend?

**Dylan: Well, it was just easy for me to do that, to make an album by myself. Anybody would do it if they could, really. Ah, Mick Jagger if he could get in a studio and record an album all by himself, y'know, he'd be probably the first one to do it.**

# 4 February 1994, Akihiko Yamamoto

Source: *Crossbeat*, Japanese magazine, Volume 7, Number 1, April 1994, pages 44, 47, 49 (in Japanese). The text reproduced here is from *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 55, June-July 1994, pages 24-27.

The interview took place in Hotel Okura, Tokyo. Originally published in Japanese, the text was translated by John and Midori Potter.

**BOB DYLAN INTERVIEW**

Q: At your 30th anniversary concert there were many famous musicians who came to pay tribute to your work. This is quite unusual. What did you think about that concert?

**A: My idea is… well, that show was held because of the songs. It was nothing to so with what I did. I wrote all of the songs but the power of the songs themselves was the main thing. The songs were the heroes.**

Q: I suppose that was a very impressive experience for you?

**A: I suppose so. I felt like I became a bit old because it was the 30th anniversary. I wish it was done for the 20th anniversary** (laughs).

Q: How long will you continue the never-ending tour. I read some interview in which you said it's like asking a coal miner why he digs coal?

**A: Going on tour is an artist's job. I go anywhere.**

Q: The last two albums you were back to basics. Singing with acoustic guitar. What was the reason for it?

**A: There were no particular reason. The songs I choose, they're all very important for me. They are my basis of music. Nowadays modern songs are made with some reason but there was a time when it wasn't like that. A time when you didn't have to think about whether the songs had a meaning or not. I went back to basics and sang songs from that time because I wanted to escape from a lot of things surrounding music on the surface. I wanted to grab reality which music itself has before music became a massive business. And also. at the same time, I wanted to show what songs should be like. I don't need to write music. Some songs which have something to say already exist. This is the same as people who keep playing Shakespeare.**

Q: People's voices change as they get older. In your case, do you change the music and lyrics because your voice is different?

**A. Leave it to your voice.**

Q: Do you have any worries about singing your songs – which have a very important meaning – in front of Japanese audiences?

**A: My songs arc poetic. Also. at the same time, very musical. They have different levels. It doesn't matter if the audience can't understand English, we can get together musically. But a lot of people who call themselves Bob Dylan experts they have an opinion that only my lyric has an important meaning. My lyric couldn't exist without a musical background.**

Q: You wrote a lot of songs and you still sing them at concerts. What meaning do those protest songs have in modern society?

**A: Everything keeps changing like the seasons going around. Can you accept these changes? Only the people know this. Because these changes always happen. It doesn't matter if the people want them or not. There is nothing which is always the same in this world.**

Q: Your way of singing with words and rhythm can be said to be origins of rap, perhaps. What do you think about the popularity of rap music recently?

**A: When you listen to the 1920s. 30s. 40s music, this is the origin of rap which people never heard. The origin of rap existed a long time before me. I like rap music but I don't listen to it much.**

Q: You joined important charity concerts like Live Aid, Farm Aid. I wonder if you think that joining this sort of concert is a musician's duty?

**A: I can make people more aware about certain problems, but that's it. If you want to support certain groups people have to see those problems are their problems. If not, a charity concert becomes just another concert.**

Q: What was your impression of Japan?

**A: It is difficult to form an image of one place when you are working. Tokyo is a mysterious place, like Buenos Aires. I was very impressed about Kyoto. In my second visit to Japan I went to see Kabuki and Takarazuka. They were very impressive. I bought records and videos too.**

Q: When you came to Japan for the first time in 1978, I heard that you said "Tokyo is the sort of town where you can write songs".

**A: Too many cars now. The only interesting place in Japan now is countryside.**

Q: In the 1960s you said don't trust the over 30s. I was very impressed because you were the leader of the youth. Now you are 53, what do you think about what you said?

**A: I want to say now don't trust the over 30s. (laughs)**

Q: OK. You are supported by a lot of young musicians and listeners, aren't you?

**A: I'm still influenced by the first generation of Rock 'n' Roll, I was the second generation. So, I understand that younger generation people listen to music as I listened to an older generation of music.**

Q: You have been singing for a long time where does the energy come from?

**A: Everybody gets energy from their forerunners. We are at the end of the line. I don't know what it's all about but our forerunners give us energy.**

Q: I saw an interview in which you said I cannot forget a about a concert just before Buddy Holly died. Are you impressed by your own concerts as much as you were by Buddy Holly at that time?

**A: I'm always impressed. Otherwise I couldn't carry on doing concerts. I'm glad if the audience get the same feeling. But that feeling can only come in a concert. You don't need to take it home. Of course, I don't want to do a bad show but strange I always remember bad shows. At every concert there is a moment when I think I could have done better.**

Q: In your new, album. 'World Gone Wrong' there are no sleeve lyrics. I wonder if you went back to folk roots so you don't need to write anything down?

**A: If you put lyrics on the sleeve of an album you lose the pleasure of listening. If you are reading the words at the same time as you are listening you cut off the pressure. Also. the words I chose for this album. are already released on these songs by other people in America, so you can get them. To put the words on a record… no-one puts the words, like Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly. Those people didn't put the words on their records, did they? What are words? Words are equally as important as music. People don't print the music on a sleeve so why do people say it's necessary to print the words.**

Q: But there are some Japanese people whose life has changed because of your words?

**A: You don't need to listen to every single word. Music is a big painting. It's not important for someone to translate my words to try and make them understand.**

Q: In your interview in Rolling Stone magazine you said "my songs are all protest songs". What do you really think about it?

**A: My aim was not to protest. There were protest songs in the Woodstock generation. To me protest is not just to protest. People who listen to my music, they always talk about protest? So, my reputation as a protest singer is exaggerated. But I don't care what anybody says.**

Q: This year is the 25th anniversary of Woodstock. I think you are a forerunner of the Woodstock generation. What do you think about the 1960s which was about love and peace?

**A: The Woodstock generation is dead. All ideology is dead. The so-called 1960s was over by 1965. The people who appeared after that, they thought about how to make money, how to buy clothes and drugs, only those things. In the 1960s I was already working. I was no longer a teenager so I was not that naive.**

Q: But I think you still have the spirit of Rock 'n' Roll?

**A: Yes, that's right. The basis of rock will never die. The roots of rock are very deep. When someone plays rock they always come back to the roots. The rock in the 1970s and 80s was like flowers falling off a tree. The roots of rock is still going deep underneath the earth.**

Q: What is the reason why you are still carrying on and at the same time you are giving an enormous influence to the music scene?

**A: Because I have a heart. If music doesn't have a heart nobody would want to see me play. I was moved towards music at an important time in my life. Music told me a lot. I am still very impressed by music. Time have changed. people have changed, life has changed, but music never changes.**

Q: There is a famous quote from you that songs are floating around you, “I just catch them”. Do you still write songs like that?

**A: All my great songs are like that. The process of writing music is inspiration, receiving. An important thing is the environment and songs quietly come to me. If anything disturbs that situation the songs don’t come to me they go somewhere else. Then the songs die. The most important thing is you don’t try hard to write songs, you should have an open heart.**

Q: When Kennedy became President, you went to New York. Now a young man who admired Kennedy has become President. The times have changed. What do you think about President Clinton?

**A: Politics is a nightmare. None of the American citizens are interested in politics.**

Q: That doesn’t sound like you, who gave a lot of impetus to a lot of movements in the 1960s?

**A: I have absolutely nothing to say to people who are influenced politically because of my songs.**

Q: You are always making different arrangements for your live performances. I think it seems as if you make a song and then break it up. What do you think about that?

**A: That is the wrong idea. The tune of the song, the rhythm, never changes. If anything ever changes it’s only the mood. I think in the early 1970s and in the 1980s the bands elaborated the songs. That’s why the songs seemed different. In 1978, the Japan tour, I came with a band which had twelve people. So, I changed the arrangements for that. So, some people maybe thought it sounded different I don’t listen to my own records because I don’t want to be influenced by myself. Musicians who listen to their own records, that is parody of themselves. I don’t want to be like them. When I’m making a record, I’m listening to my music but when the album is released I never listen. My concerts in the last ten years – I only need four band members.**

# Early May 1995, Edna Gundersen

Source: *USA Today*, US newspaper, 5 May 1995, page 12D.

This location of this interview is unknown. Probably it was conducted by telephone. Although part of the text of this interview was included in both *The fiddler now upspoke* and *Every Mind Polluting Word*, one section in the original article was omitted, and so the entire article is reproduced here.

**Dylan on Dylan, 'Unplugged' and the birth of a song**

On the eve of his *MTV Unplugged* album, the usually reclusive Bob Dylan agreed to an exclusive chat about his current activities. After a string of West Coast dates this month, he and his band resume touring in Europe in June, then return for a full U.S. tour this fall. He spent three weeks in January writing new songs but probably won't record them before 1996. What else? Read on.

Q: How did you plan this *Unplugged* project?

**A: I wasn't quite sure how to do it and what material to use. I would have liked to do old folk songs with acoustic instruments, but there was a lot of input from other sources as to what would be right for the (MTV) audience. The record company said, "You can't do that, it's too obscure." At one time, I would have argued, but there's no point. OK, so what's *not* obscure? They said *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*.**

Q: And *Like a Rolling Stone*, your signature.

**A: I was hearing a lot about how Eric Clapton did *Layla* acoustically for *Unplugged*. That influenced me to do the same for *Like a Rolling Stone*, but it would never get played that way normally.**

Q: Would you consider an *Unplugged* sequel?

**A: I'd consider doing *Unplugged* again in a relaxed setting where I didn't feel like I was on the spot. I felt like I had to deliver, and I delivered something that was preconceived for me. That wasn't a problem, but it wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do.**

Q: Do you prefer playing acoustic over electric?

**A: They're pretty much equal to me. I try not to deface the song with electricity or non-electricity. I'd rather get something out of the song verbally and phonetically than depend on tonality of instruments.**

Q: Was performing before TV cameras difficult?

**A: It's hard to rise above some lukewarm attitude toward (TV). I've never catered to that medium. It doesn't really pay off for me.**

Q: Was the studio audience a typical Dylan crowd?

**A: I'd never seen them before. (Laughs) As I recall, they were in the polite category.**

Q: Did you approve of the finished show?

**A: I can't say. I didn't see it.**

Q: You've been touring a lot in recent years. Obviously you enjoy playing live.

**A: There's a certain part of you that becomes addicted to a live audience. I wouldn't keep doing it if I was tired of it. I do about 125 shows a year. It may sound like a lot to people who don't work that much, but it isn't. B.B. King is working 350 nights a year.**

Q: Was playing at Woodstock a special moment?

**A: Nah, it was just another show, really. We just blew in and blew out of there. You do wonder if you're coming across, because you feel so small on a stage like that.**

Q: Do any of your songs feel dated or stale to you?

**A: I rarely listen to my old records. Songs to me are alive. They're not based on any con game or racket or humbug. They're real songs and they're right now. They're not songs people can listen to and say, "Oh gee, I remember where I was when I first heart that" or "That speaks for me." My songs aren't like that. They're not disposable. Folk and blues songs aren't either.**

Q: But you've discarded some songs along the way.

**A: Let's face it, some of my songs don't hold up live. I can't think of any right now, but I've tried them over the years and now I just don't do them.**

Q: Do current events, like the Oklahoma bombing, impact on your songwriting?

**A: Chaos is everywhere: lawlessness, disorganization, misrule. I don't know if it impacts my songwriting like it use to. In the past few years, events have affected me and I've addressed them. But unless a song flows out naturally and doesn't have to be chaperoned, it just dissipates.**

Q: Do you write with immortality in mind?

**A: No. It's a here-and-now thing. A lot of songs are just interrogation of yourself. I wouldn't classify myself as any type of songwriter. I try not to force myself anywhere.**

Q: Are there many unwritten songs inside your head?

**A: Probably more that have never come out than ones that have. I get thoughts during the day that I just can't get to. I'll write a verse down and never complete it. It's hard to be vigilant over the whole thing.**

Q: At 53, do you feel a greater urgency about writing?

**A: Yeah, it's either that or be completely mindless about it. I've written a whole bunch of songs, so I can't say I didn't get to what I wanted to. As you get older, you get smarter and that can hinder you because you try to gain control over the creative impulse. Creativity is not like a freight train going down the tracks. It's something that has to be caressed and treated with a great deal of respect. If your mind is intellectually in the way, it will stop you. You've got to program your brain not to think too much.**

Q: And how do you do that?

**A: Go out with the bird dogs.**

**Off the info highway**

*Highway 61 Interactive*, Bob Dylan's elaborate new CD-ROM, is a cyberworld hit. While fans are mastering the multimedia labyrinth of data, lyrics, interviews and songs, the low-tech singer has yet to find the infobahn on-ramp.

**"I wouldn't know how to use it if I had to,"** Dylan says of the *Interactive* disc. **"I didn't have any input into that. I don't even know what material is on it."**

Dylan isn't anti-techno, just preoccupied with traditional music-making tools; his guitar and harmonica.

CD-ROM technology **"is not a vacuous thing, I realize that,"** he says. **"But it's stuff that can happen without you having to participate, like Jerry Garcia's ties. I'm just a performer and a singer and songwriter. The other stuff can sponge off that. It doesn't need any of my input.**

**"There are all kinds of outlets like that. People talk to me about marketing a lot of that stuff. I haven't got around to it because I'm still too busy in my own thing."**

# 20 July 1996, Unknown Interviewer (Aftenposten)

Source: *Aftenposten*, Norwegian newspaper, 21 July 1996. The text reproduced here is from *Isis*, UK fanzine, Number 70, December 1996, page 45.

This interview took place in Molde, Norway. A short interview, even by Dylan's standards.

**Bob Dylan om Molde; "A snappy little town"**

"Bob Dylan om Molde; "A snappy little town" " ("Bob Dylan on Molde: "A snappy little town" ") Upon his departure from Molde, Dylan is asked what he thought of the place. His reply – as you may have gathered – was all of four words; **"A snappy little town"**.

# 2000, Jeff Rosen

Sources: The first part of this interview is taken from the documentary *No Direction Home*, broadcast on *Thirteen*, WNET, US television, and in *Arena*, BBC2, UK television, 26 and 27 September 2005. The transcript here is taken from *Every Mind Polluting Word*.

Additional sections were included in:

- The DVD: *Roy Silver: The Lost Interview*, part of the 3-disc deluxe version of the Bob Dylan album *Together Through Life*, Columbia 88697516972, 28 April 2009.
- A CD released by: Pacifica Radio, IZ1209, March 2011.
- A 7 minute video: *The Story Of Travelin' Thru, 1967 – 1969*, released on the website: www.bobdylan.com, in early November 2019.

Reportedly Dylan was interviewed for a total of 10 hours by Jeff Rosen, Dylan's manager, and bestowed on Martin Scorsese who selected some of them for the film. The released sections consist almost entirely of Dylan's responses. It has not been possible to determine the chronological sequence of the segements collated here or, in general, which of them are contiguous.

**I had ambitions to set out and find like an odyssey of going home somewhere. I set out to find this home that I'd left a while back and I couldn't remember exactly where it was, but I was on my way there. And encountering what I encountered on the way, was how I envisioned it all. I didn't really have any ambition at all. I was born very far from where I'm supposed to be and so I'm on my way home, you know.**

**Time... You can do a lot of things that seem to make time stand still but of course, you know, no one can do that.**

**Maybe when I was about 10, I started playing the guitar. I found a guitar in the house that my father bought, actually. I found something else in there. This kind of mystical overtones. There was a great big mahogany radio. It had a 78 turntable when you opened up the top. And I opened it up one day and there was a record on, a country record, this song called, 'Drifting Too Far From (The) Shore.' The sound of the record made me feel like I was somebody else and that, you know, I was maybe not even born to the right parents, or something.**

**It looked like any other town out of the '40s or '50s. Just some rural town. It was on the way to nowhere. And you probably couldn't find it on a map.**

**Maybe three blocks one way, and maybe three blocks the other way and that was like a main street where all the department stores were the drugstores, the… That's about it, you know.**

**What happens to a town after the livelihood is gone? All right, it just sort of decays and blows away, doesn't it? That's the way it goes. Most of the land was either farmland or just completely scavenged by the mining companies. Very hot in the summertime; in the winter, it was just rightly cold, you know. All winter, it was just, I mean… We didn't have the clothes they have now, so I mean, you just wore two or three shirts at a time. Slept in your clothes.**

**The pit was on the outer limits of the town. That's where everybody worked. You couldn't be a rebel. It was so cold that you couldn't be bad. The weather equalizes everything very quickly. And nobody was gonna really pull a stickup. There really wasn't any philosophy, any idiom... any ideology to really go against.**

**My father and his brothers, they had an electrical store. 'Bout the first job I ever had was sweeping up the store and I was supposed to learn the discipline of hard work or something, you know, and the merits of employment.**

**Circuses came through. There were tent shows at the carny midways. And they had barkers.**

**It was just more rural back then. That's what people did. You could see guys in blackface. George Washington in blackface or Napoleon wearing blackface. Like, weird Shakespearean things. Stuff that didn't really make any sense at the time. And people had other jobs in the carny team. I saw somebody putting makeup on getting back from running the Ferris wheel once. And I thought that was pretty interesting. Guy's got, you know... He does two things, you know, or something like that.**

**We'd have to listen late at night for other stations to come in from other parts of the country, places that were far away. Fifty-thousand watt stations coming out through the atmosphere.**

**Johnnie Ray. He had some kind of strange incantation in his voice like he'd been voodooed and he cried, kind of, when he sang.**

**It was the sound that got to me. It wasn't who it was, or... It was the sound of it.**

**I began listening to the radio, I began to get bored being there. I thought about going to military school, but the military school that I envisioned myself going to I couldn't get in which was West Point. You know, I could always envision myself dying in some heroic battle somewhere. So I mean, maybe that era has gone.**

**First time I heard rock 'n' roll on the radio I felt it was pretty similar to the country music which I'd been listening to. I formed a couple of groups, growing up, and we rehearsed and played where we could play. There wasn't much opportunity to really break out of that area.**

**Nobody liked country music, or rock 'n' roll, or rhythm and blues. That kind of music wasn't what was happening up there. The music that was popular was 'How Much is that Doggie in the Window?' That wasn't our reality. Our reality was bleak to begin with. Our reality was fear that at any moment this black cloud would explode, where everybody would be dead. They would show you in school, how to dive for cover under your desk. We grew up with all that, so it created a sense of paranoia that, I don't know, was probably unforeseen.**

**I really can't say if the girls took a liking to me or not from playing around town. The first girl that ever took a liking to me, her name was Gloria Story. Gloria Story, I mean, that was her real name. Second girlfriend was named Echo. Now, that's pretty strange. I've never met anybody named Echo. I serenaded her underneath the ladder that went up to her window. And both these girls, by the way, brought out the poet in me.**

**James Dean, Brando, 'The Wild One.' It didn't kill all the entire past. It's not like they just appeared and there's a new scene happening now. Time, you know, time kind of obliterated the past that was around when I was growing up. Just time and progress, really.**

**Got out of high school and left the very next day. I'd gone as far as I could in my particular environment. I was gonna try to join some other band.**

**There was only one guy that ever came out of there, and he was out of Fargo. And I'd actually gone there to play with him. He had a regional hit called 'Suzie Baby.' At that point, I was just playing triplets on the piano. I didn't have my own piano, so they weren't gonna buy a piano. But I did play some shows with them. Nothing much came of it.**

**I was a musical expeditionary. I had no past, really, to speak of, nothing to go back to, nobody to lean on. I came down to Minneapolis. I didn't go to classes. I was enrolled but I didn't go to classes. I just didn't feel like it. We were singing and playing all night. Sleeping most of, you know, the morning. I didn't really have any time for studying.**

**I fell into that atmosphere of everything Kerouac was saying about the world being completely mad. And the only people for him that were interesting were the mad people, the mad ones, the ones who were, you know, mad to live and mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time the ones who never yawn, all those mad ones. And I felt like I fit right into that bunch.**

**I had heard folk music before leaving the Iron Range. I'd heard John Jacob Niles somewhere, strangely enough. I don't know, folk music was delivering me something, you know which was the way I always felt about life, you know, and people and, you know, institutions, and ideology and it was just, you know, uncovering it all.**

[on Odetta:] **She played that upstroke-downstroke kind of rhythm where you don't need the drum. It's kind of like a Tex-Mex rhythm. I heard that rhythm and I thought, well, I could use that rhythm for all kinds of things.**

**I don't even remember, you know, buying any records. If went into the booth. I had a very agile mind. I could learn a song by maybe hearing it once or twice.**

**I traded my electric equipment for an acoustic guitar. Started playing almost immediately.**

**Why it became that particular name, I really can't say.**

**The name just popped into my head one day. But it didn't really happen any of the ways that I've read about it. I mean, I just don't feel like I had had a past and, you know, I couldn't relate to anything other than what I was doing at the present time and I don't, you know, didn't matter to me what I said, you know. It still doesn't, really.**

**Right then and there I had no goal except learning all the songs I could.**

**I'd forgotten all about the Iron Range, where I grew up. I'd forgotten about it all. It didn't even enter my mind.**

**Woody Guthrie, he had a particular sound. And besides that, he said something to go along with his sound. That was highly unusual, to my ears.**

**He was a radical, his songs had a radical slant. I thought, "ooh," you know, like... "That's what I want to sing. I want to sing that."**

**I couldn't believe that I'd never heard of this man. You could listen to his songs, and actually learn how to live. One guy said, "You're singing a Woody Guthrie song." He gave me a book that he wrote, called Bound for Glory, and I read it. I identified with that Bound for Glory book more than I even did with On the Road.**

**These songs sounded archaic to most people. I don't know why they didn't sound archaic to me. They sounded like these songs were happening at the moment, to me.**

**I was just learning songs and playing them and trying to find out who Woody Guthrie was. Woody's records were almost impossible to find. They didn't have any of his records in the record stores. Paul was a folk music scholar. He didn't play at all. He had a whole lot of records which probably couldn't be found anywhere else in the Midwest except at Paul's house, and he lived there with somebody else. You know, I was listening to records at his house once. I knew they'd be away for the weekend so I went over there and helped myself to a bunch of old records.**

**Those records were extremely hard to find. They were like hen's teeth. If you came across them, somebody like myself who was a musical expeditionary, you know, you just would have to immerse yourself in them.**

**I wanted to get to the East Coast to visit Woody Guthrie. When I first heard him, I didn't know if he was dead or alive, really. But then I discovered that he was definitely alive and he was in a hospital with some kind of ailment. So I thought it'd be a nice gesture to go visit him.**

**Hitchhiking back then was very acceptable. I had a suitcase and a guitar. And I don't know, maybe I had $ 10 in my pocket.**

**Joan Baez, she was staggering. Kind of like hit my world from a different angle. She was completely about folk music. She was an excellent, really excellent guitar player. When I saw her on television, I thought, you know, like "That girl looks like she might need a singing partner." I'd say she was someplace in the back of my mind, you know.**

**Got out of the car on George Washington Bridge. Took the subway down to the Village. Went to the Café Wha? I looked out at the crowd. I most likely asked from the stage, "Does anybody know where a couple of people could stay tonight?"**

**I was ready for New York. I started playing immediately and I realized right away that I'd come to the right place, because there were many places to play. I played with Freddy Neil. He was a big star down there. I did that until about 8.00, he would give me what he could. The place was usually packed from 12.00 to 8.00 with tourists and lunch-hour secretaries. And then at 8:00 all the rest of the houses would open where you'd pass the basket and play.**

**There'd be a carny on the street bringing people down. "You know, you gotta come down here and see this." "There's so much weirdness you've never seen in your life." Just always, there'd be people coming and going.**

**Sawdust on the floor, tourist traps like, a poet, somebody singing a song with a parrot on a shoulder. Tiny Tim-type characters. No one who had any recordings out ever played them. You only played those if you had to.**

**You would have to make an impression on somebody. There were many, many singers who were good, but they couldn't focus their attention on anybody. They couldn't really get inside somebody's head. You gotta be able to pin somebody down.**

**So I found out where Woody Guthrie was and I took a bus out to Morristown. Basically, I think it was an insane asylum. I thought about it later, it was a sad thing, they put him in a mental home, because he just had the jitters. He asked for certain songs and I'd play them. I was young and impressionable and I think I must have been shocked in some kind of way to find him where I found him.**

**Brother John Sellers, he was the master of ceremonies at Gerde's Folk City. And there was one night called Hootenanny Night where anybody could play.**

**We just watched and we picked out the performers that were doing it for real and tried to pick up what the essence of what they were doing was.**

**Dave Van Ronk, he had that big gruff thing, but he had this very sweet, sensitive thing going on at the same time. He was a dichotomy of a performer. He could take the essence of the song and only go after that, not go after the frills.**

**Liam was profound. Besides all of his rebel songs and his acting career, he would have these incredible sayings. Like once he said to me after about 30 pints of Guinness he was saying, "Remember, Bob, no fear, no envy, no meanness." I said, "Right."**

**What I heard in the Clancy Brothers was rousing, rebel songs. Napoleonic in scope. And they were just these Musketeer-type characters. And then on the other level you had the romantic ballads that would just slay you right in your tracks, the sweetness of Tommy Makem and Liam. It was just like, take a sword, cut off your head, and then weep. That's sort of what they were about.**

**All the great performers that I'd seen who I wanted to be like were those kind of performers they all had one thing in common. It was in their eyes. Now, there was something in their eyes that would say: "I know something you don't know," and I wanted to be that kind of performer.**

**That's when I went to the crossroads and made a big deal. You know, like... One night and then went back to Minneapolis and it was like, "Hey, where's this guy been?" "You've been to the crossroads."**

**I wasn't seeing Woody Guthrie anymore. I was still singing a lot of his songs, but I'd replaced them with a lot of the other songs, all of a sudden. I kind of went through Woody Guthrie in a kind of way. But I didn't really want to go through Woody Guthrie. I didn't want to feel that it was something just negligible.**

**But I really cared, I really wanted to portray my gratitude in some kind of way. But I knew that I was not gonna be going back to Greystone anymore. I felt like I had to write that song. I did not consider myself a songwriter at all. But I needed to write that and I needed to sing it. So that's why I needed to write it. 'Cause it hadn't been written and that's what I needed to say, I needed to say that.**

**The owner of the place finally gave me a two-week run. He had me open for John Lee Hooker.**

**I didn't really feel like I was making a step forward anywhere. Things were taking its natural course.**

**I didn't start to have any ambition until I started working more and more. I wondered how people recorded. I wondered how you get to do that. There were always talent scouts in the clubs. No one had ever spoken to me directly about making any records so I just assumed they'd passed on me.**

**That was the sound of the day. People would want to hear a beautiful voice sing a melodic song.**

**The folksinging scene was either commercial folksinging for like a college kind of crowd: Harry Belafonte, Brothers Four... that commercial... They had records that were on the pop charts. And then there was the other side, which was intellectual. People would just sit there, you know, I think and playing in the environment that I was playing in was neither of those.**

**Yeah, he was kind of like a Damon Runyon character. Is that the word? One of these old Broadway guys, buzz-cut haircut. He was very special in a lot of ways. He was very enthusiastic. He had great love of music, and it just radiated out of him. When I met him, a review had just come out of The New York Times of the set I'd played at Gerde's the previous night. Hammond had seen the article and asked me right then and there whether I wanted to record for Columbia Records. I thought it was almost unreal. I mean, no one would think that this kind of folk music would be recorded on Columbia Records.**

**They recorded the popular hits of the day of people usually with beautiful tones of voices and great arrangements. I don't know what they thought of my stuff up there.**

**I didn't tell anybody for a bit because I almost wasn't sure it was happening myself. I don't think I really told anybody until I actually went through with the sessions.**

**I have a habit I picked up someplace along the way. Whatever works for me, not to give that away so easily, you know.**

**When I did make that first record, I used songs which I just knew but I hadn't really performed them a lot. I wanted just to record stuff that was off the top of my head and see what would happen.**

**The House of the Rising Sun is on that record. I'd never done that song before, but I heard it every night 'cause Van Ronk would do it. So I thought he was really on to something with the song, so I just recorded it.**

**The mystery of being in a recording studio did something to me and those are the songs that came out.**

**When I got the disk, I played it and I was highly disturbed. I just wanted to cross this record out and make another record immediately. I thought I'd recorded the wrong songs and I'd already written a few of my own, that I thought maybe I should have stuck on there. I was way past that record. Or part of me was just saying that I didn't want to record that record anyway, that I just did it I didn't want to give away anything that was really dear to me or something.**

**I wrote them anywhere I was. You could write them on the subway or in a café or wherever. You could write them talking to somebody else and be scribbling down a song.**

**I didn't really know if that song was good or bad or... It felt right. But I didn't really know that it had any kind of anthemic quality or anything.**

**I wrote the songs to perform the songs. And I needed to sing, like, in that language. Which is a language that I hadn't heard before.**

**Everything was meshed up at that time. Everything was like just all in like a blender. Everyone was interested in whatever was going on. I stayed at a lot of people's houses which had poetry books and poetry volumes and I'd read what I found... I found Verlaine poems or Rimbaud, you know, "Drunken Boat," Illuminations.**

**The folk idiom is so widespread that you could take any part of it and rework a song. I never thought I was breaking through anything. I was just working with an existing form that was there. I was definitely not inventing anything that hadn't been tried before, some part of the picture, you know.**

**On my second album, all of a sudden people started to take notice that never noticed before. Grossman came into the picture around there. He was kind of like a Col. Tom Parker figure... all immaculately dressed, every time you see him. You could smell him coming.**

**Pete Seeger, very tall, like a towering figure. I didn't realize he was a communist. I really wasn't sure even what a communist was. If he was, it wouldn't have mattered to me anyway. I really didn't think about people in those terms. To be on the side of people who are struggling for something doesn't necessarily mean you are being political.**

**Everyone was there who played folk music. Old and new. Sort of younger people, too.**

**I was the only singer there probably singing the songs that he'd written. And most likely, two years earlier to that, I wouldn't have been able to get into Newport.**

**I wrote a lot of songs in a quick amount of time. I could do that then, because the process was new to me. I felt like I'd discovered something no one else had ever discovered and I was in a sort of an arena artistically that no one else had ever been in before ever, although I might have been wrong about that.**

**In taking all the elements that I've ever known to make wide-sweeping statements which conveyed a feeling that was in the general essence of the spirit of the times. I think I managed to do that. I thought that I needed to press on and get as far into it as I could.**

**I was up close when King was giving that speech. To this day it still affects me in a profound way.**

**I looked out the podium, I looked out at the crowd and I remember thinking to myself, "Man, I've never seen such a large crowd."**

**You know, they were trying to build me up as a topical songwriter. I was never a topical songwriter to begin with. For whatever reason they were doing it was reasons not, really... That didn't really apply to me.**

**I was like an outsider, anyway. I'd come to town as an outsider, and still, in a lot of ways I was still more outside than I ever was, really. They were trying to make me an insider to some kind of trip they were on. I don't think so.**

**Johnny Cash was more like a religious figure to me. And there he was at Newport, you know, standing side by side. Meeting him was the high thrill of a lifetime. And, just the fact that he had sung one of my songs was just unthinkable.**

**An artist has got to be careful never really to arrive at a place where he thinks he's "at" somewhere. You always have to realize that you're constantly in the state of becoming, you know? And, as long as you can stay in that realm, you'll sort of be all right. I can't self-analyze my own work, and I wasn't going to cater to the crowd, because I knew certain people would like it, and certain people didn't like it. I had gotten in the door when no one was looking. I was in there now, and there was nothing anybody from then on, could ever do about it.**

**I felt it all over America. You know, wherever in America you went, you felt that things were happening in an Olympian type of way in which children were beyond their parents' command.**

**The ideal performances of the songs would then come on stages throughout the world. Very few could be found on any of my records. Every second, every... You know... Reaching the audience is what it's all about.**

**Words have their own meaning, or they have different meanings and words change their meaning. Words that meant something 10 years ago don't mean that now. They mean something else.**

**Subterranean Homesick Blues. I mean... I don't think I would have wanted to do it all by myself. I thought I'd get more power out of it, you know, with a small group in back of me. It was electric, but doesn't necessarily mean that it's modernized just because it's electric, you know? It was, you know, like a... Country music was electric, too.**

**They didn't light places, they didn't have to stop filming. If you ran, they ran. If you went in a room, they went into the room. And you know, at a certain point, you just became oblivious to that.**

**You know, it was probably a stupid thing to do not letting her play, but you can't be wise and in love at the same time, so... I hope she'd see the light sooner or later on that.**

**A lot of my songs, they were becoming hits for other people. There was, the Byrds had a big hit. Some group called the Turtles had some hit. Sonny and Cher had a hit with a song of mine. People were sort of writing a jingly-jangly kind of song... which seemed to have something to do with me, I, you know, like, "okay..." You know, 'I Got You, Babe', is some kind of take-off of me, something I wrote. Well, I don't know what it was a take-off on that I wrote, you know? I didn't really like that sound... or folk-rock, whatever that was, I didn't feel that had anything to do with me. It got me thinking about the Billboard charts and the songs which become popular, which I hadn't thought of that before.**

**Mike Bloomfield said he had heard my first record and said he wanted to show me how the blues were played and I didn't feel much competitive. I didn't feel much competitive with him, he could outplay anybody, even at that at that point, you know. But when it was time to bring in a guitar player on my record I couldn't think of anybody but him. I mean, he just was the best guitar player I ever heard.**

**Like a Rolling Stone definitely broke through somewhere. I didn't feel like radio had ever played a song like that before. I know I'd never heard a song like that before. So... And everything I'd done up to that point had led up to writing a song like that, just effortlessly.**

**I've never been that kind of performer that wants to be one of them, you know, like one of the crowd. I don't try to endear myself that way.**

**Now, do performers look for applause?**

**Yeah, yes and no. It really depends what kind of performer you are. Like the story of Billie Holiday, you know when she sang Strange Fruit for the first time, nobody applauded. You know, you could leave somebody kind of in a spellbound way and... I don't know. There's a lot of things going on when there's a performer on stage and there's an audience out there.**

**I was thinking that somebody was shouting, "Are you with us? Are you with us?" And, you know, I don't know what that, you know, like... What was that supposed to mean? I had no idea why they were booing. I don't think anybody was there having a negative response to those songs, though. I mean, whatever it was about, it wasn't about anything that they were hearing.**

**I'd heard a rumor that Pete was going to cut the cable. And I heard it later, you know. And it was like, it didn't make sense to me. Like, Pete Seeger, like someone whose music I cherish, you know. Like someone who I highly respect is going to cut the cable. It was like, "Oh, God." It was like... It was like a dagger, you know, it was... Just the thought of it was, you know... made me go out and get drunk.**

**The booing didn't really, you know... I had a perspective on the booing, because you got to realize you can kill somebody with kindness, too.**

**Things had gotten out of hand. You know, it fell into the... You know, you ask me why I write surreal songs or whatever, I mean that type of activity is surreal. I had no answers to any of those questions any more than any other performer did, really. But, you know, that didn't stop the press or people or whoever they were from asking these questions. They, for some reason the press thought that performers had the answers to all these problems in the society and you know, like what can... What can you say to something like that? I mean, it's just kind of absurd.**

**At a certain point, people seemed to have a distorted, warped view of me for some reason, and those people were usually outside of the musical community. "The spokesman of the generation." "The conscience of a..." This, and that and the other. That I could not relate to. I just couldn't relate to it. As long as I could continue doing what it is that I loved to do I didn't care what kinds of labels were put on me or how I was perceived in the press, because I was playing to people every night.**

**The guys that were with me on that tour, which later became The Band, you know, we were all in it together. We were putting our heads in the lion's mouth and... I had to admire them for sticking it out with me. Just for doing it, in my book, they were, you know, gallant knights for even, you know, standing behind me.**

**These stages were created for people who stood on stage and recited Shakespearean plays. They weren't made for this kind of music we were playing. The sound was pretty archaic, really. The sound really hadn't been perfected. The sound quality hadn't been perfected many years after that.**

**And I'd just about had it, though. I'd had it with the with the whole scene. And I was... Whether I knew it or didn't know it, I was looking to just quit for a while.**

**What about the scene? What had you had it with? What about the scene were you sick of?**

**Well, you know, people like you. People like, you know, like, just, you know, like just being pressed and hammered and, you know, expected to answer questions. You know... What can I... You know, like... It was enough to make anybody sick, really.**

OUTTAKES 1 RELEASED on DVD: *Roy Silver: The Lost Interview* as part of the 3-disc deluxe version of the Bob Dylan album *Together Through Life*, Columbia 88697516972, 28 April 2009.

Roy Silver… Now… He's a character who showed up… kind of a… He … He's kind of like… How can you put it? He was kind of like a hustler type on the street, somebody… trying to make a deal about this and make a deal about that. He was a fast talker.

OUTTAKES 2 RELEASED on CD by: Pacifica Radio, IZ1209, March 2011.

Transcript taken from *Dylan on Dylan: Interviews and Encounters*, edited by Jeff Burger, 2018, Chicago Review Press, Chicago, pages 395-403.

**I was playing guitar pretty early on, actually. Maybe when I was about ten or eleven. Had a guitar in the house that my father bought. And I found something else in there that had kind of mystical overtones. The people who had lived in the house previous to that time, they had left some of their furniture, and among the furniture was a great big mahogany radio. It was like a jukebox. And it had a 78 turntable when you opened up the top. And I opened it up one day and there was a record on there, a country record. It was a song called "Drifting Too Far from Shore," but I think it was the Stanley Brothers; if not, Bill Monroe. I played the record, and it just brought me into a different world.**

**And when I began listening to the radio, I began to get bored being there. But up until I heard stuff coming over the radio, I don't remember really being bored. I don't remember the name of the station that came out of Mexico. There was some station that came out of Mexico, and then there was one that came out of some place in Louisiana. I don't remember the call letters, but those stations would come on toward the later part of the evening. And the earlier part of the evening would be the radio shows like *Fibber McGee and Molly* and *Inner Sanctum* and *FBI* and those kind of things. I don't ever remember being entranced by anything on the radio really, except maybe when *Grand Ol' Opry* came on.**

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**OK, so what was the entertainment around town? Well, I'll tell you who the heroes were. Gorgeous George, the wrestler, he'd come through maybe three, four times a year with his troupe. There'd be boxing shows. The Flanagan Brothers were top draws; we always watched them. Bobo Olson, a middleweight champ, came through. And then there were country western shows, somebody like Slim Whitman or Hank Snow, a lot of those guys. Ferlin Huskey, he'd be in 'em. A lot of spangled suits. And then the carny shows would come through, and there'd be the stock-car races and bands playing in the park in the summertime. And small Big Bands kinda music, pop music from the '40s and '50s, dance bands playing stuff like "Begin the Beguine," and then I started listening to the radio and hearing songs which were different, like "Mule Train and "(Ghost) Riders in the Sky." Songs in a minor key. And when rock and roll came in, it seemed to be a kind of an extension of all that and it was accessible to me so I kind of jumped on that bandwagon and rolled on down the road.**

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**At that time, my favorite rock and roll performer was the inimitable Little Richard. And I played all of his songs. They were easy enough to play and I could scream them out. Eddie Cochran songs, Gene Vincent stuff, we played just about all those songs that we heard, that'd come across on the pop radio stations. But then I was also listening to the more deeper stations that came across late in the evening.**

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**The circuses came through. There were tent shows and carny midways. There was an awful lot of stock-car races, like the old cars with the country stock- car races – those were popular. I think it was the last days of carny shows. We'd see anything from the snake woman to pygmies to, God, the fat man, the snake woman, and some pretty risqué shows. Oh, risqué'd be hard-core burlesque. And guys in blackface. You'd see that, too. George Washington in blackface. And Napoleon wearing blackface. Weird Shakespearean things. People playing stuff that didn't even make any sense at the**

**time. But actually it did. I probably retained a lot of it because when I started writing songs, I started subliminally writing a lot of songs which I probably wouldn't have even attempted to even think about unless I had some concept of that type of reality of mixing genres and ages and different historical figures.**

**As for being bad, it was so cold that law and order prevailed. But there was very little law and order. I think our town had maybe three policemen.**

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**I did get to see Woody. I got the impression I was one of the few people if not the only person that came to visit him. I visited him at the Morristown hospital. I think it was an insane asylum. Maybe he was misdiagnosed at that time. I don't know. But it was obvious to me that he was in control of his mind. He asked me to bring him things. I was young and impressionable and I think I must have been shocked in some kind of way to find him where I found him.**

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**I heard Lead Belly singing some "Becky Deem" or "Walk from East St. Louis" with only "One Thin Dime." I thought, 'I want to sing that. I don't want to sing "Hound Dog" or whatever.' I wanted to sing like Blind Lemon song, like, "She's got eyes like diamonds, hair like an Indian squaw." 'That's what I want to sing. I want to sing that. I don't want to listen to the popular radio anymore.'**

**Folk music was delivering me something which was the way I always felt about life. And people. And institutions. And ideology. And it was just uncovering it all. And finding it all there.**

**Lonnie was playing at Folk City and I thought he was just great. He could play rings around anybody and he sang fantastic. One night he showed me something on the guitar that didn't make any sense to me at the time. But it was a style of playing that was mathematically different than any other kind of way to play. This was just one of the ways that he knew how to play. He could play very intricately also. But he showed me this mathematical formula that worked anywhere on the scale. It didn't mean anything to me at the time, and I never got to develop it until many, many years later. That's about the only thing anybody ever taught me that was profound on the guitar, which I've been able to use in my songs.**

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**You would have to make an impression on somebody. I picked that up from Van Ronk. There was many, many singers who were good but they couldn't focus their attention on anybody. So they couldn't really get inside somebody's head. So that person would be ambivalent towards them and not really care if they pass 'em by. But I learned you gotta be able to pin somebody down like where they couldn't get away so easy. You have to make yourself memorable in some kinda way.**

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**Café Wha. The place opened about noon and it would be nonstop entertainers, if you want to call them that, from noon until eight. Everyone played I think twenty minutes. I played with Freddy Neil, a guy who later wrote "Everyone's Talkin'," He was a big star down there. He would play mostly chain-gang songs and popular blues-based ballads and maybe some calypso-type folk songs. And he was the ringmaster besides, so I played in his band all day, played the harmonica for him, and I fit in. I didn't really learn much. I did that until about eight and they got fed and he would give me what he could. And the place was usually packed from twelve to eight with sailors or tourists and lunch-hour secretaries and people like that.**

**And then at eight, all the rest of the houses would open, like where you'd pass the basket and play. You had to be somewhat good to even play at those places. They had auditions but they didn't pay you anything and you made what you could. But the place that did pay was the Gaslight. That was a tough place to get into for someone without a reputation. And the guy down there that was the star of the street at the time was Dave Van Ronk. I'd heard his records when I was in Twin Cities. I'd heard some compilation records that he was on, and I thought he was really great.**

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**Folklore Center was where all the folk music in the world was happening. It was all going on there. Records and books and there weren't any tapes then but instruments, dulcimers, and banjos, and autoharps and harmonica racks. I'd never seen a harmonica rack before, a real one. I was makin' 'em out of a coat hanger. And records, of course. So it was a place to stay warm in the winter and just listen to records and learn stuff and meet all the folksingers that were coming in and out of town.**

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**All these people were monumental performers. John Jacob Niles was just incredible. He sounded like an old woman, but like an old, scary woman out of a Shakespeare play with a high, piercing, eerie,**

**wailing voice, and he had long, white hair and he played a strange instrument that I don't think anybody'd ever seen. Something that maybe only came over from the old country and didn't have many of them. That's where I got the song "It Ain't Me, Babe," from listening to him play. He used to sing a song called "Go Away from My Window." He used to play a bunch of eerie, spooky ballads and I only saw him a few times but he was highly impressive, left a lasting memory. Van Ronk himself was a colossal performer. He drove people crazy.**

**The New Lost City Ramblers played at schoolhouses and churches. They were never on the scene but I always made an attempt to see them. And I'd see the gospel shows. I'd go see Sister Rosetta Tharp and Dixie Hummingbirds and Swan Silvertones, I heard a lot of Blind Willie Johnson in Sister Rosetta Tharp and I thought if she wasn't singing gospel, she would be a great blues singer. She was singing gospel blues. And she played electric hollow-body guitar. I just loved the way she sounded and with a driving rhythm.**

**But I'd never really seen who I'd wanted to see. I would have wanted to see Blind Willie Johnson a lot. Like, "The Holy Ghost is a mystery", that kind of thing. I thought he was the deepest singer but I'd only heard him on records. The Robert Johnson record at that time was astounding. I played it for Van Ronk, and Van Ronk was like, "Who's this guy?" No one had heard of him before. That was an astounding record. What was astounding was just the sheer songwriting. I hadn't heard that before. I hadn't heard twelve-bar songs which could be each one identifiable in its own genre. And so many different rhythms that he'd set up just with his one guitar. I was pretty overwhelmed, actually.**

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**I never listened to any of the records I made. Once we completed the record and it was released, I didn't have any real reason to listen to them again and I never did. I never really thought they were perfect records in any kind of way. They weren't well-produced. You can say what you will about pop music; all the pop records were extremely well-produced and my records weren't well-produced. A lot of the sound on them was distorted. I always wanted to make the song come through in the best way possible. That's all I was concerned with. So, therefore, the performances weren't ideal on *any* of the records that I made.**

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**John Hammond. Yeah, he was [*laughs*]… John Hammond. He was kind of like a Damon Runyon character. One of these old Broadway guys. Buzz-cut haircut. Conservative dress, little narrow tie, well-schooled in all the music that we all loved. Before I left that day, he gave me some records… he gave me the Robert Johnson record. At the time, Columbia was putting it out and no one had ever heard any Robert Johnson songs. Maybe they were on a few of the reissue things here and there but they had 'em all in the vaults and they issued that record called *King of the Delta Blues*. He gave me one of the first copies of it. So that was early 1961 probably. And he gave me Bessie Smith records and Charlie Christian and a lot of stuff that he thought would interest me and then he told me, come back at a certain time to record.**

**It came to me that a producer really didn't do that much – Hammond didn't, the one that followed him didn't, the one after that didn't. After a certain period of time, the producer, whoever they were, assumed that I would bring in a preconceived song, which meant that they didn't have to do that. Usually a producer in charge of a session is in charge of everything, including the song. Well, if an artist is writing his own song, he doesn't have to do that. So what does the producer do? Beats me. On my records, it was more important to have a good engineer, I would think.**

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**I wrote a lot of songs in a quick amount of time. I could do that then, because the process was new to me. I felt like I'd discovered something no one else had ever discovered, and I was in a certain arena artistically that no one else had ever been in before, ever. Although I might have been wrong about that, considering some of the old troubadours who were in the days before recording but I thought that I needed to press on and get as far into it as I could.**

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**"Subterranean Homesick Blues"… I don't think I'd have wanted to do it all by myself. I could get more power out of it with a small group in back of me. Well, there wasn't any negative response to people who hadn't heard it before. I didn't understand what the gripe was all about. I'm a musician first and I can't self-analyze my own work, and I wasn't gonna cater to a crowd because I knew certain people would like it and certain people didn't like it. I mean, there's many of us who could've probably gone into this field or that field because of guaranteed success one way or another. But I never was interested in that. Negative response to me would be somebody stops coming to see you play or they flat-out don't want to deal with your recording. The negative response had nothing to do with me. I've read that Stravinsky had negative response, Coltrane, many negative responses. Charlie Parker had**

**lots of negative responses. People are always emotionally charged up when they feel some artist is not doing what they used to do.**

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**The British audiences were the first audiences that really accepted what I was doing at face value. To that crowd, it wasn't different at all. It was right in line with everything that they'd read about in school – the Shakespearean tradition, Byron, and Shelley.**

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**Mary Martin is this woman… she worked at Grossman's office, and I had many shows coming up and it was obvious that I needed a band to play them. Putting together a band can be tedious, and I was hoping that there was some existing band that I could just use. Butterfield was doing his thing. So who I really wanted was Al Kooper, who I thought was a perfectly complementary keyboard guy and he had a bass player named Harvey and there were a bunch of other people around.**

**But Mary said that she knew of a band out of Canada that were working out in Jersey. And in the past, I'd played with Ronnie Hawkins, who had made some records for Roulette, and I knew who Ronnie Hawkins was. And she said this band had been with him a long time and they knew this kind of music, and I should use them. And she knew them personally and a couple of 'em came up to New York. And we talked a while. I said I needed a band.**

**But I was just looking for a couple of guys, 'cause I wanted to put 'em with Kooper and the other guy, the bass player. But I ended up taking the guitar player and the drummer… Later, they became the group known as The Band but at that time I think they were called Ronnie Hawkins or The Hawks. Or something like that. They were working just rhythm and blues clubs. And the kind of music they were playing was cover tunes by Bobby Blue Bland and Junior Parker songs. And they did it quite well. But that wasn't what was happening at the time.**

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**Well, Mike Bloomfield, I always thought he should've stayed with me instead of going with Butterfield but that was his life to lead. I first heard him when Grossman had me come out to play at a club they had started in Chicago, and I think the name of the club was The Bear. He just introduced himself and said he'd heard my first record and he wanted to show me how the blues were played [*laughs*]. And I didn't feel much competitive with him. He could outplay anybody even at that point. Well, when it was time to bring in a guitar player to play on my record, I couldn't think of anybody but him. I mean, he was the best guitar player I ever heard on any level. He could flatpick and he could fingerpick, and it looked like he'd been just born to play guitar. And he came into the session once more carrying his guitar in a paper bag.**

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**You can be famous on the street where you live and that's one type of fame. You can be famous in your town, another kind of fame, you can be famous in a country. Or you can be famous and known only to a few people who are in a similar field. I mean, certain doctors are famous to other doctors, certain lawyers are famous to other lawyers, but the common man wouldn't really know who they were. The kind of fame that musicians seem to get is the kind of fame where everybody, whether they want to know who you are or not, your whole personal condition is just forced on them. And that becomes tricky, when people who don't know what you're really about suddenly know who you are.**

OUTTAKES 3 RELEASED on *The Story Of Travelin' Thru, 1967 – 1969*, a 7 minute video with two short audio clips from the interview released on the website: **www.bobdylan.com**, in early November 2019.

**Johnny Cash was the epitome of country music, he was … the living ultimate end.**

**He was an early supporter of mine … told me so, but I had been a fan of his long before that.**

# Early July 2001, Edna Gundersen (1)

Source: *USA Today*, US newspaper, 15 July 2001.

The venue of this interview is unknown.

**Dylan's melodies always are a-changin'**

While the globe marked his 60th birthday with rapturous tributes usually reserved for retirement parties and obituaries, Bob Dylan was busy being reborn. Love and Theft, due Sept. 11 on Columbia, renders all those eulogies incomplete and premature. Recorded with his touring band, Texas keyboardist Auggie Myers and assorted extras, Dylan's 43rd album exudes the breezy confidence of a veteran and the adventurous energy of a budding prodigy. It defies expectations posed by both 1997's atmospheric Time Out of Mind, a meditation on mortality that netted three Grammys, including best album, and 2000's Things Have Changed, the sly Wonderboys theme that won an Oscar and Golden Globe.

Things have changed again. Love and Theft finds pop's inscrutable iconoclast breaking new ground while simultaneously mining gloried traditions in American song, from Delta blues to Appalachian strains to lovesick croons. The result is contemporary yet rootsy, and an unexpected left turn from the million-selling time. Dylan could be assessing that risk in the lounge-geared Bye and Bye: "I'm walking on briars; I'm not even acquainted with my old desires."

Dylan tells USA TODAY exclusively that the album is not tangled up in blueprints of earlier landmarks.

**"The songs don't have any genetic history,"** Dylan says. **"Is it like Time Out of Mind or Oh Mercy or Blood on the Tracks or whatever? Probably not. I think of it more as a greatest-hits album, volume one or volume two. Without the hits – not yet, anyway."**

The 12 originals **"are variations on the 12-bar theme and blues-based melodies,"** he adds. **"The music here is an electronic grid, the lyrics being the substructure that holds it all together."**

Dylan roams from the rockabilly-fueled Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum and upbeat Western swing of Summer Days to the hymnlike Sugar Baby, twangy Floater and hard-rocking Honest with Me. He tests his upper register on Moonlight, evokes Ralph Stanley in the moody Highwater (For Charlie Patton) and experiments with shifting tempos in Cry Awhile. In Lonesome Day Blues, he strains to decipher the wind's whispers. In the earthy Po' Boy, a soulful standout, he's feeding swine and washing dishes. All tunes were composed recently except for his rerecorded Mississippi, cut from Time and later covered by Sheryl Crow.

"Love and Theft is an album for the masses, not just the core Bob Dylan fans," says Columbia president Don Ienner. "A lot of people aren't being served by much of the music that they hear today, and this is the kind of record that people are hungry for."

# Early July 2001, Edna Gundersen (2)

Source: *USA Today*, US newspaper, 16 July 2001, page D1.

The venue of this interview is unknown.

***'Love' Takes Dylan in different direction***

The veteran is back with new album, new energy.

While the globe marked his 60th birthday with rapturous tributes usually reserved for retirement parties and obituaries, Bob Dylan was busy being reborn. *Love and Theft*, due Sept. 11 on Columbia, renders all those eulogies incomplete and premature. Recorded with his touring band, Texas keyboardist Augie Meyers and assorted extras, Dylan's 43rd album exudes the breezy confidence of a veteran and the adventurous energy of a budding prodigy.

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Dylan is quick to note that the album is not tangled up in blueprints of earlier landmarks.

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# August to November 2006, Jann Wenner

Source: *Rolling Stone: The Fortieth Anniversary,* US magazine, Issue 1025/1026, 3-17 May 2007, pages 48, 50, 52, 54.

The interview took place at an unknown location.

**Bob Dylan**

You've been on the road pretty steadily for forty years.

**I like the originality of being on the road. It's real life, in real time.**

What is it that is so enjoyable?

**The groupies and the drinking and the parties backstage…** [Laughs] **Why would anybody? Performers are performers. Why do you still edit your magazine?**

It's something I do well, and one gets pleasure out of something one does well.

**Exactly. It's the one thing in life you find you can do well.**

You said that going out on the road makes you write more.

**Yeah. That would be true, to a certain degree. But if you don't have to write songs, why write them? Especially if you've got so many you could never play – there wouldn't be enough time to play them all, anyway. I've got enough where I don't really feel the urge to write anything additional.**

You just released this amazing new record. The title, Modern Times, seems to be a very deliberate statement.

**Well, I don't know. Can you think of a better title?**

Highway 61 Revisited. How did you decide on that title?

**Titles are something that come after you've done whatever it is you've done. I don't set out with a title. It was something that probably just passed through my mind. Why, does it have some impact?**

It seems that you set out to assess America right now. Is there a general theme to the record?

**You would have to ask every individual person who hears it what it would mean. It would probably mean many things on many levels to many different kinds of people.**

To me, it seems that it's about war and corruption.

**Well, all my records are, to a certain degree. That's the nature of them.**

Your records are about power, knowledge, salvation.

**That would be not so easy for me to relate to, what a record is about. It is a statement, it's its own statement, its own entity, rather than being about something else. If I was a painter… I don't paint the chair, I would paint feelings about the chair.**

You're a student of history. If you were to take the current moment and put it in a historical context, where do you think we are?

**That would be hard to do, unless you put yourself ten years into the future. It's not the nature of a song to imply what's going on under any current philosophy any more than… how can I explain it? Like all the music that came out of the First and Second World Wars. Did you ever notice how lighthearted it was? If you listen to the songs from that period, you would think that there's nothing gloomy on the horizon.**

Do you think it's gloomy on the horizon?

**In what sense do you mean?**

Bob, come on.

**No, you come on. In what sense do you mean that? If you're talking about in a political sense…**

In a general political, spiritual, historical sense. You're talking about the end of times on this record, you've got a very gloomy vision of the world, you're saying, "I'm facing the end of my life and looking at all this…"

**Aren't we all always doing that?**

No, some people are trying to avoid it. But I'm trying to interview you and you're not being very helpful with this.

**Jann, have I ever been helpful?**

You have been in the past. You gave some really great interviews in the last several years.

**Yeah, but I wasn't on tour when I was doing them; I could be fully present. But now, I'm thinking about amps going out and…**

You don't have people taking care of those for you?

**You would hope.**

You can't find a good road manager, is that the problem here?

**Yeah** [laughs].

What can I do to get you to take this seriously?

**I'm taking it seriously.**

You're not.

**Of course I am. You're the one who's here to be celebrated. Forty years… forty years with a magazine that obviously now has intellectual recognition. Did you ever think that would happen when you started?**

I was taking it seriously.

**Look how far you've come. You're the one to be interviewed. I want to know just as much from you as you want to know from me. I would love to have you on our radio show and interview you for an hour.**

I'm going to do that as soon as we're done with this. We'll just turn it around and flip it and do that.

**You've seen more music changes than me.**

Oh, please,

**No, no please. You please. You've seen it all from the top. I've seen it maybe from… also near the top.**

From the bottom up, what's the view today? Modern Times is not lighthearted. And it seems like you are worried about the times we're in and what we may or may not have learned as a country. It seems not distant from Highway 61 or earlier records where you describe a pretty difficult situation in the country, but nothing in this record indicates anything has gotten better – indeed, it's gotten worse.

**Well, America's a different place than it was when those other records were made. It was more like Europe used to be, where every territory was different – every county was different, every state was different. A different culture, different architecture, different food. You could go a hundred miles in the States, and it would be like going from Stalingrad to Paris or something. It's just not that way anymore. It's all homogenized. People wear the same clothes, eat the same food, think the same things.**

**This style of music, which punctuates my music, comes from an older period of time, a period of time that I lived through. So it's very accessible to me. Someone who was not around at that period of time, it wouldn't be accessible to them. For them, it would be more of a revivalist thing or a historical thing. You're from that time, too. I'm sure you know all these same things. The first time I ever went to London, which was in the early Sixties, '61, they still had the rubble and the damaged buildings from Hitler's bombs. That was how close the complete destruction of Europe was to the period of time when I was coming up.**

**Robert Johnson had just died, three years before I was born. All the great original artists were still there to be heard, felt and seen. Once that gets into your blood, you can't get rid of it that easily.**

What gets in your blood?

**That whole culture, that period of time, that old America.**

You mean the 1920s and 1930s?

**It wouldn't have made sense to talk to somebody who was, say, in their fifties** [back then]**, to ask him, "What was it like in the late 1800s or 1900s?" It wouldn't have interested anybody. But for some reason, the 1950s and 1960s interest people now. A part of the reason, if not the whole reason, is the atom bomb. The atom bomb fueled the entire world that came after it. It showed that indiscriminate killing and indiscriminate homicide on a mass level was possible… whereas if you look at warfare up until that point, you had to see somebody to shoot them or maim them, you had to look at them. You don't have to do that anymore.**

With the atom bomb, man – suddenly, and for the first time – had the power to utterly destroy mankind.

**I think so. I'm sure that fueled all aspects of society. I know it gave rise to the music we were playing. If you look at all these early performers, they were atom-bomb-fueled. Jerry Lee, Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, Elvis, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran…**

How were they atom-bomb-fueled?

**They were fast and furious, their songs were all on the edge. Music was never like that before, Lyrically, you had the blues singers, but Ma Rainey wasn't singing about the stuff that Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee were singing about, nobody was singing with that type of fire and destruction. They paid a heavy price for that, because obviously the older generation took notice and kind of got rid of them as quickly as they could recognize them. Jerry Lee got ostracized, Chuck Berry went to jail, Elvis, of course, we know what happened to him. Buddy Holly in a plane crash, Little Richard, all that stuff…**

Then, in this new record, you're still dealing with the cultural effects of the bomb?

**I think so.**

But doing it in the musical styles of earlier generations? I don't hear much rock in there.

**You don't hear any rock in there, because I'm not familiar with rock music. It's not something that I feel assimilated into. It's too spacey, there's too much space in it. It doesn't get to the point quick enough, if there is a point. It's what's taken over, but the rock & roll element's been kind of taken out… I don't know how to put it. It either reaches you or it doesn't reach you. I just like the older music better.**

What do you think of the historical moment we're in today? We seem to be hell-bent on destruction. Do you worry about global warming?

**Where's the global warming? It's freezing here.**

It seems a pretty frightening outlook.

**I think what you're driving at, though, is we expect politicians to solve all our problems. I don't expect politicians to solve anybody's problems.**

Who is going to solve them?

**Our own selves. We've got to take the world by the horns and solve our own problems. The world owes us nothing, each and every one of us, the world owes us not one single thing. Politicians or whoever.**

Do you think America is a force for good in the world today?

**Theoretically.**

But in practical fact…

**The practical fact is always different than theory.**

What do you think the practical fact is right now?

**With what's going on? Human nature hasn't really changed in 3,000 years. Maybe the obstacles and actualities and daily customs change, but human nature really hasn't changed. It cannot change. It's not made to change.**

Do you find yourself being a more religious person these days?

**A religious person? Religion is supposedly a force for positive good. Where can you look in the world and see that religion has been a force for positive good? Where can you look at humanity and say, "Humanity has been uplifted by a connection to a godly power"?**

Meaning organized religion?

**Corporations are religions. It depends what you talk about with a religion… Anything is a religion.**

At one point, you took on Christianity in a very serious way, and then Judaism. Where are you now with all that?

**Religion is something that is mostly outward appearance. Faith is a different thing. How many religions are there in the world? Quite a few, actually.**

What is your faith these days?

**Faith doesn't have a name. It doesn't have a category. It's oblique. So it's unspeakable. We degrade faith by talking about religion.**

When you write songs where you say you walk in "the mystical garden," there's a lot of religious imagery.

**In the mystic garden. That kind of imagery is just as natural to me as breathing, because the world of folk songs has enveloped me for so long. My terminology all comes from folk music. It doesn't come from the radio or TV or computers or any of that stuff. It's embedded in the folk music of the English language.**

Much of which comes from the Bible.

**Yeah, a lot of it is biblical, a lot of it is just troubadour stuff, a lot of it is stuff that Uncle Dave Macon would sing off the top of his head.**

What do you take faith in?

**Nature. Just elemental nature. I'm still tramping my way through the forest, really, on daily excursions. Nature doesn't change. And if there is any war going on on a big level today, it's against nature.**

On Modern Times, it seems like you're dealing with the forces of reckoning.

**Reckoning? You mean every day is a judgment? That's all instilled in me. I wouldn't know how to get rid of it.**

How is it instilled in you?

**It's instilled in me by the way I grew up, where I come from, early feelings…**

Is it something you see as coming or something that's happening right now?

**We really don't know much about the great Judgment Day that's coming, because we've got nobody to come back and tell us about it. We can only assume certain things because of what we've been taught.**

What do you assume is happening in the world around us when you walk in the mystical garden?

**Mystic garden.**

You see things closing in, you see the darkness coming.

**I could have come up with that line thirty years ago. This is all the same thing from different angles.**

It's like the landscape of "Desolation Row," only you've changed from outrage to acceptance.

**I think as we get older, we all come to that feeling, one way or another. We've seen enough happening to know that things are a certain way, and even if they're changed, they're still going to be that certain way.**

Therefore, we have to accept it?

**I've always accepted that. I don't think I've thought about things any differently in the whole time I've been around, really.**

You've resisted talking about your past for years. In Chronicles and No Direction Home, you're writing about your legacy. Why are you doing it now?

**Well, it probably was because enough things have resolved themselves, and I had an editor who was a good ally. I could have probably done it earlier, but I just didn't have the encouragement.**

Did you enjoy it?

**When I did it, I did, yeah. What I didn't like about it was the constant rereading and revising, because I'm not used to that. A song is nothing compared to some kind of literary thing. A song, you can keep it with you, you can hum it, you can kind of go over things when you're out and around, you can keep it in your mind. It's all small. But you can't do that with a book. If you want to check it, you have to reread what you've done. It's very time-consuming, and I didn't like that part of it.**

**If I wasn't inspired to do it, I wouldn't do it. So great flashes would come to me. These waves would come, and I would have to either mark things down or have to go back to where I could write things and keep typewriters here and there and do that. But it was enjoyable in that I only did it when I was inspired to do it and never touched it when I wasn't. I never tried to manufacture the inspiration.**

I was struck by your account of coming to New York when you were young, going to the public library, and by the very deliberate and methodical fashion in which you went about learning your craft and building your knowledge.

**But I was learning everything I needed to learn from real live people who were really there at the time, so I was in it firsthand. I think that's where my feelings came from, in terms of all of them early songs. Even songs at later dates, it's "What is human nature really like?" Not "What am I like, what do I like, what don't I like, what am I all about?" Not that kind of thing, but "What are all these invisible spirits all about?" I think that's where songs like "Blowin' in the Wind" come from. It's a more ancient struggle than what might currently be seen as the fulcrum of where the lyrics are coming out of.**

Are you surprised that you made a record today that's as vital and as important and as creative as any you've made in the past?

**No. No, I knew I was going to make it. I'm surprised that it sold as many records as it did, so a lot of people must feel a similar way.**

Why do you think people reacted so strongly to you in the 1960s? What did you reach in people that resonated so deeply?

**Because I had – and perhaps still do have – that originality that others don't have. Because I come from a time when you had to be original, and you had to have some kind of God-given talent just to begin with. You couldn't manufacture that. Just about everybody and anybody who was around in the**

**Fifties and Sixties had a degree of originality. That was the only way you could get in the door. That was just a necessary part of your makeup, which needed to be there.**

**My thing was never heard or seen before, but it didn't come out of a vacuum. There's a direct correlation between something like Highway 61 Revisited and "Blue Yodel No. 9," by Jimmie Rodgers. It just doesn't spring out of the earth without rhyme or reason.**

Nobody had heard stuff said that way or spoken that way.

**But nobody had heard the stuff that we heard. You came up in the Fifties. There was more freethinking then, there wasn't such mass comformity as there is today. Today, a freethinking person gets ridiculed. Back then, they were just sort of ostracized and maybe avoided. The popular consensus at the time, in this time we're speaking about, was a very mild form of entertainment; it was boring and uninteresting. Beneath that surface, though, there was an entirely different world.**

And you tapped into that world?

**We all did. Some of us decided we could live in this world. Others decided, well, they could visit it once in a while, but it wasn't necessarily their thing.**

So you lived in it.

**I did.**

And everybody else was just visiting?

**Yeah, like tourists. Like at the sock hop.**

So people entered your world and were awed by it, but couldn't live in it?

**No, I don't think you could, any more than… did you ever see Little Richard perform? You could be awed by it, but you were not a part of it. Unless, of course, you wanted to be a part of it, then it was open to you.**

Last night, you chose to close with "All Along the Watchtower," which has now become an anthem of yours.

**Who knew?**

Did you rediscover that song because of Hendrix?

**Probably.**

Had you heard that before, in your mind, what he did with it?

**No, that record's kind of a mystery to me, anyway. When he made it, it caused me to sit up and pay attention. Like, "Oh, there might be more to that than I had dreamed."**

What did you do from Highway 61 Revisited last night, "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues"? How did you choose that one? I love the rearrangement.

**You know, it's not rearranged. There's a different dynamic. The dynamic on all of those songs can change from night to night, because of the style of music that I've grown accustomed to playing, which I always could play. But you can't do everything. You can't just display everything at the same time.**

You change them to make it more fun for yourself?

**Well, it's more contrived than that.**

Why is it more contrived?

**It's because I have so many different types of songs, speaking musically: fast ballads, slow ballads, minor-key twelve-bar things, major-key twelve-bar things, twelve-bar pieces that differ greatly in the dynamics of the rhythm, which causes the lyrics, the way you deliver them, to change from night to night. It's based on an infinite system where you don't necessarily have to feel good to play it, but if you just follow the rules, you can do different things every night.**

Take "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," for instance, which you did last night. Don't people come to the show and want to hear that original, mournful version?

**I don't know who would, unless it's somebody who bought that record in 1960-what. But it's the same song, and I'm the same person, and it's always been there. Those early songs I made with just an acoustic guitar. In a way, those are like demos, because that's what people do when they demo a song, they just go in and play it with their acoustic guitar, and that's what it is. Then they develop the song later.**

Do you think your performance of it in this way gives it a different meaning? Originally it was lost and sad; now it's assertive.

**Yeah. Astrologically, you're dealing with a different day every day of the week. Every day is a different color, a different planet rules it. You could say the same thing, you could feel the same way, you could**

**write the same thing, but if it's on a Tuesday, it's going to be different than if it comes out on Friday. That's just a fact. You can ask any astrologer.**

When you see Bono do his Africa relief work or Bruce Springsteen go out and do the Vote for Change Tour, do you think that rock music can be a voice for change?

**Maybe to some people it can. A person feels good when they do charity work. What Bono does is a good thing. Bruce has got a certain degree of power. He can use that power any way he sees fit. You have to applaud him for it. He's not playing around, and he means what he says.**

But do you think rock music is a voice for change?

**It's a change in lifestyle. I don't know. I've never been affected by it that way, so I can't really say.**

When you heard music as a young kid, there was a calling of your talent, but wasn't there also a calling of "My life can be different"?

**Yeah, but that was a calling. People who have a calling to play it are different than people who just play it for frivolity, people who have… whose motives aren't sincere. You talk about musicians – maybe one in a thousand are worth listening to. In terms of what they have to say, in terms of what they're putting forth, in terms of the world they're involved in, in terms of moving you from here to there. There's not many musicians capable of that.**

A few of your friends and contemporaries: What do you think of Neil Young?

**Neil is very sincere, if nothing else. He's sincere, and he's got a God-given talent, with that voice of his, and the melodic strain that runs through absolutely everything he does. He could be at his most thrashy, but it's still going to be elevated by some melody. Neil's the only one who does that. There's nobody in his category.**

Tell me about George Harrison.

**George got stuck with being the Beatle that had to fight to get songs on records because of Lennon and McCartney. Well, who wouldn't get stuck? If George had had his own group and was writing his own songs back then, he'd have been probably just as big as anybody. George had an uncanny ability to just play chords that didn't seem to be connected in any kind of way and come up with a melody and a song. I don't know anybody else who could do that, either. What can I tell you? He was from that old line of playing where every note was a note to be counted.**

You were very close, right?

**Yeah.**

What was the nature of your friendship?

**We'd known each other since the old days, really. I knew the Beatles really early on, all of them.**

What was your relationship with John Lennon like? Somewhat competitive?

**Yeah. Only to a certain extent, but not really. Him and McCartney both, really, they were fantastic singers. Lennon, to this day, it's hard to find a better singer than Lennon was, or than McCartney was and still is. I'm in awe of McCartney. He's about the only one that I am in awe of. He can do it all. And he's never let up. He's got the gift for melody, he's got the rhythm, he can play any instrument. He can scream and shout as good as anybody, and he can sing a ballad as good as anybody. And his melodies are effortless, that's what you have to be in awe of… He's just so damn effortless. I just wish he'd quit** [laughs]**. Everything that comes out of his mouth is just framed in melody.**

What do you think accounted for that period in the Sixties that was so remarkably creative?

**It was a more singular time. I think what we talked about in the early part of the interview is something to be thought about: the first atom bomb that went off. That was explosive, and it gave rise to a different type of personality. You had fiery people, whereas before, everything was more in the backwoods and more secretive. The same things were going on back then, they were just more isolated or taking place in the upper rooms. That's what I think, anyway. I don't know why it was a more powerful period of time. I don't feel it was any less uncomfortable than it is today.**

What does it feel like to grow older? Do you feel wiser? Happier? More creaky in your bones?

**Things begin to happen that you never considered before. You realize how fragile a human being is and how something insignificant, like what happened to your finger or your toe or something like that, may be enough to really sit you down for a while. I've certainly had trouble in those areas. As you go on, you realize life goes by at a very fast pace, so you've got to slow everything down, because it's going by too quick. I think we all realize it's still going down fast, and we're just not quite as agile as we used to be.**

Do you feel wiser?

**Wiser? Not necessarily.**

Happier?

**I don't think happier… Happiness to me is just being able to breathe well.**

You seem happier to me, less angry and amped up and pissed off.

**Oh. It depends what hour of the day you catch me in, though. It'll get better before it gets worse.**

Do you still try to reach your audience every night, every listener there?

**In the same way that the Stanley Brothers would have done or Chuck Berry would do: try to display talent in a way that could be conceivable.**

Are you thinking about that person in the last row or up there in the balcony?

**No, I'm not. I know a lot of performers say they do, but I don't know how much they really do. To me, the relationship between a performer and the audience is definitely anything but a buddy-buddy thing, any more than me going in and admiring a Van Gogh painting and thinking that me and him are on the same level because I like his painting.**

So you're there to do your art, and they're there to appreciate it and try to understand it.

**I would hope so. I think so.**

How do you describe your influence when you first came out?

**Maybe just like what the books say, that my stuff allowed people to write and perform stuff they felt like singing, which hadn't been done before. But I don't think about that as much of an influence.**

You just gave them the opportunity to open up their own thinking?

**Yeah, but I never opened up my own thinking. My stuff was never about me, per se, so everybody who came after who thought it was about me, per se, or them, per se, they took the wrong road.**

Do you think you have any influence on things right now?

**Well, how many performers are out there doing what we do night after night? How many shows are you going to go to? We play on some of these festivals, and me and my band are the only performers there doing anything remotely close to what we're doing in the type of music that it is. It almost like Tony Bennett or something – it's, like, archaic. You have to be thankful that you still have a generous audience.**

# 28 May 2008, Alan Jackson

Source: *The Times*, UK newspaper, 6 June 2008, times2 section, pages 7-9. A fuller version, which was published online at https://www.alanjacksoninterviews.com/Article_5.html, is copied here.

The interview took place in Odense, Denmark.

**He's got everything he needs, he's an artist… he don't look back**

Odense, Denmark, and the not-quite-grand hotel that, for the next two nights, will be some approximation of a home away from home for Bob Dylan. He arrived here this morning from Reykjavic, four days after his 67th birthday and in the beginning stages of a lengthy itinerary that will take him onwards through Scandinavia, the Eastern bloc, Austria, Italy, France, Andorra, Spain and Portugal between now and mid-July. To his irritation, others long ago gave this ongoing schedule the would-be mythic title of The Never-Ending Tour (habitually, he plays upwards of 100 concerts each year, often considerably more). As he prefers to see it, **"I'm just making my living by plying a trade."**

Achieving my promised audience with the legendary singer-songwriter and now exhibited painter proves to be a two-step process. Firstly his road manager takes me from the lobby to a darkened, sparsely-furnished meeting room in which an orange-haired woman is sitting straight-backed and making a show of reading a novel. "If you could just wait here," he begins then disappears, his mobile clamped to his ear. Left alone, I introduce myself to the woman but she merely smiles enigmatically and continues with her book. Who is or was she? I still have no idea.

Minutes later I am collected, taken up a flight of stairs and ushered along a corridor towards a door that is slightly ajar. As I approach it is opened by Dylan himself, who welcomes me inside with a soft handshake and a quick volley of courtesies: 'How have you been (I have interviewed him twice before, in 1997 and again in 2001)?', 'What's been going on in your life?' and 'Are you OK with the dark (here too in what appears to be his bedroom, all the curtains have been drawn against the fading sunlight outside)?'

My eyes adjusting to this premature twilight, I take in the fact that he is wearing boots, jeans and a loose sweatshirt, its sleeves pushed up above the elbows. Meanwhile and as we take seats at right angles to each other, he presses his fingertips into his grey-flecked curls and vigorously rubs his scalp, as if in doing so he will focus his mind. Which is when I place on the low table between us the book that I have brought with me. **"Heh-heh-heh!"** Dylan chuckles, reaching out for it. **"This is pretty handsome stuff."**

He is looking at a straight-from-the-presses copy of The Drawn Blank Series, produced by the Halcyon Gallery to coincide with the exhibition of that name, staged at their new premises in a Georgian town house in Mayfair's Bruton Street. Will he visit the show itself? **"I don't know,"** he says, seemingly transfixed by the book's cover, his voice the familiar rasp. **"I have all these dates to play. It might not be possible. I'd like to. We'll have to see."**

The haphazard process leading up to this London show began nearly 20 years ago, at which point he was approached by an editor at the American publishing company Random House. **"They'd seen some of my sketches somewhere and asked if I'd like to do a whole book. Why not, you know? There was no predetermined brief. 'Just deal with the material to hand, whatever that is. And do it however you want. You can be fussy or you can be slam-bang. It doesn't matter.' Then they gave me a drawing book, I took it away with me and turned it back in again full three years later."**

Published in 1994 with the briefer title Drawn Blank, the resultant images had been executed both on the hoof while he was touring and in a more structured way in studios, using models (**"Just anyone who'd be open to doing it."**) and lights. What was going on in his own life during that three year period, to inform or provide a back story to the work? **"Just the usual,"** Dylan shrugs, by now fixed in the hunkered-forward, hands-clasped position he will maintain for most of our time together. **"I try to live as simply as is possible and was just drawing whatever I felt like drawing, whenever I felt like doing it. The idea was always to do it without affectation or self-reference, to provide some kind of panoramic view of the world as I was seeing it at the time."**

Built up of images that are often contemplative, sometimes exuberant but consistently technically accomplished and engaging, that view is of train halts, diners and dockyards, barflys, dandies and uniformed drivers, whether glimpsed in New Orleans or New York, Stockholm or South Dakota. And of women. We're left in no doubt but that Dylan likes women. **"They weren't actually there at the same time,"** he notes quickly, pointing, when

his page-turning reveals the painting Two Sisters, its subjects lounging, one clothed, the other naked but for her bra. **"They posed separately and I put them together afterwards."**

There was little precedent within his own family for this talented eye, it seems. **"Instead of playing cards, my maternal grandmother would do these little still lives, but I can't really say that had any influence on what I've done."** Art formed no part of his formal education either and he recalls there being no public galleries in the Minnesotan communities (first Duluth, then Hibbing) of his youth. **"I was in my teens before I started to see books of paintings in the school library – frescos or the work of Michelangelo, that kind of thing. And I didn't really see the stuff that properly had an impact on me – Matisse, Durais, Monet, Gauguin – 'til later on, when I was in my '20s."**

By then, Dylan the university drop-out and fledgling folk performer had gravitated to New York, where he quickly discovered the Metropolitan Museum of Art. **"It was overwhelming for me at the time, the immensity and sheer variety of stuff on display. The first exhibition I saw there was of Gauguin paintings and I found I could stand in front of any one of them for as long as I'd sit at the movies, yet not get tired on my feet. I'd lose all sense of time. It was an intriguing thing."**

It was as his music career gathered pace that first he found himself trying his own hand at drawing. **"Mostly when I was on a train or in a cafe, just to make sense of what was in my immediate world. I found it relaxed me. Some of the stuff I kept, some I didn't."** It was sketches completed in this manner and spirit that, years later, came to the attention of Random House and led to that commission. However, little accord was given to the book on its eventual publication.

**"The critics didn't want to review it. The publisher told me they couldn't get past the idea of another singer who dabbled. You know, like, 'David Bowie, Joni Mitchell, Paul McCartney… Everyone's doing it these days.' No-one from the singing profession was going to be taken seriously by the art world, I was told, but that was OK. I wasn't expecting anything phenomenal to happen. I mean, it's not like the drawings were revolutionary. They weren't going to change anyone's way of thinking."**

But years later there came an approach from the Chemnitz City Art Gallery in Germany. A fan in particular of the 1965 album Bringing It All Back Home, its director Ingrid Mossinger had felt it likely that someone as adept as he in the use of metaphoric and abstract language might also draw or paint. Her research then led her to the book Drawn Blank, in the preface of which Dylan wrote of hoping to "eventually complete" its collection of sketches. She made contact with him through his management and encouraged him to do just that.

The method used to turn them into the paintings about to go on exhibition in London involved making digital scans of the original drawings, enlarging and then transferring them onto heavy paper ready for re-working. At the German gallery's suggestion, Dylan then experimented with treating individual images with a variety of colours. **"And doing so subverted the light. Every picture spoke a different language to me as the various colours were applied."**

Already, attempts have been made to pin down and name his influences. When I mention this, Dylan wrongly takes it as a suggestion that the resultant work is pastiche or somehow derivative. **"I haven't trained in any academy where you learn how to do something in the style of Degas or Van Gogh, or how to copy Da Vinci,"** he retorts. **"I don't have that facility to copy note for note. Influenced by? If I had the ability to paint like any of those guys I might see the similarity, but I don't. If there is anything it's just by accident and instinctive."** Which is all that any critic was suggesting, after all. But, it seems, he is as uncomfortable at having his paintings deconstructed as he is his songs.

Of the latter process, he said on our last meeting, **"These so-called connoisseurs of Bob Dylan music? I don't feel they know a thing or have an inkling of who I am and what I'm about. That such people have spent so much time thinking about who? Me? Get a life, please."** And today, he expresses similar impatience with those critics who have read into his art a variety of underlying feelings – anonymity, transience, rootlessness, even loneliness. Reaching again for the Halcyon book. **"Let's have a look, shall we** (the pages fall open at Woman In Red Lion Pub, her dress executed in a vivid yellow)? **Do you see loneliness in that? Or that** (Six Women)? **I don't. And this one's just a pastoral scene** (Sunday Afternoon). **What's rootless, transient and lonely about that, tell me? It's a mystery why anybody would say or even think such a thing."**

And the idea that, in framing various of the images with windows and doors, he is revealing himself as a perennial outsider, forced by his name and status to observe the world rather than connect directly with it? Dylan rolls his eyes. **"I just find it to be less satisfying to have the ends** (by which he means the edges of the image) **being endless, so I'll put a window there or block it in some way. It just looks better to me that way."**

So he would prefer a purely emotional, instinctive response to the work rather than any searching for themes and insights? **"If it pleases the eye of the beholder… There's no more to it than that, to my mind. Or even if it repels the eye. Either one is fine."**

On both our previous meetings, Dylan voiced his disdain for those completists who would wish to see every scrap of paper he has ever written upon or hear every studio out-take that he has rejected. With that in mind, I ask if in personal terms it was a big deal for him to actually sign his name on each of the Drawn Blank paintings. **"Yes!"** he exclaims, laughing. **"I finally grew into it but yes, it was."** And did he perhaps practice his signature in advance? **"I did actually because it's tricky getting it just right. Finally you think, 'Oh, to hell…' and just go for it, like you're writing a cheque or something."**

He has, he says, no particular favourite among the images. **"But it's the same as with the early songs… In the '60s when we were making records quickly, by the time they came out we were way past the recorded versions and were saying, 'No, don't release that. We're playing it this way now.' So it is with the art. I find myself thinking, 'I could have done this or that to make it better.' In the end though, you've just got to let the work go and hope you'll know to do better next time."**

When I ask if he finds the art establishment preferable to the one he is more used to, Dylan grins and pulls a face of mock disgust. **"The music world's a made-up bunch of hypocritical rubbish. I know from publishing a memoir (2004's Chronicles Volume One) that the book people are a whole lot saner. And the art world? From the small steps I've taken in it, I'd say, yeah, the people are honest, upfront and deliver what they say. Basically, they are who they say they are. They don't pretend. And having been in the music world most of my life (he laughs again), I can tell you it's not that way. Let's just say it's less… dignified."**

He tells me he continued to draw for his pleasure after the Random House commission was fulfilled. **"Not as intensely but yes, I have sketchbooks from the years since then. Of course, what I release to the public and what I keep for myself are two different things."** And already on the table are proposals for two future series of paintings, the first of which would involve having celebrities sit for him. **"I could pick the names myself but don't want to. I'd rather be given a list and have someone else contact the people to find out if they're up for it. So I'm waiting to see who they might be thinking of. I assume it's movers and shakers. You know, inventors, mathematicians, scientists, business people, actors… We'll see.**

**"But what interests me more is the idea of a collection based on historically romantic figures. Napoleon and Josephine, Dante and Beatrice, Captain John Smith and Pocahontas, Brad and Angelina** (here he laughs broadly). **I could use my own imagination for that. It wouldn't have to be the actual people, obviously."** But the latter two might be delighted to sit for him, no? Dylan chuckles at the possibility. **"Maybe. Who knows? All I'll say is that I'm intrigued by the basic idea. Whether or not it comes to fruition, time will tell. This** (The Drawn Blank Series) **was easy to do because it didn't clash with any other commitments. If something does, then I simply cannot do it."**

By commitments, one presumes Dylan means not just his touring schedule but also his personal and familial relationships. Only the bald facts are known in this regard. He has four grown-up children (Jesse, Anne, Samuel and rock singer Jakob) from a 10-year marriage to former model Sara Lowndes that ended in divorce in 1977. And in 2001 it was revealed by a biographer that he was subsequently married for the period 1986 to 1992 to one of his former backing singers, Carol Dennis, and has another daughter Desiree, also now an adult, from the union.

But enquiries about his non-work life causes him to shut down. Not even a fact as basic as that of where he lives (his main home is believed to be a mansion on the coast beyond Los Angeles) receives ready validation and when I ask if he has a studio in which he worked on the paintings, he will offer only, **"Well, there are spaces in some of the properties where I can do just about any old thing,"** before looking off into the middle distance, awaiting the next question.

Of course, such reticence has earned him a reputation as rock's grumpy old man, a curmudgeon who refuses to appear grateful for the fact that he is revered and adored. But whether or not he intends that, such determined self-protection merely enhances the myth and mystery. Today and after spending much of the 1980s through to the mid '90s out in the critical cold, Dylan's star is higher than at any time since the 1960s, the decade with which he is most closely associated (erroneously in his view). Honours, awards and citations all but rain down upon him these days: it is as if we have all awoken to the fact that we will not see his like again. Not that anyone would hope than that he has many years yet to live. **"Well, thank you for that,"** he notes with a laugh.

For any further insights into his private world we must wait to see what, if any crumbs are thrown in the next installment of the intended three-book Chronicles **("I could do more. It wouldn't be a problem in terms of material."**), at which he is already at work. Yes, he allows, he was gratified by the critical and commercial success of Volume One. **"Especially given the effort that went into it. Writing any kind of book is a lonely thing. You cut yourself off from friends and family in order to find that necessarily quiet place in your mind. You have to disassociate and detach yourself from just about everything and everybody. I didn't like that part of it at all.**

**"It took me maybe two years in total. I was touring at the same time so in the beginning on days off or on a bus I'd write my thoughts out in longhand or on a typewriter. It was the transcribing of the stuff,**

**the re-reading and retelling of it, that was time-consuming and I came to figure that there had to be a better way. I know what that is now. You need a full-time secretary so that you can get the ideas down immediately then deal with them later."**

Meanwhile there is the continuing delight that is his own radio show (he smiles at the very mention of it), Theme Time Radio Hour With Your Host Bob Dylan, the brainchild of America's XM Satellite service and now broadcast weekly here on BBC Radio 2. And later this year he will release a further volume within the ongoing Bob Dylan Bootleg Series, featuring previously unreleased or rare material alongside alternative versions of existing tracks recorded between 1989 and 2006. Coming on top of the recent award to him of a special Pulitzer Prize recognising "his profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary poetic power" (**"I hope they don't ask for it back!"**), all of this would suggest that he has arrived a very creative but also contented period within his life.

**"I've always felt that though,"** he responds. **"It's just sometimes I've got more going on than at other times."** But life is good? **"To me, it's never been otherwise."**

My time with Dylan is up and we stand in preparation for my leaving the room. As a last aside, I ask for his take on the US political situation in the run-up to November's presidential election. **"Well, you know right now America is in a state of upheaval,"** he says, moving towards the end of a double bed against which his guitar is propped. **"Poverty is demoralising. You can't expect people to have the virtue of purity when they are poor. But we've got this guy out there now who is redefining the nature of politics from the ground up… Barack Obama. He's redefining what a politician is, so we'll have to see how things play out. Am I hopeful? Yes, I'm hopeful that things might change. Some things are going to have to."**

Saying so, he offers a parting handshake. **"You should always take the best from the past, leave the worst back there and go forward into the future,"** he notes in benediction before the door closes quietly between us.

# 12/13 June 2008, Vojo Šindolić

Source: originally published in an article called *Always Changing: An Interview With Bob Dylan*, in: *The Pacific Rim Review of Books*, Issue Ten, Fall/Winter 2009, pages 3-4. A revised version with extra dialogue was subsequently published in Croatian as *Bob Dylan* in: *Slobodna Dalmacija*, Croatian newspaper, 18 April 2017, kultura section, pages 22-23. This translation into English by Alan Hoaksey was published as *An Overlooked Croatian Article* in: *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 76, Summer 2023 (published September 2023), pages 41-47, 49-51.

The interview took place somewhere in Croatia.

**Bob Dylan**

Bob Dylan revealed some of the biggest mysteries of his career in an exclusive interview, and he also spoke about the tumultuous past and sobering up.

Although Bob Dylan is a globally famous person, there is nothing less to be said about the Nobel Prize laureate in literature, and an inexhaustible source of musical and artistic inspiration since the early 1960s, in fact, little is known about a man who has been constantly inspiring numerous generations of diverse musicians, poets and artists in general for more than fifty years.

The mystery that accompanies the life and work of Bob Dylan has been maintained to this day, of course, accompanied by an incredible series of successive masterpieces, at least in the field of poetry and rock music.

Robert Allen Zimmerman, the son of a Midwestern home appliance salesman, was born in Duluth, Minnesota, on May 24, 1941, but legally changed his name to Robert “Bob” Dylan in August 1962. He legally changed his name to Robert “Bob” Dylan. Despite the constant change of image, spiritual dilemmas, his manipulative nature and the occasionally confusing fluctuations between the creation of lofty music and the whims with which he pampered himself, the real Bob Dylan is indeed a political prophet, a rock & roll star, a singer of folk and country music, a religious enthusiast, a brilliant poet and an interesting painter.

From 1961 and the legendary encounter with Woody Guthrie (who was then on his deathbed and with whom Dylan's career actually begins) until Bob Dylan’s latest, this spring tour of Japan – so, in the last fifty-four years, Dylan has created a stunningly influential and immense piece of music and poetry that has literally changed the world.

**Pioneer of folk politicization**

American folk and country music once served Dylan as a powerful weapon for the social changes that followed during the American Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. If not the first, Bob Dylan was arguably among the first to politicize folk music. He was the first to express political awareness and social attitudes through music – first through folk and then rock & roll music.

Even then, Dylan prophetically foreshadowed the political and social changes that soon took place. Almost instantaneously, the sense of a strong connection between music itself and the political movements of the time spread to the movement for equal civil rights of blacks and whites (in which folk and blues music played a very important role), the student movement, the movement against the Vietnam war, the movement for gender equality, etc. on October 21, 1967. The U.S. Pentagon has found itself obsessed with a motley army of anti-war protesters. The majority of the fifty thousand protesters were intellectuals and students, writers and rock musicians (among them Norman Mailer who led his “armies of the night”, Allen Ginsberg and Bob Dylan), new leftist and pacifist ideologues.

It was Bob Dylan who managed to stamp on his generation, and many others, a style of political struggle that is so authentic. Bob Dylan introduced politics to the top lists. What has been constantly emerging from Dylan as an artist and creator for decades is his notion of the holiness and power of song – and the endless possibilities that arise from the combination of music and words.

In his seventy-sixth year of life, Bob Dylan not only is the greatest living legend in the field of rock music, he also influenced absolutely everything that came after him in pop music, rock & roll music, rhythm and blues.

And while the Cold War was slowly but surely giving way to the new globalization world, Dylan, as only he knows and knows how, watched this multi-year transitional scene with exceptional wisdom and compassion, registering diverse forms of hope, disappointment, powerlessness, infatuation, desire and alienation of millions of young people around the world.

Bob Dylan I first met in the late 1970s when, as one of the editors of the then only Yugoslav rock and roll magazine, Jukebox, I often travelled to major European cities, and somewhat less often to the United States, to do extensive interviews with rock stars and interesting figures such as Leonard Cohen, Kris Kristofferson, John Lennon, Patti Smith, Neil Young, Van Morrison, but also members of rock groups such as the Grateful Dead, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Rolling Stones, etc.

**Ginsberg Connection**

As in all other cases in my literary work, which is inextricably linked to members of the Beat generation and related writers, Allen Ginsberg was a voluntary Beatnik ambassador who helped me establish contact with Bob Dylan. Later, mostly during the eighties, Bob Dylan and I saw each other often, we even performed together several times at occasional poetry evenings and I would, whenever the opportunity arose, do a longer or shorter interview with him.

We usually talked about anything and everything: from politics to religion, from film to literature. I never got the impression that Bob was a difficult person – either for conversation or for closer contact, although there are numerous rumours about him that he is an extremely large grumpy. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that Bob knew that Allen Ginsberg and I were very close friends, and that I was persistently engaged in translating not only the works of beat generation writers (Jack Kerouac, W. S. Burroughs, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, etc.), related writers such as Charles Bukowski and John Fante, but also works by singer-songwriters and rock poets such as James Douglas Morrison, Patti Smith, Kris Kristofferson, Robert Hunter, etc.

On the other hand, it is also true that conducting a conversation with Bob Dylan is a very demanding activity. In fact, it's always a big challenge and a tremendous pleasure to talk to Bob because you never know if he'll be in the mood and talkative; if at that moment he is really interested in something and is in a good mood to talk, he will be happy to talk about it at length. Anyway, it's very hard to get Bob to sit down and answer all sorts of questions.

Since I translated Sam Shepard's book a few years ago about your famous Rolling Thunder Revue Tour in the fall of 1975, I would first like to ask you about your present feelings for that tour that took place almost forty years ago, but also about your film Renaldo & Clara, which was created at the same time.

**So Renaldo's intense fantasies and his conflict with reality – these are the core and essence of the film itself. My basic intention was not to refer to the literary plot, but much more to the conceptual connections – colours, images, sound. It's quite clear that everyone in that movie starred for sheer fun. No one thought about the passage of time. How else? Life itself is improvisation. We don't live it by an already established, written script.**

There's no sense of time in a movie, is there?

**The past, present and future do not exist separately, but at the same time, in the same place, and there is little that man cannot imagine actually happening. What I wanted to do with the concept of time and the way characters change from one person to another. In fact, my intention was that the viewer is never entirely sure who is speaking – and whether the one who speaks, speaks in the first or third person. To do so is actually a ruse, a kind of trick. But, if one thinks a little better, it doesn't matter at all.**

**In the film "Renaldo & Clara", I also used the property of timelessness. I believe that the act of creation itself is much more real and honest than the one that deals with the actual flow of time. It is the film that creates and retains time. This is what the film should achieve – to keep, to preserve a certain amount of time, to breathe in that time and to stop time.**

What do you think of your performance in "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid?" And what about the music you composed for the same film? Apparently, they're two completely different things?

**I think Sam Peckinpah intended this role for me quite deliberately. But, you know, no one asked me what my approach to backing music was for that film. Then I discovered that they had accepted my music, but also changed its purpose. Those in the studio did it behind Peckinpah's back. I would compose an instrumental for a certain scene, and then those in the studio in post-production would change everything and use the same music for another scene and so they totally ruined my original idea of the music for that film.**

What could he say about the movie "Hearts of Fire"?

**What do you want to know about this film?**

How did you agree to cooperate and act in it?

**The script for that film reached me through a certain person from the William Morris Agency and that person drew my attention to the role of Billy Parker, as well as that director Richard Marquand had me**

**in mind for the role. I was drunk almost all the time of filming. It was a terrible script, and the actors had no control over it. I did it for the money. I mean, what else could be the reason?**

Do you continue to read many things as in the past?

**Here and there.**

Have you always read a lot?

**I always read something.**

### I've always played the same kind of music

Can you tell me anything about your new songs?

**You know, when I was growing up, I kept listening to Hank Williams, Gene Vincent, Little Richard and the like. In one way or another, they mostly influenced the formation of my style. I can't help it, the kind of music I'm doing now is the same kind of music I've always played.**

I want to ask you a few details about your poetic, literary works, not just your great career as a singer-songwriter. Shortly before his death, on one of our last meetings and recorded conversations, our mutual friend Allen Ginsberg told me something about you that I consider very significant, so I want to repeat it to you because I believe you will be glad of it.

He told me, "Over Kerouac's grave during the Rolling Thunder tour in the fall of 1975, Bob Dylan told me that the 'Mexico City Blues' collection really snapped him in the head and artistically completely occupied him in 1958 or 1959 while he was living in St. Paul. When I asked him 'Why?' he replied, 'It was the first work of poetry that spoke to me in the American language.' For example, you have a verse in Dylan's poem 'Gates of Eden' that goes something like this: 'The motorcycle black madonna two-wheeled gypsy queen and her silver-studded phantom', and these are verses that directly originate from my 'roar' or Kerouac's collection 'Mexico City Blues' in the sense of 'the connection of flashing images'. Kerouac's spontaneous accumulation of words. It's the same way Dylan writes his songs. Such poetry later continued its distinctive style in verses by John Lennon and the Beatles, who took their name directly from beatnik, and Bob Dylan and as such spread around the world and conquered it. I think that after the long-term influence of Whitman and then, perhaps Pound's, this is probably the greatest American influence on world literature – a combination of Whitman, poet Beat generation and Bob Dylan." That's how Allen described to me your joint visit to Kerouac's grave in Lowell in 1975.

**I don't know who all watched my performances in 1963 or 1964 and if anyone alive remembers them anymore. I was already singing similar songs. One was called "Desolation Row." People were saying, "What's he singing about?" They didn't understand what I was singing about. But maybe I didn't quite understand it at the time either. However, today I understand very well what I sing about. Therefore, it took time for songs such as "Desolation Row", "Maggie's Farm", "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and many others to become popular, because they were not well received at the very beginning. I've always been ready for something like that, and today I'm even more.**

Is there a big, real difference between the "improvised", in a moment of the songs created, and those that have undergone numerous modifications and modifications? In fact, what is the end result?

**Man can create something permanent. I mean, in order to live forever, you have to stop time. To stop time, you have to exist at a certain point, and so powerfully and effectively that you can even stop time and prove your essence by stopping time by stopping time. If you can do that, anyone who comes into contact with what you've accomplished – whatever it may be, whether it's a poem written, a carved statue, or a painted image – will capture some of it. What's strange is that they won't understand it, but they'll recognize it as such.**

**My poems speak of the experiences of the soul, of personal pain, of the individual, of personal recognition – of personal sobering up. But very often people want to be mistaken. They can't wait until it's too late. Many people wait until they are old, many of them wait until near the end of their lives. People can't wait that long. Salvation begins right now, today.**

### Is the sock clean?

In the mid-1980s, during one of my frequent visits to Ginsberg's New York home on Lower East Side, Manhattan, Bob Dylan unexpectedly appeared. During this period, Ginsberg was again very busy photographing and almost all day he photographed everything that seemed interesting to him, from drying ropes to neighbouring chimneys.

About eleven o'clock in the evening, while we were sitting at the kitchen table looking at Allen's photographs (which, five years later, had been published in the large monograph Allen Ginsberg: Photographs, Twelvetrees

Press, Altadena, 1990), the phone rang. It was Bob Dylan. He asked Allen if he could stop by because he was just finishing a new album in those days, so he wanted to play him still unfinished material, but also hear his opinion. Allen was very pleased with the invitation and told Dylan to come immediately. He also told him that no bell on the front door of the building worked but when he could shout under the window.

This is what happened. After about half an hour, Dylan arrived and started shouting from the street. Allen opened the window and wrapped the key to the front door into one sock, tightly made a knot on top of it and threw it down. Moments later, Dylan walked into the apartment and asked, **"Is this sock clean?"**

Dylan brought with him two packs of six cans of beer. He was wearing black jeans and boots, a black vest and an almost half-unbuttoned shirt with Dylan's tummy behind it – which Allen commented on, but Dylan ignored his humorous remark.

Ten years before, in 1975, some of the most important scenes for Dylan's film Renaldo & Clara were filmed.

"So where is that tape?" asked Allen excitedly. Dylan reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a tape in a plastic box.

### Empire Burlesque

We sat in the living room. **"I'm hoping you could give me a different idea for the title of the album,"** Dylan told him, adding, **"I've never had a problem with album titles before. They always came to mind at the right time."**

This is where the home circus begins. Ginsberg who had speakers in the kitchen and living room plays that cassette to the strongest, but the sound is barely heard. The song "Tight Connection" begins, but Allen doesn't hear anything. And he addresses Dylan, "What are the words you sing**?" "You have to listen more carefully,"** Dylan replied. "But I'm listening very closely and I don't hear anything, please repeat the words of the whole song to me!" It was enough for Dylan to turn pale in his face and not act relaxed. "I'm sorry, but I don't hear a single word," Allen repeated to him. They played the same song at least five times. And Dylan spoke all the lyrics to Ginsberg's ear.

At the next song, Ginsberg commented: "A very populist approach to melody." But we were all silent.

Moments later, Allen said, "Ah, I see you're still into Jehovah's Witnesses!"

**"But you have no idea who God is!"** Dylan replied.

"It's true, I've never met this guy," Allen added.

Listening to the other songs, that's where the argument ended.

A little later, Ginsberg asked, "And what were you going to call the album?"

**"Empire Burlesque"** Dylan replied, and Ginsberg nodded and said, "Yes, that was the name of vaudeville where I once worked part-time myself, down on Delancey Street."

Then Ginsberg said to him, "Yes, that's a good title for your album. So are the songs."

The companionship continued until three in the morning, but no one was particularly eloquent anymore.

# Early 2009, Bill Flanagan

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The interview took place at an unknown location.

**Bob Dylan, interview with Bill Flanagan.**

**PART 1, PUBLISHED 17 MARCH 2009**

Flanagan: A lot of this album feels like a Chess record from the fifties. Did you have that sound in your head going in or did it come up as you played?

**Dylan: Well some of the things do have that feel. It's mostly in the way the instruments were played.**

Flanagan: You like that sound?

**Dylan: Oh yeah, very much so… the old Chess records, the Sun records… I think that's my favorite sound for a record.**

Flanagan: What do you like about that sound?

**Dylan: I like the mood of those records – the intensity. The sound is uncluttered. There's power and suspense. The whole vibration feels like it could be coming from inside your mind. It's alive. It's right there. Kind of sticks in your head like a toothache.**

Flanagan: Do you think the Chess brothers knew what they were doing?

**Dylan: Oh sure, how could they not? I don't think they thought they were making history though.**

Flanagan: Did you ever meet Howlin' Wolf? Muddy Waters?

**Dylan: I saw Wolf perform a few times but never met him. Muddy I knew a little bit.**

Flanagan: I suspect that a lot of men will identify with My Wife's Home Town. Do you ever get in hot water with your in-laws over your songs?

**Dylan: No not really. The only person it could matter to gets a kick out of it. That song is meant as a compliment anyhow.**

Flanagan: Do relatives come up to you at cookouts and ask when you're going to write a song for them?

**Dylan: Oh yeah, one of my uncles' wives used to pester me all the time, "Bobby, when are you gonna write a song about me… put me on the radio?" It would make me uncomfortable.**

Flanagan: How would you get out of it?

**Dylan: I'd say, "I already did Auntie. You're just not listening to the right stations."**

Flanagan: Do you have a picture in your head of where these songs take place? Where is the guy in *Life Is Hard* standing when he sings that song?

**Dylan: Well the movie's kind of a road trip from Kansas City to New Orleans. The guy's probably standing along the way somewhere.**

Flanagan: Movie?

**Dylan: Yeah.**

Flanagan: Right, you mentioned something about that before. How did you get involved?

**Dylan: The French director, Olivier Dahan, approached me about composing some songs for a film he was writing and directing.**

Flanagan: When was that?

**Dylan: I can't remember exactly, it was sometime last year.**

Flanagan: What did you find intriguing about that? You must get approached for movie songs all the time.

**Dylan: I had seen one of his other movies, the one about the singer Edith Piaf, and I liked it.**

Flanagan: What's this new one about?

**Dylan: It's kind of a journey… a journey of self discovery… takes place in the American South.**

Flanagan: Who's in it?

**Dylan: At the time we were talking I didn't know who was going to be in it. I think Forest Whitaker and Renee Zellweger are in it now.**

Flanagan: And he wanted you to do the soundtrack?

**Dylan: Yeah, pretty much. But he wasn't too specific. The only thing he needed for sure was a ballad for the main character to sing towards the end of the movie. And that's the song *Life Is Hard*.**

Flanagan: Were all the songs on this record written for the movie then?

**Dylan: Well no, not really. We started off with *Life Is Hard* and then the record sort of took its own direction.**

Flanagan: The new record's very different from *Modern Times* which was a number one hit. It seems like every time you have a big hit, the next time out you change things around. Why don't you try to milk it a little bit?

**Dylan: I think we milked it all we could on that last record and then some. We squeezed the cow dry. All the *Modern Times* songs were written and performed in the widest range possible so they had a little bit of everything. These new songs have more of a romantic edge.**

Flanagan: How so?

**Dylan: These songs don't need to cover the same ground. The songs on *Modern Times* songs brought my repertoire up to date, and the light was directed in a certain way. You have to have somebody in mind as an audience otherwise there's no point.**

Flanagan: What do you mean by that?

**Dylan: There didn't seem to be any general consensus among my listeners. Some people preferred my first period songs. Some, the second. Some, the Christian period. Some, the post Colombian. Some, the Pre-Raphaelite. Some people prefer my songs from the nineties. I see that my audience now doesn't particular care what period the songs are from. They feel style and substance in a more visceral way and let it go at that. Images don't hang anybody up. Like if there's an astrologer with a criminal record in one of my songs it's not going to make anybody wonder if the human race is doomed. Images are taken at face value and it kind of freed me up.**

Flanagan: In what way?

**Dylan: Well for instance, if there are shadows and flowers and swampy ledges in a composition, that's what they are in their essence. There's no mystification. That's one way I can explain it.**

Flanagan: Like a locomotive, a pair of boots, a kiss or the rain?

**Dylan: Right. All those things are what they are. Or pieces of what they are. It's the way you move them around that makes it work.**

**PART 2, PUBLISHED 7 APRIL 2009**

Flanagan: A lot of violence in these tunes – you advise anyone going to Houston to keep their gun belts tight, someone's packing a Saturday Night Special in *Jolene*, there's a cold blooded killer stalking the town in IT'S ALL GOOD and the woman in *My Wife's Home Town* is going to make the singer kill someone. Does putting violence in a song up the ante?

**Dylan: How do you mean that?**

Flanagan: Does it make the song riskier?

**Dylan: Well no. The main point is to acknowledge things without going off the deep end. I think whatever's there is justified. You choose these things carefully.**

Flanagan: You've been working in a lot of different areas lately. Your book was a best-seller, you acted in a movie, "Theme Time Radio Hour" is very popular and you had an exhibit of your art work. Does working in other media feed back into the music?

**Dylan: I think if it happens it might happen the other way around.**

Flanagan: Did Chronicles work like that?

**Dylan: Well sure, Chronicles has its own rhythm. And I guess that would come out of playing songs.**

Flanagan: How about your art work?

**Dylan: That's completely out of the blue. I've always drawn and painted, but up until recently, nobody's taken an interest. There's never been any support for it.**

Flanagan: And now?

**Dylan: Well, I've had a museum exhibit, I have an association with a London gallery, and there'll probably be another exhibition of new works in another European museum in 2010. Now I'm scrambling to keep up. I've been commissioned to do paintings and they want me to work with iron and lead.**

Flanagan: How do you find subject matter?

**Dylan: I just draw what's interesting to me, and then I paint it. Rows of houses, orchard acres, lines of tree trunks, could be anything. I can take a bowl of fruit and turn it into a life and death drama. Women are power figures, so I depict them that way. I can find people to paint in mobile home communities. I could paint bourgeois people too. I'm not trying to make social comment or fulfill somebody's vision and I can find subject matter anywhere. I guess in some way that comes out of the folk world that I came up in.**

Flanagan: Say you wake up in a hotel room in Wichita and look out the window. A little girl is walking along the train tracks dragging a big statue of Buddha in a wooden wagon with a three-legged dog following behind. Do you reach for your guitar or your drawing pad?

**Dylan: Oh wow. It would depend on a lot of things. The environment mostly; like what kind of day is it. Is it a cloudless blue-gray sky or does it look like rain? A little girl dragging a wagon with a statue in it? I'd probably put that in last. The three-legged dog – what type? A spaniel, a bulldog, a retriever? That would make a difference. I'd have to think about that. Depends what angle I'm seeing it all from. Second floor, third floor, eighth floor. I don't know. Maybe I'd want to go down there. The train tracks too. I'd have to find a way to connect it all up. I guess I would be thinking about if this was an omen or a harbinger of something.**

Flanagan: If a young man considering a career in the arts wanted to meet a lot of women, would he be better off learning to paint or to play guitar?

**Dylan: Probably neither. If he had women on his mind, he might think about becoming a lawyer or a doctor.**

Flanagan: Seriously?

**Dylan: Yeah, seriously. Maybe a private detective, but that would be the wrong motivation for any career.**

Flanagan: In *If You Ever Go To Houston* the character sends messages to three sisters in Dallas; two get off with a friendly greeting but then the other is warned to "Pray the Sinner's Prayer." What's the Sinner's Prayer?

**Dylan: That's the one that begins with "Father forgive me for I have sinned."**

Flanagan: The guy in *If You Ever Go To Houston* mentions he was in Houston during the Mexican War. A lot of people think the Anglos treated the Spanish badly in Texas, but miss the fact that the Spanish had claimed Texas for Mexico without ever populating it. They just drew a big line on the map and said, "All this is ours." The people who actually lived there were either Anglo settlers or Indians, and none of them wanted anything to do with Spain or its Mexican colony. Do you think Sam Houston has gotten a bum rap?

**Dylan: I don't know. I never heard that he had gotten a bum rap. Are we talking about Sam Houston the statesman, soldier and politician? Sam Houston was the governor of two states, both Texas and Tennessee. Who else has ever done that! What was he supposed to have gotten a bum rap for?**

Flanagan: Well, he chopped off Texas from Mexico.

**Dylan: No he didn't. He chopped it off from Spain. Just like somebody else chopped off Florida from Spain. Where does the bum rap come in?**

Flanagan: Somebody insulted him in the movie *Giant*, which got Rock Hudson all worked up. And I think Steve Earle might have taken a shot at him – or maybe it was Colonel Travis.

**Dylan: *Giant's* all about money. That's where Jimmy Dean says to Rock Hudson, "I'll have more money than you and all the rest of you stinkin' sons of Benedict." I thought it was that which got Rock so worked up. Steve Earle, he may know something I don't know. As for Travis, he was a lawyer and died at the Alamo. It could have been something personal.**

Flanagan: The instrumental sections on your albums have a different quality than the usual rock instrumental sections. For instance, on an Aerosmith record, at least part of it is about Joe Perry's solo. While there's wonderful playing on *Beyond Here Lies Nothing*, we don't hear the usual guitar soloing technique. Is there a special way you approach the instrumental sections on a record?

**Dylan: What can I say, if I had Joe Perry with me everything would obviously be different. As it is though, he wasn't there. Soloing is not a big part of my records anyway. Nobody buys them to hear solos. What I try to do is to make sure that the instrumental sections are dynamic and are extensions of the overall feeling of the song.**

Flanagan: Who's that playing with you here?

**Dylan: Mike Campbell.**

Flanagan: You have a history with Mike?

**Dylan: Yeah, I do. He played with me a lot when I played with Tom Petty.**

Flanagan: I saw some of those shows. I particularly liked the segment during the show when it was just you and Mike and Benmont and no bass or drums.

**Dylan: Yeah. We worked out a few things. I would've always liked to have seen that develop more, but it didn't.**

Flanagan: How is he to work with?

**Dylan: He's good with me. He's been playing with Tom for so long that he hears everything from a songwriter's point of view and he can play most any style.**

Flanagan: A lot of accordion on this record – in places where we might expect to hear harmonica or organ or lead guitar.

**Dylan: Yeah, I guess so. The accordion can sound like all those instruments. Actually, I wished I had used it more on some of my past records.**

Flanagan: Who's playing that?

**Dylan: David Hidalgo.**

Flanagan: Have you guys ever played together before.

**Dylan: I think so. Los Lobos played some shows with me in Mexico a while back. I remember playing some things with David and Cesar then.**

Flanagan: Is there a chance you'll add an accordion on stage?

**Dylan: Well sure, if I could fit it into my rhythm section.**

Flanagan: Did you write any of these songs with the accordion in mind or did it come up during the sessions?

**Dylan: I use an accordion player when I play off-road shows. It's a perfect instrument in a lot of ways. It's orchestrative and percussive at the same time. Actually accordion players were the first musicians that I had seen a lot of growing up.**

Flanagan: "Opened his eyes to the tune of the accordion."

**Dylan: Precisely.**

Flanagan: Tell me about Joey Gallo.

**Dylan: Tell you what about him?**

Flanagan: You wrote a song about him. Some say it takes liberty with the truth.

**Dylan: Really? I wouldn't know. Jacques Levy wrote the words. Jacques had a theatrical mind and he wrote a lot of plays. So the song might have been theater of the mind. I just sang it. Some say Davy Crockett takes a lot of liberties with the truth and Billy the Kid too – FDR in Trinidad. Have you ever heard that?**

Flanagan: I certainly do remember it. "When Roosevelt came to the land of the hummingbird." I wonder if anybody in Georgia or Ukraine wrote a song about George Bush's visit? I know they named the airport road after him and his popularity in those places remained very high, even when no one liked him at home.

**Dylan: They name roads after a lot of people.**

Flanagan: In *My Wife's Home Town* there's the line, "Dreams never did work for me anyway." Do you really believe that?

**Dylan: Well, yeah. Dreams can lead us up a blind alley. Everybody has dreams. We go to sleep and we dream. I've always thought of them as coming out of the subconscious. I guess you can interpret them. Dreams can tell us a lot about ourselves, if we can remember them. We can see what's coming around the corner sometimes without actually going to the corner.**

Flanagan: Can't dreams also mean hopes about the future?

**Dylan: Oh sure. It's about how we use the word, I guess. Hopes for the future? I've always connected them up with fears about the future. Hopes and fears go together like a comedy team. But I know what you are talking about. Like in the Everly Brothers song, *All I Have To Do Is Dream*. If they said, "All I have to do is hope," it wouldn't be saying the same thing. It wouldn't be as strong.**

Flanagan: What about political dreams?

**Dylan: Oh yeah. Politicians would have political dreams – dreams and ambitions. Maybe we are talking about two different things.**

Flanagan: What's your take on politics?

**Dylan: Politics is entertainment. It's a sport. It's for the well groomed and well heeled. The impeccably dressed. Party animals. Politicians are interchangeable.**

Flanagan: Don't you believe in the democratic process?

**Dylan: Yeah, but what's that got to do with politics? Politics creates more problems than it solves. It can be counter-productive. The real power is in the hands of small groups of people and I don't think they have titles.**

**PART 3, PUBLISHED 16 APRIL 2009**

Flanagan: In that song *Chicago After Dark*, were you thinking about the new President?

**Dylan: Not really. It's more about State Street and the wind off Lake Michigan and how sometimes we know people and we are no longer what we used to be to them. I was trying to go with some old time feeling that I had.**

Flanagan: You liked Barack Obama early on. Why was that?

**Dylan: I'd read his book and it intrigued me.**

Flanagan: "Audacity of Hope"?

**Dylan: No it was called "Dreams of My Father."**

Flanagan: What struck you about him?

**Dylan: Well, a number of things. He's got an interesting background. He's like a fictional character, but he's real. First off, his mother was a Kansas girl. Never lived in Kansas though, but with deep roots. You know, like Kansas bloody Kansas. John Brown the insurrectionist. Jesse James and Quantrill. Bushwhackers, Guerillas. Wizard of Oz Kansas. I think Barack has Jefferson Davis back there in his ancestry someplace. And then his father. An African intellectual. Bantu, Masai, Griot type heritage – cattle raiders, lion killers. I mean it's just so incongruous that these two people would meet and fall in love. You kind of get past that though. And then you're into his story. Like an odyssey except in reverse.**

Flanagan: In what way?

**Dylan: First of all, Barack is born in Hawaii. Most of us think of Hawaii as paradise – so I guess you could say that he was born in paradise.**

Flanagan: And he was thrown out of the garden.

**Dylan: Not exactly. His mom married some other guy named Lolo and then took Barack to Indonesia to live. Barack went to both a Muslim school and a Catholic school. His mom used to get up at 4:00 in the morning and teach him book lessons three hours before he even went to school. And then she would go to work. That tells you the type of woman she was. That's just in the beginning of the story.**

Flanagan: What else did you find compelling about him?

**Dylan: Well, mainly his take on things. His writing style hits you on more than one level. It makes you feel and think at the same time and that is hard to do. He says profoundly outrageous things. He's looking at a shrunken head inside of a glass case in some museum with a bunch of other people and he's wondering if any of these people realize that they could be looking at one of their ancestors.**

Flanagan: What in his book would make you think he'd be a good politician?

**Dylan: Well nothing really. In some sense you would think being in the business of politics would be the last thing that this man would want to do. I think he had a job as an investment banker on Wall Street for a second – selling German bonds. But he probably could've done anything. If you read his book, you'll know that the political world came to him. It was there to be had.**

Flanagan: Do you think he'll make a good president?

**Dylan: I have no idea. He'll be the best president he can be. Most of those guys come into office with the best of intentions and leave as beaten men. Johnson would be a good example of that… Nixon, Clinton in a way, Truman, all the rest of them going back. You know, it's like they all fly too close to the sun and get burned.**

Flanagan: Did you ever read any other presidential autobiographies?

**Dylan: Yeah, I read Grant's.**

Flanagan: What was he like? Any similarities?

**Dylan: The times were different obviously. And Grant wrote his book after he'd left office.**

Flanagan: What did you find interesting about him?

**Dylan: It's not like he's a great writer. He's analytical and cold, but he does have a sense of humor. Grant, besides being a military strategist, was a working man. Worked horses. Tended the horses, plowed and furrowed. Brought in all the crops – the corn and potatoes. Sawed wood and drove wagons since the time he was about eleven. Got a crystal clear memory of all the battles he'd been in.**

Flanagan: Do you remember any particular battle that Grant fought?

**Dylan: There were a lot of battles but the Shiloh one is most interesting. He could've lost that. But he was determined to win it at any price, using all kinds of strategies, even faking retreat. You could read it for yourself.**

Flanagan: When you think back to the Civil War, one thing you forget is that no battles, except Gettysburg, were fought in the North.

**Dylan: Yeah. That's what probably makes the Southern part of the country so different.**

Flanagan: There is a certain sensibility, but I'm not sure how that connects?

**Dylan: It must be the Southern air. It's filled with rambling ghosts and disturbed spirits. They're all screaming and forlorning. It's like they are caught in some weird web – some purgatory between heaven and hell and they can't rest. They can't live, and they can't die. It's like they were cut off in their prime, wanting to tell somebody something. It's all over the place. There are war fields everywhere… a lot of times even in people's backyards.**

Flanagan: Have you felt them?

**Dylan: Oh sure. You'd be surprised. I was in Elvis's hometown – Tupelo. And I was trying to feel what Elvis would have felt back when he was growing up.**

Flanagan: Did you feel all the music Elvis must have heard?

**Dylan: No, but I'll tell you what I did feel. I felt the ghosts from the bloody battle that Sherman fought against Forrest and drove him out. There's an eeriness to the town. A sadness that lingers. Elvis must have felt it too.**

Flanagan: Are you a mystical person?

**Dylan: Absolutely.**

Flanagan: Any thoughts about why?

**Dylan: I think it's the land. The streams, the forests, the vast emptiness. The land created me. I'm wild and lonesome. Even as I travel the cities, I'm more at home in the vacant lots. But I have a love for humankind, a love of truth, and a love of justice. I think I have a dualistic nature. I'm more of an adventurous type than a relationship type.**

Flanagan: But the album is all about love – love found, love lost, love remembered, love denied.

**Dylan: Inspiration is hard to come by. You have to take it where you find it.**

**PART 4, PUBLISHED 20 APRIL 2009**

Flanagan: Getting back to politics, what did you think of Jesse Ventura, being a Minnesotan and all?

**Dylan: He did some good things or tried to. I never met him. All I know about the governor is that he's a Rolling Stones fan.**

Flanagan: Your old cohorts?

**Dylan: I hear from Keith once in a while but that's about it.**

Flanagan: What do you think of the Stones?

**Dylan: What do I think of them? They're pretty much finished, aren't they?**

Flanagan: They had a gigantic tour last year. You call that finished?

**Dylan: Oh yeah, you mean Steel Wheels. I'm not saying they don't keep going, but they need Bill. Without him they're a funk band. They'll be the real Rolling Stones when they get Bill back.**

Flanagan: Bob, you're stuck in the 80's.

**Dylan: I know. I'm trying to break free.**

Flanagan: Do you really think the Stones are finished?

**Dylan: Of course not. They're far from finished. The Rolling Stones are truly the greatest rock and roll band in the world and always will be. The last too. Everything that came after them, metal, rap, punk, new wave, pop-rock, you name it… you can trace it all back to the Rolling Stones. They were the first and the last and no one's ever done it better.**

Flanagan: *This Dream Of You* has this wonderful South of the Border feel, but at the same time, I detect echoes of Sam Cooke, the Coasters, the Brill Building, and Phil Spector. Were those records from the 50's and 60's important to you? Did you try to capture some of that flavor in *This Dream Of You*?

**Dylan: Those fifties and sixties records were definitely important. That might have been the last great age of real music. Since then or maybe the seventies its all been people playing computers. Sam Cooke, the Coasters, Phil Spector, all that music was great but it didn't exactly break into my consciousness. Back then I was listening to Son House, Leadbelly, the Carter family, Memphis Minnie and death romance ballads. As far as songwriting, I wanted to write songs like Woody Guthrie and Robert Johnson. Timeless and eternal. Only a few of those radio ballads still hold up and most of them have Doc Pomus' hand in them. "Spanish Harlem," "Save the Last Dance for Me," "Little Sister"… a few others. Those were fantastic songs. Doc was a soulful cat. If you said there was a little bit of him in *This Dream Of You* I would take it as a compliment.**

Flanagan: Even though many of the tracks on the album are about love, the album is full of pain – sometimes in the same song. In *Beyond Here Lies Nothing*, the song is underscored by a feeling of foreboding. You're moving down "boulevards of broken cars." You're going to love "as long as love will last." Is pain a necessary part of loving?

**Dylan: Oh yeah, in my songs it is. Pain, sex, murder, family – it goes way back. Kindness. Honor. Charity. You have to tie all that in. You're supposed to know that stuff.**

Flanagan: Getting back to *This Dream Of You*, the character sings, "How long can I stay in this nowhere café?" Where is that café?

**Dylan: It sounds like it's south of the border or close to the border.**

Flanagan: You're not saying?

**Dylan: Well, no, it's not like I'm not saying. But if you have those kind of thoughts and feelings you know where the guy is. He's right where you are. If you don't have those thoughts and feelings then he doesn't exist.**

Flanagan: The character in the song reminds me a lot of the guy who is in the song *Across The Borderline*.

**Dylan: I know what you're saying, but it's not a character like in a book or a movie. He's not a bus driver. He doesn't drive a forklift. He's not a serial killer. It's me who's singing that, plain and simple. We shouldn't confuse singers and performers with actors. Actors will say, "My character this, and my character that." Like beating a dead horse. Who cares about the character? Just get up and act. You don't have to explain it to me.**

Flanagan: Well can't a singer act out a song?

**Dylan: Yeah sure, a lot of them do. But the more you act the further you get away from the truth. And a lot of those singers lose who they are after a while. You sing, "I'm a lineman for the county," enough times and you start to scamper up poles.**

Flanagan: What actor could you hear singing *This Dream Of You*?

**Dylan: Gosh I don't know, James Cagney, Mickey Rooney.**

Flanagan: How about Humphrey Bogart?

**Dylan: Yeah, sure, him too. Funny thing about actors and that identity thing. Every time I run into Val Kilmer, I can't help myself. I say, "Why, Johnny Ringo – you look like somebody just walked on your grave." Val always says, "Bob, I'm not Johnny Ringo. That's just a role I played in a movie." He could be right, he could be wrong. I think he's wrong but he says it in such a sincere way. You have to think he thinks he's right.**

Flanagan: Do you think actors have to be sincere?

**Dylan: Not at all. Mae West wasn't. She was just who she was on the screen. Just like Jimmy Stewart and Burt Lancaster.**

Flanagan: And Johnny Weissmuller.

**Dylan: Yeah, Lon Chaney, too.**

Flanagan: Could that mean that Alec Guinness is Hitler?

**Dylan: Well sure, a part of him is. But of course he's not Hitler. And neither is anybody else. Hitler was Hitler.**

Flanagan: Do you remember images of Hitler from growing up?

**Dylan: No, not growing up. He was dead by the time I was four or five. I never had a real understanding of that.**

Flanagan: Never had an understanding of what?

**Dylan: How you take a failed landscape painter and turn him into a fanatical mad man who controls millions. That's some trick. I mean the powers that created him must have been awesome.**

Flanagan: Well, the social and economic conditions of the Weimar Republic were so different than now.

**Dylan: Yeah sure, looking back in hindsight, you can see that someone would have to take control. But still, it's so perplexing. Like why him? You could see that the man's a total mutt. No Aryan characteristics whatsoever. You couldn't guess his ancestry. Brown hair, brown eyes, pasty complexion, no particular type of stature, Hitler moustache, raincoat, riding whip, the whole works. He knew something. He knew that people didn't think. Look at the faces of the millions who worshipped him and you see that he inspired love. It's scary and sad. The torch of the spoken word. They were glad to follow him anywhere, loyal to the bone. Then of course, he filled up the cemeteries with them.**

Flanagan: It brings to mind Hitler talking to the crowd in Triumph of the Will by Leni Riefenstahl.

**Dylan: Yeah, it's clear as day.**

**PART 5, PUBLISHED 22 APRIL 2009**

Flanagan: Going back to that song you wrote for the movie that you mentioned earlier, *Life Is Hard* has the formality of an old Rudy Vallee or Nelson Eddy ballad right down to the middle eight ("Ever since the day…"). Do you figure that if you start a song in that style, you stick with the rules right down the line?

**Dylan: Sure, I try to stick to the rules. Sometimes I might shift paradigms within the same song, but then that structure also has its own rules. And I combine them both, see what works and what doesn't. My range is limited. Some formulas are too complex and I don't want anything to do with them.**

Flanagan: *Forgetful Heart* – how do you decide to put an Appalachian banjo on a minor key blues? Is it something you think of ahead of time or does it come up in the session?

**Dylan: I think it probably came up at the studio. A banjo wouldn't be out of character though. There is a minor key modality to *Forgetful Heart*. It's like "Little Maggie" or "Darling Cory," so there is no reason a banjo shouldn't fit or sound right.**

Flanagan: You wrote a lot of these songs with Robert Hunter. How does that process work?

**Dylan: There isn't any process to speak of. You just do it. You drive the car. Sometimes you get out from behind the wheel and let someone else step on the gas.**

Flanagan: You must have known Hunter a long time. Do you remember where you first met?

**Dylan: It was either back in '62 or '63 when I played in the Bay area. I might have met him in Palo Alto or Berkeley or Oakland. I played all those places then and I could have met Hunter around that time. I know he was around.**

Flanagan: Didn't Hunter play in a bluegrass band with Jerry Garcia?

**Dylan: Yeah, it was either that or a jug band.**

Flanagan: Have you ever thought about composing anything with those Nashville songwriters?

**Dylan: I've never thought about that.**

Flanagan: Neil Diamond did an album years ago where he co-wrote with different Nashville songwriters.

**Dylan: Yeah, that might have worked for him. I don't think it would work for me.**

Flanagan: You don't think it would work for you?

**Dylan: No. I'm okay without it. I'm not exactly obsessed with writing songs. I go back a ways with Hunter. We're from the same old school so it makes its own kind of sense.**

Flanagan: Do you listen to a lot of songs?

**Dylan: Yeah – sometimes.**

Flanagan: Who are some of your favorite songwriters?

**Dylan: Buffett I guess. Lightfoot. Warren Zevon. Randy. John Prine. Guy Clark. Those kinds of writers.**

Flanagan: What songs do you like of Buffett's?

**Dylan: *Death Of An Unpopular Poet*. There's another one called *He Went To Paris*.**

Flanagan: You and Lightfoot go way back.

**Dylan: Oh yeah. Gordo's been around as long as me.**

Flanagan: What are your favorite songs of his?

**Dylan: *Shadows*, *Sundown*, *If You Could Read My Mind*. I can't think of any I don't like.**

Flanagan: Did you know Zevon?

**Dylan: Not very well.**

Flanagan: What did you like about him?

**Dylan: *Lawyers*, *Guns And Money*. *Boom Boom Mancini*. Down hard stuff. *Join Me In L.A.* sort of straddles the line between heartfelt and primeval. His musical patterns are all over the place, probably because he's classically trained. There might be three separate songs within a Zevon song, but they're all effortlessly connected. Zevon was a musician's musician, a tortured one. *Desperado Under The Eaves*. It's all in there.**

Flanagan: Randy Newman?

**Dylan: Yeah, Randy. What can you say? I like his early songs, *Sail Away*, *Burn Donw The Cornfield*, *Louisiana*, where he kept it simple. Bordello songs. I think of him as the Crown Prince, the heir apparent to Jelly Roll Morton. His style is deceiving. He's so laid back that you kind of forget he's saying important things. Randy's sort of tied to a different era like I am.**

Flanagan: How about John Prine?

**Dylan: Prine's stuff is pure Proustian existentialism. Midwestern mindtrips to the nth degree. And he writes beautiful songs. I remember when Kris Kristofferson first brought him on the scene. All that stuff about *Sam Stone* the soldier junky daddy and *Donald And Lydia*, where people make love from ten miles away. Nobody but Prine could write like that. If I had to pick one song of his, it might be *Lake Marie*. I don't remember what album that's on.**

Flanagan: A lot of the acts from your generation seem to be trading on nostalgia. They play the same songs the same way for the last 30 years. Why haven't you ever done that?

**Dylan: I couldn't if I tried. Those guys you are talking about all had conspicuous hits. They started out anti-establishment and now they are in charge of the world. Celebratory songs. Music for the grand dinner party. Mainstream stuff that played into the culture on a pervasive level. My stuff is different from those guys. It's more desperate. Daltrey, Townshend, McCartney, the Beach Boys, Elton, Billy Joel. They made perfect records, so they have to play them perfectly… exactly the way people remember them. My records were never perfect. So there is no point in trying to duplicate them. Anyway, I'm no mainstream artist.**

Flanagan: Then what kind of artist are you?

**Dylan: I'm not sure, Byronesque maybe. Look, when I started out, mainstream culture was Sinatra, Perry Como, Andy Williams, Sound of Music. There was no fitting into it then and of course, there's no fitting into it now. Some of my songs have crossed over but they were all done by other singers.**

Flanagan: Have you ever tried to fit in?

**Dylan: Well, no, not really. I'm coming out of the folk music tradition and that's the vernacular and archetypal aesthetic that I've experienced. Those are the dynamics of it. I couldn't have written songs for the Brill Building if I tried. Whatever passes for pop music, I couldn't do it then and I can't do it now.**

Flanagan: Does that mean you create outsider art? Do you think of yourself as a cult figure?

**Dylan: A cult figure, that's got religious connotations. It sounds cliquish and clannish. People have different emotional levels. Especially when you're young. Back then I guess most of my influences could be thought of as eccentric. Mass media had no overwhelming reach so I was drawn to the traveling performers passing through. The side show performers – bluegrass singers, the black cowboy with chaps and a lariat doing rope tricks. Miss Europe, Quasimodo, the Bearded Lady, the half-man half-woman, the deformed and the bent, Atlas the Dwarf, the fire-eaters, the teachers and preachers, the blues singers. I remember it like it was yesterday. I got close to some of these people. I learned about dignity from them. Freedom too. Civil rights, human rights. How to stay within yourself. Most others were into the rides like the tilt-a-whirl and the rollercoaster. To me that was the nightmare.**

**All the giddiness. The artificiality of it. The sledge hammer of life. It didn't make sense or seem real. The stuff off the main road was where force of reality was. At least it struck me that way. When I left home those feelings didn't change.**

Flanagan: But you've sold over a hundred million records.

**Dylan: Yeah I know. It's a mystery to me too.**

**PART 6, PUBLISHED 26 APRIL 2009**

Flanagan: *Life Is Hard* comes from a tradition that got pretty much wiped out by the popularity of swing and blues and rock n roll. I remember Leon Redbone said once that the big break in 20th century music was not in the 50's when rock came in; it was when swing and jazz knocked off parlor piano ballads in the late 20's and early 30's. Do you ever wish that old style had stuck around a little longer?

**Dylan: Today, the mad rush of the world would trample over delicate music like that. Even if it had survived swing and jazz it would never make it past Dr. Dre. Things changed economically and socially. Two world wars, the stock market crash, the depression, the sexual revolution, huge sound systems, techno-pop. How could anything survive that? You can't imagine parlor ballads drifting out of hi rise multi-towered buildings. That kind of music existed in a more timeless state of life. I love those old piano ballads. In my hometown walking down dark streets on quiet summer nights you would sometimes hear parlor tunes coming out of doorways and open windows. Somebody's mother or sister playing *A Bird In A Gilded Cage* off of sheet music. I actually tried to conjure up that feeling once in a song I did called IN *The Summertime*.**

Flanagan: No one was expecting a new album from you right now. I heard even the record company was surprised. How do you know it's time to go in and make a new one?

**Dylan: You never do know. You just think sometimes if not now I'll never do it. This particular album was supposed to come out next Fall sometime; September, October; when the movie's released. We made it last year and it was supposed to be put away for a year. But then the guys from the record company heard it, and decided that they would like to put it out in early spring and not wait for the movie.**

Flanagan: You don't use elevated language on these songs – it's mostly every-day speech and imagery. Did you decide to keep a lid on the poetry this time out – was it what the musical style demanded?

**Dylan: I'm not sure I agree. It's not easy to define poetry. Hank Williams used simple language too.**

Flanagan: *It's All Good* is a terrific song. You use that common catch phrase as a hook and describe a world that gets darker and more miserable with every verse – it's kind of funny and kind of scary. How did that song get started?

**Dylan: Probably from hearing the phrase one too many times.**

Flanagan: Every girl named Roxanne feels a connection to Sting. Every Alison thinks Elvis Costello was singing about her. You expecting to meet a lot of Jolenes?

**Dylan: Oh gosh, I hope not.**

Flanagan: Any chance your Jolene is the same woman who got Dolly Parton so worked up?

**Dylan: You mean that woman with the flaming locks of auburn hair?**

Flanagan: Yeah! Whose smile is like a breath of Spring.

**Dylan: Oh yeah, I remember her.**

Flanagan: Is it the same one?

**Dylan: It's a different lady.**

Flanagan: At the end of *Jolene* I noticed that those riffs start happening. I've seen you do that live, but I've never heard that on any of your records. I assume that's Donnie playing with you.

**Dylan: Yeah, it is. The organ sound and steel guitar combined make those riffs.**

Flanagan: Tony, your bass player has been with you now for… what?

**Dylan: Gee, I don't know, probably for a while. Fifteen, twenty years.**

Flanagan: How about your drummer, George?

**Dylan: Not as long as Tony but longer than my last drummer.**

Flanagan: Where does George come from to play like that?

**Dylan: George is from Louisiana. He's from New Orleans.**

Flanagan: There's no characters on this record like the ones in *Desolation Row*, except maybe Judge Simpson in *Shake, Shake Mama*. Would he be one of these archetypal figures like Cinderella or Shakespeare in the alley?

**Dylan: Oh, most definitely. He's a possum huntin' judge.**

Flanagan: Certain singers show up in *It's All Good*. Neil Young and Alicia Keys have popped up on your recent albums. Do you think all your musician friends are going to be looking for shout-outs now? Once you start down that road how do you get out of it?

**Dylan: Well these people are archetypes, too. They might not think of themselves like that, but they are. They represent an idea.**

Flanagan: Could you write a song about anybody?

**Dylan: Well I bet you could, yeah.**

Flanagan: How would you get Stevie Wonder into a song?

**Dylan: When Stevie Wonder recorded Blowin' In The Wind/ I was playin' cards/ I was drinkin' gin.**

Flanagan: Could you write a song like Stevie wonder?

**Dylan: I could write one like *Superstition* but I couldn't write one like *Sir Duke*.**

Flanagan: Could you write a song about George Bush?

**Dylan: Well sure. George's name would be easy to rhyme.**

Flanagan: In the song *I Feel A Change Coming On* the character says…

**Dylan: Wait a minute Bill. I'm not a playwright. The people in my songs are all me. I thought we talked about that?**

Flanagan: What exactly makes it you?

**Dylan: It's in the way you say things. It's not necessarily the things you say that make you who you are.**

Flanagan: Okay, I think the line is, "I see my baby coming, she's walking with the village priest/I feel a change coming on."

**Dylan: Yeah, but you're leaving a lot out.**

Flanagan: Okay, but that's the part I remember. I assume the guy, or you, are talking about being hooked up with somebody and feeling pretty good about it. Given what a hard time women have given the men, or you, in the other songs on the album, we can read this as a happy ending or a sign of trouble ahead. What are the chances that the guy in *Feel A Change* is likely to live happily ever after?

**Dylan: You might be reading too much into it. It's not a fairy tale type song. There are degrees of happiness. You go from one to the other and then back again. It's hard to be completely happy when those around us are suffering and groaning from hunger. But I know what you mean. You are talking about riding off into the sunset hoping that whatever you've done will outlive you.**

Flanagan: Isn't that the Hindu point of view?

**Dylan: Maybe it is.**

Flanagan: A lot of performers give God credit for their music. How do you suppose
God feels about that?

**Dylan: I'm not the one to ask. It sounds like people just giving credit where credit is due.**

Flanagan: How do you think this new record will be received?

**Dylan: I know my fans will like it. Other than that, I have no idea.**

# 7 April 2009, Douglas Brinkley

Source: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Issue 1078, 14 May 2009, pages 42-49, 76.

The interview took place in Palais de Congrès, Paris.

**Bob Dylan's America**

**Bob Dylan's Late-Era, Old-Style American Individualism**

It's a land of Walt Whitman and Chuck Berry, of border towns and murder ballads – and America's greatest songwriter may be the last man living there.

On April 7th, French president Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, stroll into the Palais des Congrès in Paris. Nobody in the sold-out auditorium, however, pays the First Couple much attention. Bob Dylan, who in 1990 was named a Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Art et des Lettres, the highest cultural award France can bestow, is about to take the stage for an evening of *nostalgie* (as the tickets read). After an old-style-vaudevillian introduction, out walks Dylan with his five-member band, all sharply dressed in Pretty Boy Floyd suits and fedoras. As Dylan launches into a hard-rock version of "Cat's in the Well," from his *Under the Red Sky* album, the cheering crowd holds up cellphones, trying to film the enigmatic legend, who immediately ensconces himself behind an electric piano. Dylan plays guitar on only a single song – as is usually the case – but throughout the night his harmonica riffs soar through the cavernous hall. Everyone feels energized by his charismatic presence. After about two and a half hours, he ends the performance with a defiant version of the crowd-pleasing "Blowin' in the Wind."

After the show, the Sarkozys wander backstage, anxious to meet Dylan. The French president is attired in a black turtleneck and jeans. In a single swooping motion, Sarkozy seizes Dylan's hand, welcoming him to France. **"It was like looking at my mirror image,"** Dylan tells me later, about the encounter. **"I can see why he's the head of France. He's genuine and warm and extremely likable. I asked Sarkozy, 'Do you think the whole global thing is over?' I knew they just had a big G-20 meeting and they maybe were discussing that. I didn't think he'd tell me, but I asked him anyway."**

While Dylan – who will be playing around 30 concerts in minor-league baseball stadiums this summer along with Willie Nelson and John Mellencamp – is celebrated in America, he is lionized in Europe. The French periodicals were all abuzz that Dylan had just collaborated with the popular 41-year-old film director Olivier Dahan on a new movie soundtrack. The following evening, at Dylan's second sold-out Paris show, I chatted with the genial Dahan, a scruffy-looking guy straight from the pages of *Oliver Twist*. In 2007, Dahan directed *La Vie en Rose*, the celebrated biopic of Edith Piaf that won two Academy Awards. Last year, he brazenly solicited a handful of songs from Dylan, via a letter, for his new road movie, *My Own Love Song*. Starring Forest Whitaker and Renée Zellweger, *My Own Love Song* is the tale of an infirm female singer who journeys across America, from Kansas to Louisiana. "I wanted the songs to feel Southern," Dahan says. "Real songs of the American spirit. What that meant for me, like millions of others worldwide, is Bob Dylan's songs."

**"At first this was unthinkable,"** Dylan recounts. **"I mean, I didn't know what** [Dahan] **was actually saying.** [In faux French accent] **'Could you write uh, 10, 12 songs?' Ya know? I said, 'Yeah, really? Is this guy serious?' But he was so audacious! Usually you get asked to do, like, one song, and it's at the end of the movie. But 10 songs?"** Dylan continues, **"Dahan wanted to put these songs throughout the movie and find different reasons for them. I just kind of gave the guy the benefit of the doubt that he knew what he was doing. I always liked those movies, ya know, those black-and-white movies where, like, Veronica Lake all of a sudden out of nowhere is singing in a nightclub. Or Diahann Carroll is singing in a cafe. All those movies where the action stops and the heroes are represented as walking past a barn dance where the Sons of the Pioneers are playing on a truck. It's so musical. They don't put that kind of thing in movies anymore. Now it's come down to just an end-title song – which has nothing to do with the movie, and basically people are walking out."**

The audiences at the Palais des Congrès were cross-generational: the gray-hairs and the body-pierced youths sat side by side. At this juncture Dylan's audience is… well, everybody. The French troubadour Charles Aznavour attended that second Paris show with one of his sons. Dylan, in homage to Aznavour, played the Frenchman's melancholic composition "The Times We Have Known" with sublime grace. After the show, the 84-year-old Aznavour joined Dylan backstage for a bit of banter. Wearing a suede coat with a sky-blue scarf around his neck, the deeply tanned Aznavour epitomized to Dylan how a popular musician can comport himself

with dignity in the fourth quarter of life. **"I finally caught up with you,"** Dylan tells him. **"I saw you in 1963 at Carnegie Hall. It was filled with French people and me. I was the only American there, really."**

After a round of Obama fist bumps, Dylan heads down a flight of stairs and onto his touring bus for the five-hour drive to Amsterdam, where he will be playing three more shows. For Dylan, it seems, life is always the next gig. Changing pace and location are essential to his survival as an artist. Contrary to reputation, however, he is no recluse. People populate his waking hours (although they're primarily of the worker-bee kind). **"You're always aware of what town you're in,"** Dylan says of the millions of miles logged. **"But in another sense, touring is like being on a freighter out on the open sea. You're really out there for days and months."**

Critics have claimed that since 1988 Dylan has been on a Never Ending Tour, playing more than 100 concerts a year. The aggrieved Dylan bristles at the term. **"Critics should know that there's no such thing as forever,"** he says. **"So that speaks more about them who would use that phrase as if there's some important meaning in it. You never heard about Oral Roberts and Billy Graham being on some Never Ending Preacher Tour. Does anybody ever call Henry Ford a Never Ending Car Builder? Is Rupert Murdoch a Never Ending Media Tycoon? What about Donald Trump? Does anybody say he has a Never Ending Quest to build buildings? Picasso painted well into his 90s. And Paul Newman raced cars in his 70s. Anybody ever say that Duke Ellington was on a Never Ending Bandstand Tour? But critics apply a different standard to me for some reason. But we're living in an age of breaking everything down into simplistic terms, aren't we? These days, people are lucky to have a job. Any job. So critics might be uncomfortable with me** [working so much]. **Maybe they can't figure it out. But nobody in my particular audience feels that way about what I do. Anybody with a trade can work as long as they want. A welder, a carpenter, an electrician. They don't necessarily need to retire. People who have jobs on an assembly line, or are doing some kind of drudgery work, they might be thinking of retiring every day. Every man should learn a trade. It's different than a job. My music wasn't made to take me from one place to another so I can retire early."**

Dylan has spent a lifetime dodging people's attempts to define him. He scorns "newsy people" who constantly try to pin him down about his personal life. Random strangers sometimes come up to him asking for a critique of Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home* documentary about his life. **"I've never seen it,"** he tells me. **"Well, a lot of that footage was gathered up from the Sixties. So I'd seen that, and I thought that was like looking at a different character. But it certainly was powerful. And I don't, or can't, do that anymore."**

Dylan's principal frustration, however, is that he feels misunderstood as an artist: **"Popular music has no, whatever you call them, critics, that understand popular music in all of its dynamic fundamentalism. The consensus on me is that I'm a songwriter. And that I was influenced by Woody Guthrie and sang protest songs. Then rock & roll songs. Then religious songs for a period of time. But it's a stereotype. A media creation. Which is impossible to avoid if you're any type of public figure at all."** Where critics think he's deconstructing old songs, he instead sees himself as an old-time musical arranger. **"My band plays a different type of music than anybody else plays,"** Dylan says. **"We play distinctive rhythms that no other band can play. There are so many of my songs that have been rearranged at this point that I've lost track of them myself. We do keep the structures intact to some degree. But the dynamics of the song itself might change from one given night to another because the mathematical process we use allows that. As far as I know, no one else out there plays like this. Today, yesterday and probably tomorrow. I don't think you'll hear what I do ever again. It took a while to find this thing. But then again, I believe that things are handed to you when you're ready to make use of them. You wouldn't recognize them unless you'd come through certain experiences. I'm a strong believer that each man has a destiny."**

These days, Dylan has largely decommissioned the electric guitar in favor of an electric keyboard. Does he have arthritis? Or was he sick of jamming on "Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat" for the thousandth time? The answer is neither. **"I was looking for a keyboard player to play triplet forms for a long period of time,"** he explains. **"I tried different musicians for it, and we couldn't find anybody who understood the style of what we were doing and to stay within the boundaries. And, finally, you've just got to do it on your own. As far as guitar, I was looking for a guitar player who could play exactly like me, only better. I can't find that person either. The same thing applies to keyboards. I'm looking for a piano player who can play just like me, only better. If I could find him or her, I would hire that person. So far it hasn't happened. I wish it would. We could do more if I was freed up there."**

I ask whether, as bandleader, Dylan had ever played a set with the perfect guitarist. Dylan jumps at the opportunity to answer rather reminiscently. **"The guy that I always miss, and I think he'd still be around if he stayed with me, actually, was Mike Bloomfield,"** Dylan says of his collaborator on *Highway 61 Revisited* (who also famously played electric guitar with him at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965). **"He could just flat-out play. He had so much soul. And he knew all the styles, and he could play them so incredibly well. He was an expert player and a real prodigy, too. Started playing early. But then again a lot of good guitarists have played with me. Freddy Tackett, Steve Ripley – Mick Taylor played with me for a minute."**

Full of memory lane, Dylan goes on to tell a story about first meeting Bloomfield in Chicago at a headhunt on the South Side. A social misfit, Bloomfield was the rare white guitarist who had recorded with the likes of Sleepy John Estes and Big Joe Williams. **"He could play like Willie Brown or Charlie Patton,"** Dylan says. **"He could play like Robert Johnson way back then in the Sixties. The only other guy who could do that in those days was Brian Jones, who played in the Rolling Stones. He could also do the same thing. Fingerpicking rhythms that hardly anyone could do. Those are the only two guys I've ever met who could… from back then… the only two guys who could play the pure style of country blues authentically."**

Dylan, who is about to turn 68, continues to be a force of nature, a veritable one-man Johnstown Flood. It's impossible to categorize or comprehend his confounding output of new songs. His youthful rebelliousness has now matured into an old-style American individualism. As a composer, Dylan now fits comfortably alongside George Gershwin or Irving Berlin, though he grumpily refuses to wear any man's collar. Casually dressed in jeans and a sweater vest, Dylan offers me coffee for our interview in a second-floor suite at Amsterdam's Intercontinental Hotel along the Amstel River. Dylan's curly hair is still tousled, his deeply creased face full of mischief. He has a razor-sharp memory. For two evenings, he proves to be a lucid, if circumspect, conversationalist.

Like the dour-faced farmer in Grant Wood's "American Gothic," Dylan seems to have the American Songbook in one hand and a raised pitchfork in the other, aimed at rock critics, politicians, Wall Street financiers, back-alley thieves, the World Wide Web – anything that cheapens the spirit of the individual. His nostalgia is more for the Chess Records Fifties than the psychedelic Sixties. He believes that Europe should lose the euro and go back to its old currencies (**"I miss the pictures on the old money,"** he says). If Dylan had his way, there'd be Sousa bands on Main Street and vinyl albums instead of CDs. Teenagers would go on nature hikes instead of watching YouTube. **"It's peculiar and unnerving in a way to see so many young people walking around with cellphones and iPods in their ears and so wrapped up in media and video games,"** he says. **"It robs them of their self-identity. It's a shame to see them so tuned out to real life. Of course they are free to do that, as if that's got anything to do with freedom. The cost of liberty is high, and young people should understand that before they start spending their life with all those gadgets."**

Ever since 2001's *Love and Theft*, Dylan has been producing his own albums under the pseudonym Jack Frost. **"It's better that I produce,"** he says. **"It saves a lot of time. A lot of rigmarole. A lot of communication, ya know? It's just easier for me to make records. Translating my own ideas directly rather than having them go through somebody else. I know my form of music better than anyone else would."**

Right now, Dylan is focused on *Together Through Life*, the new studio album he recorded last fall. The album's genesis was the song "Life Is Hard," his first gift to Dahan. With a pocket full of lyrics and melodies, Dylan booked a studio to lay down nine other new tracks. To help capture the Texas-Mexico-escapism aura, Dylan hired Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter to work with him. The 68-year-old Hunter had previously written two songs with Dylan, for *Down in the Groove* in 1988: "Silvio" and "Ugliest Girl in the World." It's rare, but not unprecedented, for Dylan to collaborate on songs. Over the years, he's shared songwriting credits with the likes of Tom Petty, Willie Nelson, the late Rick Danko of the Band – even Michael Bolton. (When he was in the Traveling Wilburys, Dylan wrote numerous songs with George Harrison. He hopes one day to sit down and work with Paul McCartney: **"That'd be exciting to do something with Paul! But, ya know, your paths have to cross for something like that to make sense."**)

Dylan and Hunter view the world through a similar lens. **"Hunter is an old buddy,"** Dylan says. **"We could probably write a hundred songs together if we thought it was important or the right reasons were there. He's got a way with words, and I do too. We both write a different type of song than what passes today for songwriting. I think we'll be writing a couple of other songs too, for some off-Broadway play."** For guitar, Dylan brought in Mike Campbell (on loan from Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers). **"Mike and I played before lots of times when I was on tour with Tom,"** Dylan says. **"There was always some part of the show where Mike and myself and [organist] Benmont Tench would play two or three ballads. On my new record I didn't think he'd have any problem."**

On *Together Through Life*, Dylan's mystic-drifter persona of his recent records has moved from the Mississippi Delta to Houston and the U.S.-Mexico borderland. Brownsville. McAllen. Laredo. El Paso. **"You feel things, and you're not quite sure what you feel,"** Dylan says about the region. **"But it follows your every move, and you don't know why. You can't get out of it. It's the pressure that's imposed on us."** The album bottles the feeling of King Ranch country along Highway 77 – down toward San Benito, where the water tower reads HOMETOWN OF FREDDY FENDER. "Spirited guys from down there," Dylan believes. **"Independent-thinking guys. Texas might have more independent-thinking people than any other state in the country. And it shows in the music. Realistically speaking, that is the same type of music that I heard growing up most nights in Minnesota. The languages were just different. It was sung in Spanish there. But where I came from, it was sung in Polish."**

The first track of *Together Through Life* – "Beyond Here Lies Nothin'" – is pure Tex-Mex torque. Already getting a lot of radio play, the song conjures up shiny automobiles rumbling across "boulevards of broken cars" through the vast Rio Grande Valley night. No grapefruit trees or warm salt breezes or beef-jerky stands here. You imagine forlorn bank buildings and tiny grain elevators and faded billboard advertisements. The last-chance gas is behind you a good 20 miles. By the second track, "Life Is Hard," Dylan is wandering past the old schoolyard, looking for strength to fight back the grim tide of old age. A red-brick afterglow lingers in the ballad like in an Edward Hopper painting. A Broadway singer has already recorded a demo of the song; it would be perfect for Diane Reeves or Norah Jones.

The third track, "My Wife's Home Town," a gloss on the old blues standard "I Just Want to Make Love to You," echoes the haunting Tom Waits vibe of Mule Variations. Dylan sounds like a phlegmatic Cab Calloway scatting and coughing before the coffin closes. Everything feels condemned. The fiendish specter of suicide is omnipresent: "State gone broke/The county's dry/Don't be looking at me with that evil eye." Dylan even menacingly cackles "*a-hah-heh-heh*" on the track. **"The song is a tribute, not a death chant,"** he says. **"Deep down, I think that everybody thinks like me sooner or later. They just might not be able to express it."**

The sense of dislocation continues in the more upbeat "If You Ever Go to Houston." The long-shot chance of redemption (or at least a good night of fun) is palatable. Dylan and Hunter are tapping into the rootlessness of Houston, which is about to supplant Chicago as the third-largest city in the United States. There is a feeling of operating on the undetected margins of the sprawl. The Dylan-Hunter lyric noticeably references the Mexican-American War of 1846 to 1848 as a remembrance of survival against adversity.

I ask Dylan about the wave of recent violence reaching up from Mexico into the Southwest borderlands, an area that the Grateful Dead had once happily celebrated in "Mexicali Blues" and other songs. **"That's always been dangerous ground,"** he says. **"It has a different kind of population than Austin or Dallas or other big cities. Texas is so big. It's a republic; it's its own country. The Texas borderlands are like a buffer zone for Mexico and the rest of the States. You get that leftover vibe from northern Mexico, central Mexico, where you have that legacy of Aztec brutality. That's where they used to slash the hearts out of people, captives and thousands of slaves offered up on bloody altars. On the other hand, you have Cortés and all those conquistadors who were coming out of the Spanish Inquisition-type scene. So I can imagine it got pretty brutal. And I think it's got a lot of spillover from that time, in our times. I see the violence as some kind of epidemic that has lasted until this day maybe."**

Not that Dylan isn't having fun in *Together Through Life*. In "I Feel a Change Comin' On," the wayward stranger gets a little oomph in his stride. Surveying the crazy world, Dylan is hopeful that a new love will fall into his arms. Dreams come and go, Dylan sings, but love is eternal. Every good Dylan album has a first-person line, one that his fans gravitate toward with wild enthusiasm. The winner in *Together Through Life* is the quip "I'm listening to Billy Joe Shaver/And I'm reading James Joyce/Some people they tell me/I've got the blood of the land in my voice." Dylanologists will probably have a field day analyzing why he chose to call out Shaver (a hand-maimed Texas guitar-picker who wrote many of Waylon Jennings' best songs). And why James Joyce? **"Waylon played me** [Shaver's] **'Ain't No God in Mexico,' and I don't know, it was quite good,"** Dylan says. **"Shaver and David Allen Coe became my favorite guys in that [outlaw] genre. The verse came out of nowhere. No… you know something? Subliminally, I can't say that this is actually true. But I think it was more of a Celtic thing. Tying Billy Joe with James Joyce. I think subliminally or astrologically those two names just wanted to be combined. Those two personalities."** (Maybe it's just that "Joyce" rhymes with "voice"?)

Something about the Old West mythologies of gunslinger John Wesley Hardin, political maverick Sam Houston and short-story writer O. Henry appeals to Dylan's imagination. Like a Western hero, he has given up the sedentary life and chosen the difficult path of his own ideals, made real by noble isolation. **"I think you really have to be a Texan to appreciate the vastness of it and the emptiness of it,"** Dylan says. **"But I'm an honorary Texan."**

"What do you mean?" I ask.

**"Well,"** he says, **"George Bush, when he was governor, gave me a proclamation that says I'm an honorary Texan** [holds hand up in pledge, laughs]**. As if anybody needed proof. It's no small thing. I take it as a high honor."**

While Dylan has praised Obama and rhapsodized about Obama's memoir, *Dreams From My Father*, he's been uncritical of the Bush administration. Almost every American artist has taken a piñata swipe at Bush's legacy, but Dylan refuses. He instead looks at the Bush years as just another unsurprising incident of dawn-of-man folly. **"I read history books just like you do,"** Dylan says. **"None of those guys are immune to the laws of history. They're going to go up or down, and they're going to take their people with them. None of us really knew what was happening in the economy. It changed so quickly into a true nightmare of horror. In another day and age, heads would roll. That's what would happen. The rot would be cut out. As far as blaming everything on the last president, think of it this way: The same folks who had held him in**

**such high regard came to despise him. Isn't it funny that they're the very same people who once loved him? People are fickle. Their loyalty can turn at the drop of a hat."**

At heart Dylan is an old-fashioned moralist like Shane, who believes in the basic lessons taught by *McGuffey's Readers* and the power of a six-shooter. A cowboy-movie aficionado, Dylan considers director John Ford a great American artist. **"I like his old films,"** Dylan says. **"He was a man's man, and he thought that way. He never had his guard down. Put courage and bravery, redemption and a peculiar mix of agony and ecstasy on the screen in a brilliant dramatic manner. His movies were easy to understand. I like that period of time in American films. I think America has produced the greatest films ever. No other country has ever come close. The great movies that came out of America in the studio system, which a lot of people say is the slavery system, were heroic and visionary, and inspired people in a way that no other country has ever done. If film is the ultimate art form, then you'll need to look no further than those films. Art has the ability to transform people's lives, and they did just that."**

The word "caustic" takes on a whole new meaning in *Together Through Life*'s final cut, the sure-to-be-canonical "It's All Good." Dylan belittles all those arrogant narcissists who constantly say it's all good, even when the world crumbles around them. Drums and guitar rumble in a mad-attic rush of grunge blues while Dylan spits out sarcasm with such lines as "Big politicians telling lies/Restaurant kitchen all full of flies/Don't make a bit of difference/ Don't see why it should… it's all good." It's a raucous affair. I ask Dylan if he has ever uttered the slang expression "It's all good," even once, himself. **"I might have, who knows?"** he says with a sidelong, savvy smile. **"Maybe if I was joking or something, just like in the song."**

If there is a guiding spirit to *Together Through Life* – Dylan's 33rd studio album – it's the ghost of Doug Sahm. At age 11, Sahm, a San Antonio native, had already recorded his first song, "A Real American Joe." By the time he was 13, the Grand Ole Opry offered him a regular gig; his mother disapproved. Eventually, Sahm's band – the Sir Douglas Quintet – became the Lone Star answer to the Beatles. The cosmic-cowboy sound was born. An impressed Dylan volunteered to sing harmony and play guitar on Sahm's 1973 *Doug Sahm and Band* as a sign of outsider solidarity; the album remains a weird, loose-grooving and quirky rock & roll classic. Dylan even wrote the lighthearted song "Wallflower" for it. Bootleg tapes of the Sahm-Dylan sessions now float around the black market. Tejano accordionist Flaco Jiménez anchored that band, Doug Sahm and Friends, back in 1973, just as David Hidalgo is doing with *Together Through Life*. As late as 1995, Sahm had joined Dylan onstage, in Austin, to play electric guitar on six numbers, including a version of the Grateful Dead's "Alabama Getaway." Sahm told the Texas audience that Dylan was a "beautiful friend" whom he loved dearly.

**"Doug was like me, maybe the only figure from that old period of time that I connected with,"** Dylan explains. **"His was a big soul. He had a hit record, 'She's About a Mover,' and I had a hit record** ["Like a Rolling Stone"] **at the same time. So we became buddies back then, and we played the same kind of music. We never really broke apart. We always hooked up at certain intervals in our lives… here and there from time to time. Like Bloomfield, Doug was once a child prodigy too. He was playing fiddle, steel guitar and maybe even saxophone before he was in his teens. I'd never met anybody that had played onstage with Hank Williams before, let alone someone my own age. Doug had a heavy frequency, and it was in his nerves. It's like what Charlie Patton says, 'My God, what solid power.' I miss Doug. He got caught in the grind. He should still be here."**

In the pecking order of rock & roll survivors, Dylan sees himself as number two, behind only Chuck Berry. Two songs from the new album – "Jolene" and "Shake Shake Mama" – sound like cuts from Berry's *After School Session*. (Another new Dylan song is "Forgetful Heart," which lyrically touches upon Berry's "Drifting Heart" of that 1958 album.) A friendship has developed between Dylan and Berry over the years. **"Chuck said to me, 'By God, I hope you live to be 100, and I hope I live forever,'"** Dylan says with a laugh. **"He said that to me a couple of years ago. In my universe, Chuck is irreplaceable… All that brilliance is still there, and he's still a force of nature. As long as Chuck Berry's around, everything's as it should be. This is a man who has been through it all. The world treated him so nasty. But in the end, it was the world that got beat."**

When I ask Dylan if he'd ever thought of collaborating on a project with Berry, he laughs. **"Chuck Berry?"** he says. **"The thought is preposterous. Chuck doesn't need anybody to do anything with or for him. You got to say that at this point in history he's probably the man. His presence is everywhere, but you never know it. I love Little Richard, but I don't think he performs as much as Chuck. And he's certainly not as spontaneous as Chuck. Chuck can perform at the drop of a hat. Well, Little Richard, he can too, actually, but he doesn't."**

After a little more talk on Berry, I shift gears to Elvis Presley, who inspired Dylan as a young man. Dylan has quipped that when he first encountered Elvis' voice as a teenager, it was like "busting out of jail." For Dylan, the very fact that Elvis had recorded versions of "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right," "Tomorrow Is a Long Time" and "Blowin' in the Wind" remains mind-boggling. Dutifully, as if returning a favor, Dylan recorded Elvis' hit "(Now and Then There's) A Fool Such As I" during both the *Basement Tapes* and *Self-Portrait* sessions.

But that was about as close as they ever got. **"I never met Elvis,"** Dylan says. **"I never met Elvis, because I didn't want to meet Elvis. Elvis was in his Sixties movie period, and he was just crankin' 'em out and knockin' 'em off, one after another. And Elvis had kind of fallen out of favor in the Sixties. He didn't really come back until, whatever was it, '68? I know the Beatles went to see him, and he just played with their heads. 'Cause George** [Harrison] **told me about the scene. And Derek** [Taylor], **one of the guys who used to work for him. Elvis was truly some sort of American king. His face is even on the Statue of Liberty. And, well, like I said, I wouldn't quite say he was ridiculed, but close. You see, the music scene had gone past him, and nobody bought his records. Nobody young wanted to listen to him or be like him. Nobody went to see his movies, as far as I know. He just wasn't in anybody's mind. Two or three times we were up in Hollywood, and he had sent some of the Memphis Mafia down to where we were to bring us up to see Elvis. But none of us went. Because it seemed like a sorry thing to do. I don't know if I would have wanted to see Elvis like that. I wanted to see the powerful, mystical Elvis that had crash-landed from a burning star onto American soil. The Elvis that was bursting with life. That's the Elvis that inspired us to all the possibilities of life. And that Elvis was gone, had left the building."**

Clearly, Dylan wants to make sure he doesn't flame out like Elvis. Not a minute of his Paris or Amsterdam shows were golden-oldie dial-ins. **"All these shows I play are in the zone,"** he says. Touring helps Dylan stay focused and fit as a fiddle. Not only are concerts workouts, but all the hustle and bustle of travel keeps him taut and thin. In movement, Dylan believes, man has a chance. Even on the road, boxing remains his primary training exercise. For years, in fact, he had a "professional opponent," Mouse Strauss, who would ferociously spar with him. **"Mouse could walk on his hands across a football field,"** Dylan says. **"He taught me the pugilistic rudiments back a while ago, maybe 20 or 30 years. That's not when I started, though. Boxing was a part of the curriculum when I went to high school. Then it was taken out of the school system, I think maybe in '58. But it was always good for me because it was kind of an individualist thing. You didn't need to be part of a team. And I liked that."**

I tell Dylan about a bootleg CD producer Bob Johnston once sent me of him sounding drunk crooning "Yesterday" with Johnny Cash. His eyes open wide. **"Me and Johnny would sit around hotel rooms in London and sing all kinds of stuff into a tape recorder,"** he says. **"As far as I know those tapes have never surfaced anywhere. But they've been in a few films here and there. I don't really remember 'Yesterday.'"** When I ask him if he thinks much about Cash, who died in September 2003, he turns somber.

**"Yeah, I do. I do miss him. But I started missing him 10 years before he actually kicked the bucket."**

"What does that mean?" I ask.

**"You know,"** he says, **"it's hard to talk about. I tell people if they are interested that they should listen to Johnny on his Sun records and reject all that notorious low-grade stuff he did in his later years. It can't hold a candlelight to the frightening depth of the man that you hear on his early records. That's the only way he should be remembered."**

Dylan has become our great American poet of drifting, inheriting a baton that was passed from Walt Whitman to Vachel Lindsay to Carl Sandburg to Allen Ginsberg. It was Sandburg, in fact, who captured Dylan's imagination. The Illinois populist represented the poetic flip side of his endless fascination with Woody Guthrie. Just as Dylan famously sat at Guthrie's sickbed in Greystone Hospital in New Jersey, he spontaneously drove with friends from New York to Hendersonville, North Carolina, simply to bang on the screened-in door of his all-seasons hero. It was in early February 1964. Mrs. Sandburg greeted the stoned-out New Yorkers with Appalachian warmth. "I am a poet," is how Dylan introduced himself to her. "My name is Robert Dylan, and I would like to see Mr. Sandburg." The 86-year-old Sandburg had collected more than 280 ballads in *The American Songbag*, and Dylan wanted to discuss them. **"I had three records out at the time,"** Dylan says, laughing at his youthful temerity. **"*The Times They Are a-Changin'* record was the one I gave him a copy of. Of course he had never heard of me."** After just 20 minutes, Sandburg excused himself. While Dylan felt it was a pleasant exchange, he didn't get to discuss "I'm a-Ridin' Old Paint" or "Frankie & Albert" with the bard. I ask Dylan whether it was worth the drive to North Carolina. **"Oh, yeah,"** Dylan says. **"It was worth meeting him. He was the Grand Ol' Man at the time. I always liked his poetry because it was so simple and poignant. You didn't need reference books to read him."**

More famously, around this time Dylan forged a bond with Ginsberg, whose poem "Howl" Dylan had practically memorized line by line. **"I like Ginsberg when he invented his own language,"** Dylan says. **"When he put his – nobody I don't think did that before – language down on paper. There's definitely a Ginsberg-ian language. And I don't think anybody uses it, because nobody has ever caught on to it. But it's powerful, confident language. All that neon jukebox and lonesome farms and grandfather night stuff. The way he puts words together. The ways that, you know, he used the English vocabulary, sharp words that seem to sweat as you read them."**

Ginsberg once told me a story about a night in the 1980s when Dylan raced over to his East Village apartment, hungry for a title to what eventually became the album *Empire Burlesque*. I ask Dylan whether he recalls the

incident. **"Yeah, of course!"** he says. **"I went over to see Allen. I think I played** [the songs] **to him over at his place at 5th Street and Avenue B. I played it for him because I thought he would like it. I never dreamed that Ginsberg would latch on to the pop-music world. I always thought they were jazz guys. I asked Allen what he would think a good title for this record was. And he listened. And he thought for a moment. And he said, 'Razzmatazz.'"** Dylan laughs and says, **"I was kind of speechless. It was not the kind of title that I was expecting. I wasn't sure about that idea. Later on, though, I realized that he might be right. I probably should have called it that."**

When tabulating literary influences, Dylan summons the name Walt Whitman, for *Leaves of Grass* continues to inspire him. Toward the end of his life, Whitman was preparing a "Death-Bed" edition of *Leaves of Grass*, reflecting on the indignities and ragged joys of growing old. **"I don't think the dream of Whitman has ever been fulfilled,"** Dylan says. **"I don't know if Whitman's spirit is still here. It's hard to say if it holds up except maybe in a nostalgic sense. That westward-expansion thing has been dead for a while now. When Whitman started out, he had such great faith in humankind. His mind must have been destroyed when the War between the States fell at his front door. His vision, which was so massively phallic, suddenly must have become plundered, ruined and emasculated when he saw all that indescribable destruction."**

We talk about Whitman serving as a nurse in a Washington, D.C., hospital during the Civil War, draining gangrene from a wounded soldier's limbs. **"I think you can see the change in Whitman,"** Dylan says. **"Before that and after that. He had the most grand view of America. Almost like he's America himself. He's just so big, and he's all that there is. The Greek Empire. The Roman Empire. The British Empire. All of European history gone. Whitman is the New World. That's what Whitman is all about. But it isn't the New World anymore. Poor man. He was hounded and mistreated, too, in his lifetime. And ridiculed. Emerson, Thoreau, all those guys, you don't know what they really thought of him."**

If any American personifies life on what Whitman called the "open road," it's Bob Dylan. Traveling allows Dylan's aloofness to ferment into clarity. Woody Guthrie, Blind Willie McTell and Jack Kerouac treasured this rootless way too. **"*On the Road* speeds by like a freight train,"** Dylan tells me. **"It's all movement and words and lusty instincts that come alive like you're riding on a train. Kerouac moves so fast with his words. No ambiguity. It was very emblematic of the time. You grabbed a hold of the train, hopped on and went along with him, hanging on for dear life. I think that's what affected me more than whatever he was writing about. It was his style of writing that affected us in such a virile way. I tried reading some of his books later, but I never felt that movement again."**

Sometimes on the road Dylan stops by the homes or graves of musicians he admires. He once went to Tupelo, Mississippi, to soak in the essence of Elvis. He's made pilgrimages in Texas to search out Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison. I ask Dylan if he minds people visiting Hibbing or Duluth or Minneapolis searching for the root of his talent. **"Not at all,"** he surprisingly says. **"That town where I grew up hasn't really changed that much, so whatever was in the air before is probably still there. I go through once in a while coming down from Canada. I'll stop there and wander around."** As for Duluth, where his grandparents lived, he thinks it's one of the country's forgotten gems. **"You'll never see another town like Duluth,"** he says. **"It's not a tourist destination, but it probably should be. Depends what season you're in there, though. There are only two seasons: damp and cold. I like the way the hills tumble to the waterfront and the way the wind blows around the grain elevators. The train yards go on forever too. It's old-age industrial, that's what it is. You'll see it from the top of the hill for miles and miles before you get there. You won't believe your eyes. I'll give you a medal if you get out alive."**

Dylan then recounts a recent side excursion he made from Minnesota to Manitoba. **"I went to see Neil Young's house in Winnipeg,"** he says. **"I just felt compelled. I wanted to see his bedroom. Where he looked out of the windows. Where he dreamed. Where he walked out of the door every day. Wanted to see what's around his neighborhood in Winnipeg. And I did just that."**

"How did you do that?"

**"I don't know,"** he answers. **"Somebody found out for me where he used to live. I mean, there's no marker or anything. And some people were living in his house. He lived in an upstairs duplex with his mother. I wanted to walk the steps that Neil walked every day."**

"Does he know you did that?" I ask.

**"I don't think so,"** Dylan says with a grin. **"I was meaning to send him a card afterward and tell him that. That I'd been there. Where he used to hang out and where he started out. Neil, I respect him so much."**

Long a master of disguise, Dylan can slip into truck stops or taprooms with relative ease. He's learned the art of blending in. If necessary, there is always a sweatshirt hood. Irregular in his daily routine, mainly a night owl, Dylan sometimes draws sketches for his paintings. For years, Dylan's artwork was mostly monochromatic, but recently, in his Drawn Blank series, he has added bursts of color to his drawings. He likes dazzling purples,

pinks and sunflower yellow. For all of his bouts of lyrical darkness, Dylan, like Van Gogh, relishes color, and he lets it show; even when the subject matter is a dismal rail yard or a ramshackle house.

When I question Dylan about his genius for disconnecting from the rat race, he quotes Scipio. **"Scipio, the great conqueror of Hannibal, who says, 'I'm never in such good company as when I'm alone.'"** To Dylan, this is ancient folk wisdom to live by. Wisdom that Hank Williams understood. Later in our conversation, he quotes Scipio again. **" 'I'm never so busy,'"** he says, **" 'as when I've got nothing to do.'"** (I get the weird feeling that this maxim will soon show up in a new Dylan lyric.) **"A person's solitude is important,"** Dylan tells me in teacher mode. **"You have to learn about yourself and figure things out, and that's a good way to do it. Obviously, though, too much of it is no good. You can abuse anything."**

Dylan has become habituated to eminence. Wherever he goes, people treat him like a king. A cross eye from Dylan can have a devastating effect on a roadie or band member's psyche. Deeply idiosyncratic, mood changing by the minute, Dylan has an unerring ability to make anyone in the room feel they're not equal to the talent present. But he also plays shaman and sprinkles your life with magic dust. When a musician friend turns ill, Dylan plays one of that musician's songs in concert as a personal tribute. Months before Mike Bloomfield died of a drug overdose, Dylan, learning he was struggling, reunited with him in San Francisco to play "Like a Rolling Stone" one last triumphant time. Playing the role of passing angel, Dylan has sung the songs of Jerry Garcia, Warren Zevon, Frank Sinatra, George Harrison and Waylon Jennings, to name just a few, soon after they died, as a spontaneous tribute to their artistry.

Dylan spends most of the afternoon of April 9th at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. I am not allowed to come along. But later he recaps to me what crossed his mind, like who his favorite artists are. **"Well, of course, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko are good as far as Americans go, and I guess George Bellows and Thomas Hart Benton are OK,"** he says. **"But this guy here, from this town, Rembrandt, is one of my two favorite painters. I like his work because it's rough, crude and beautiful. Caravaggio's the other one. I'd probably go a hundred miles for a chance to see a Caravaggio painting or a Bernini sculpture. You know who I like a lot is** [J.M.W.] **Turner, the English painter. Art is artillery. And those guys, especially Caravaggio and Rembrandt, used it in its most effective manner. After seeing their work, I'm not even so sure how I feel about Picasso, to tell you the truth."**

"Why's that?" I ask.

**"Lots of reasons,"** he says. **"He was a renegade painter. He just painted what he wanted. He didn't have anybody over him. I don't think he was ever pushed to the degree that those other guys were. I don't feel Picasso's paintings like I feel the other work I just mentioned. I like Jacques-Louis David a lot, too, although he was a propagandist painter. David's the artist who did the emblematic painting of 'Napoleon at the Saint-Bernard Pass' and 'The Death of Marat.'"** As for Andy Warhol, Dylan glares at me for bringing his name into the heavyweight mix. **"Only as a cultural figure,"** he says. **"Not as an artist."**

After that evening's show at the Heineken Music Hall – at around 11:30 p.m. – I interview Dylan again. Because it is Easter weekend, I decide to push him on the importance of Christian Scripture in his life. **"Well, sure,"** he says, **"that and those other first books I read were really biblical stuff. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Ben-Hur*. Those were the books that I remembered reading and finding religion in. Later on, I started reading over and over again Plutarch and his *Roman Lives*. And the writers Cicero, Tacitus and Marcus Aurelius… I like the morality thing. People talk about it all the time. Some say you can't legislate morality. Well, maybe not. But morality has gotten kind of a bad rap. In Roman thought, morality is broken down into basically four things. Wisdom, Justice, Moderation and Courage. All of these are the elements that would make up the depth of a person's morality. And then that would dictate the types of behavior patterns you'd use to respond in any given situation. I don't look at morality as a religious thing."**

But to Dylan, morality is often about holding firm to personal principles. We talk about his refusal to capitulate to CBS censors back in 1963 when he was to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show* for the first time. The network had wanted Dylan to play a Clancy Brothers song, even though he had rehearsed "Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues." The censors refused to allow a so-called "commie" protest song into America's Cold War living rooms. Dylan wouldn't give in. He now views the walk-off as a seminal event in his early career. **"Ed** [Sullivan] **was behind me, but the censors came down, and they didn't want me to play that particular song,"** he says. **"I just had it in my mind to do that particular song. I'd rehearsed it, and it went down well. And I knew everybody back home would be watching me on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. But then I walked off *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and they couldn't have a chance to see me. So I don't know what that says about me as a person. That was the biggest TV show ever at that time, and it was broadcast on Sunday night. Millions of people watched from coast to coast. It was a dream come true just to be on that stage. Everybody knew that."**

Bolting from *The Ed Sullivan Show* was the true turning point in Dylan's life script, even more significant than going electric at Newport. From that moment onward, Dylan would only play by his rules. His spine stiffened. When a recording artist blew off Ed Sullivan… well, the James Dean outsider avenue was the only option left.

But how did Dylan's mother and father back in Minnesota feel about little Bobby stiffing Mr. Sullivan? **"Well, we grew up without TV, really,"** Dylan explains. **"TV came in when I was maybe 16. We didn't get the network shows up north. We only got TV from about 3:00 till 7:00 when it began to come in. We had no consciousness of TV. None. It was all live entertainment that would come through town. Those days are long gone. Even the memories have been obliterated. I think maybe I was in the last generation that grew up like that. We didn't see Dick Clark. I think *Ed Sullivan* came in the last year I was at home. Didn't see Elvis on *Ed Sullivan* because we didn't get that. It was a more innocent way of life. Imagination is what you had and maybe all you had."**

More than any recent American artist, with the possible exception of the late collage painter Robert Rauschenberg, Dylan has repeatedly challenged his own intellect and faith. Nothing is ever fully settled. His mind is always crowded with future projects: a series of Brazil-inspired paintings, the next installment of *Chronicles*, a TV special, an orchestra playing new arrangements of his timeless standards, and the composition of more song-poems for the ages sometimes casually written on hotel letterhead. He is going out in life as a gnarled bluesman able to hold his head high, a tried-and-true folkloric figure who's outfoxed even B'rer Rabbit.

When President Sarkozy, looking to make small talk, asked Dylan, **"Where do you live?"** the quick response was a few simple words: **"Right here… No. I'm just joking. I'm from the Lone Star State."** (Dylan ended by giving Sarkozy a Texas-style belt buckle as a gift.)

Technically, Dylan's answer wasn't true. Dylan belongs to no city or state. There is Dylan the family man who spends time in California with his children and grandchildren in Malibu, West Hollywood and Beverly Hills. Sometimes Dylan lingers in the Bay Area for weeks at a time, sketching fishmongers and longshoremen. As a New York Yankee fan, he can be found sitting behind first base in the Bronx on random autumnal nights, wishing Mickey Mantle were still batting cleanup. But it's Minnesota's north country, which seems to always lie just over the frozen brow of a long-remembered field, where the road still reaches into the void on below-zero blue winter days, that remains Dylan's touchstone place. That's the American landscape, which has influenced him most. The Great Lakes region is where he learned Mexican *conjunto* music by way of Polish polka bands. You can't find the real Dylan spirit in Greenwich Village or an L.A. studio, a Yazoo River juke joint or a Laredo cafe. For underneath all the mercurial antics and standing ovations, Dylan is so down-home that he considers the boondocks of Hibbing-Duluth to be far grander than Paris.

**"The air is so pure there,"** he says. **"And the brooks and rivers are still running. The forests are thick, and the landscape is brutal. And the sky is still blue up there. It is still pretty untarnished. It's still off the beaten path. But I hardly ever go back."**

# before 14 October 2009, Unknown Interviewer (Joan Baez documentary)

Source: soundtrack to the DVD *Joan Baez: How Sweet the Sound*, American Masters, Razor & Tie Entertainment PASS003, 2009.

The interview took place at an unknown location. Dylan's responses only. The video includes shots of Dylan in a purple shirt with white polka dots, which may help to date the interview.

**She had a very unusual way of playing a guitar. I'd never heard anybody do that like Joanie did, and I tried to practice it but I couldn't get that style down.**

*-----*-----*

**She had that heart-stopping soprano voice. Just couldn't get it out of my mind, and her range of songs was very unusual for that time. Just a combination of all the things she did which were put together in such a… seemed like some kind of miraculous way.**

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**Joanie was at the forefront of a new dynamic in American music. She had a record out, circulating among the folk circles called… I think it was just called 'Joan Baez' and… everybody was listening to it… me included. I listened to it a lot.**

*-----*-----*

**I was like singing and playing with her. I thought our voices really blended well. We could sing just about any kind of thing and make it make sense. To me it always sounded good. I think it might have sounded good to her, too. Then we began singing here and there and she just asked me if I wanted to play some shows with her, just like that.**

*-----*-----*

[In 1965] **I was just trying to deal with the madness that had become my career… you know, and, unfortunately, she got swept along and I felt very bad about it. I was sorry to see our relationship end.**

*-----*-----*

**I loved that song 'Diamonds And Rust', and to be included in something that Joanie had written there. Uh! To this day, it still impresses me.**

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**Joanie's role in that movie** [Renaldo And Clara] **was created for her to be the heroine. I thought that Joanie always wanted to express herself that way. I know she was completely in her element in that Rolling Thunder tour. She brought a lot to that tour.**

# October 2009, Bill Flanagan

Source: taken from a slightly fuller version in: *The Big Issue, Special Souvenir Edition*, Scotland, 23-29 November 2009, pages 14-17, 19.

The interview took place in Waterfront Plaza Hotel, Oakland, California.

**'I'm a true believer'**

Bob Dylan has, at various times, revolutionized folk, rock, country and gospel music. However, any Dylan fan who says he was not surprised that Bob has released an album of traditional Christmas songs is pulling your leg. *Christmas In The Heart* is another surprising move by an artist famous for surprises. Yet when you hear Dylan's direct and obviously sincere readings of 'O Come All Ye Faithful', 'Little Town Of Bethlehem', and 'The First Noel', this unlikely exercise seems of a piece with the rest of Dylan's work.

From the very first, this was an artist who made us look at the familiar with new eyes and ears. While some critics tie themselves into knots analysing Dylan's motives, it has usually turned out that Bob Dylan means exactly what he says. Featuring members of his touring band along with Los Lobos' David Hidalgo and Chess Records veteran Phil Upchurch, *Christmas In The Heart* is Bob Dylan's celebration of family, community, faith and shared memory. And a timely celebration it is. Recognizing the world wide problem of hunger, Bob Dylan has donated all of his proceeds from the record, in perpetuity, to organizations around the world to help with hunger and homelessness.

We sat down to talk in the Waterfront Plaza Hotel in Oakland on a rainy, windy, October day.

BILL FLANAGAN: Is recording a Christmas album something you've had on your mind for a while?

**BOB DYLAN: Yeah, every so often it has crossed my mind. The idea was first brought to me by Walter Yetnikoff, back when he was president of Columbia Records.**

BF: Did you take him seriously?

**BD: Well, sure I took him seriously.**

BF: But it didn't happen. How come?

**BD: He wasn't specific. Besides, there was always a glut of records out around that time of year and I didn't see how one by me could make any difference.**

BF: What was Christmas like around your town when you were growing up?

**BD: Well, you know, plenty of snow, jingle bells, Christmas carolers going from house to house, sleighs in the streets, town bells ringing, nativity plays. That sort of thing.**

BF: Your family was Jewish – as a kid did you ever feel left out of the Christmas excitement?

**BD: No, not at all.**

BF: What's your idea of a good Christmas Dinner?

**BD: Mashed potatoes and gravy, roast turkey and collard greens, turnip greens, biscuit dressing, corn bread and cranberry sauce.**

BF: Have you spent any Christmases overseas and been struck by how the holiday is celebrated in other countries?

**BD: I was in Mexico City once and they do a lot of re-enactment scenes of Joseph and Mary looking for a place to stay.**

BF: How do you like to spend the week between Christmas and New Years?

**BD: Doing nothing – maybe reflecting on things.**

BF: Why do you think Christmas has better songs than other holidays?

**BD: I don't know. That's a good question. Maybe because it's so worldwide and everybody can relate to it in their own kind of way.**

BF: Very often when contemporary artists do Christmas records, they look for a new angle. John Fahey did instrumental folk variations on holiday songs, Billy Idol did a rock and roll Christmas album, Phil Spector put the Wall of Sound around the Christmas tree and the Roches did kind of a kooky left-field collection. You played this right down the middle, doing classic holiday songs in traditional arrangements. Did you know going in you wanted to play it straight?

**BD: Oh sure, there wasn't any other way to play it. These songs are part of my life, just like folk songs. You have to play them straight too.**

BF: There's something new that happens when your voice goes up against the very smooth background singers and old-fashioned arrangements. It adds a new flavour to the mix. When you do 'I'll Be Home For Christmas', it sounds really forlorn, like you're singing the song in jail and this is your one phone call. Do you ever approach singing a song like an actor?

**BD: Not any more than Willie or Nat King Cole would. The songs don't require much acting. They kind of play themselves.**

BF: Do you try to go for different emotions on different takes?

**BD: Not really. The emotions would pretty much be the same on any singular take. The inflections would maybe differ if we changed the key and sometimes that might affect the emotional resonance.**

BF: When I hear your version of 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing', it makes me think of a lonely fellow outside the church, looking through the window at the congregation, wishing he was in there. Did any of these songs surprise you when you heard them played back?

**BD: No, they were pretty much the same going in as going out. You can already hear them in your head before you begin.**

BF: Any Christmas songs you like but you did not think you could do?

**BD: Not really. There were ones I didn't want to do, but not any that I didn't think I could do. The idea was to record the best known ones.**

BF: 'Christmas Blues' is an old Dean Martin song. What attracted you to that?

**BD: It's just a beautiful song.**

BF: Stan Lynch once told me about you and him slipping out of a rehearsal with The Heartbreakers to go see Dean, Sinatra and Sammy Davis. What appealed to you about those guys?

**BD: I don't know, maybe the camaraderie. On the other hand I wasn't much into that whole scene actually – it left a lot of people out.**

BF: 'Must Be Santa' is a real jumping polka. Did you hear a lot of polka bands growing up?

**BD: Yeah, I heard a few.**

BF: I never heard that song before. Where did you hear it?

**BD: I first heard that song years ago on one of those *Sing Along with Mitch* records. But this version comes from a band called Brave Combo. Somebody sent their record to us for our radio show. They're a regional band out of Texas that takes regular songs and changes the way you think about them. You oughta hear their version of 'Hey Jude'.**

BF: The way you do 'Winter Wonderland' makes me think of Gene Autry and Roy Rodgers, the singing cowboys in the old movies. Even in John Wayne films, there'd always be a scene back at the fort where an Irish band was playing, or the Sons of the Pioneers were singing. Did you have a favourite cowboy singer as a kid?

**BD: Yeah, Tex Ritter.**

BF: What about Gene and Roy?

**BD: Yeah, they were okay, but Tex Ritter was my favourite. He was way more heavy. There was more gravity to him.**

BF: Have you heard *Christmas on Death Row*, the rap Christmas record?

**BD: No, I don't think so.**

BF: Do you listen to rap music?

**BD: I don't listen to rap radio stations and I don't play rap songs on the jukebox, and I don't go to rap shows. So no, I guess I don't listen to rap music all that much.**

BF: What do you think of rap music?

**BD: I love rhyming for rhyming's sake. I think that's an incredible art form.**

BF: There's a lonely quality in the way you do 'Silver Bells'. You were a young man when you moved from Minnesota to New York City. Was Christmas very different in New York?

**BD: Christmas was pretty much the same in New York, only more so.**

BF: Did it make you homesick?

**BD: Not really, I didn't think about it that much. I didn't bring the past with me when I came to New York. Nothing back there would play any part in where I was going.**

BF: Hearing you sing 'Adeste Fideles' reminds me of being an altar boy at Midnight Mass. The priests all had to lead the singing, and it didn't matter if they were singers or not, they belted it out. Have you ever sung in a foreign language before?

**BD: I've sung in French, Italian and Spanish. Over the years, Columbia has asked me to do records in those languages and I recorded stuff here and there. None of the tracks have been released, though. It's hard deciding whether to do a translation of one of my own songs, or an original song in one of those languages – which I'm actually more partial to. I've always wanted to do some Edith Piaf songs.**

BF: Which one, 'La Vie En Rose' perhaps?

**BD: Yeah. That one and a couple of others. 'Sous Le Ciel De Paris', 'Pour Moi Tout Seule' and maybe one or two more.**

BF: What stopped you?

**BD: Well, I can hear myself doing them in my head, but I'd need written arrangements to pull it off and I'm not sure who could do that.**

BF: Which singers do you associate with Christmas?

**BD: Johnny Mathis and Nat King Cole. Doris Day.**

BF: What about Bing Crosby?

**BD: Sure, 'White Christmas' was always a big song.**

BF: I always get choked up at the end of *Going My Way* when the old priest's mother comes walking toward him on Christmas Eve and Bing watches from the door of the church then picks up his suitcase and walks off into the snow – 'Tura, Lura, Lura' playing in the background. You can't get any more Christmasy than that. Did movies have a big effect on how you saw the world growing up?

**BD: I think so. I lived in a small town and movies were a window into the outside world.**

BF: 'Christmas Island' is a wacky song! "Santa's going to sail in with your presents in a canoe". Where did that come from? You ever been to 'Christmas Island'?

**BD: No I've never been there. I have no idea where the song comes from, who wrote or even if there is such a place.**

BF: Your song 'Three Angels' always reminds me of the holidays. Did you ever sit down to write a Christmas song?

**BD: I have never done that. It's something to think about though.**

BF: You have grandchildren. What do you think they'll make of this record? Did it occur to you making this record that years from now your grandchildren will play this album for their own kids?

**BD: I don't know what my grandchildren think of any of my records. I don't know if they've even heard them. Maybe the older ones.**

BF: You're a lot more loyal to these melodies than you are to the melodies of the songs you've written. Do you figure these tunes can't be messed with?

**BD: If you want to get to the heart of them, they can't be, no.**

BF: Your version of 'The Christmas Song' is right in the pocket. You slide into that song like you've been singing it all your life. You also sing the intro ("All through the year we waited…") which most people leave out. I don't think Nat King Cole used that intro – why did you bring it back?

**BD: Well, I figured the guy who wrote it put it in there deliberately. It definitely creates tension, predicts what you are about to hear.**

BF: I think you did drop the "goodies" on the sleigh. Did something about that bother you?

**BD: No not really. I don't think I thought of it until you mentioned it. I try my best to be exact, but sometimes things just fall away. We probably recorded the song, got the feel right and moved on. Most likely we didn't even listen back. Just moved on to something else. I don't think that's something I would have noticed anyway.**

BF: You really give a heroic performance of 'O Little Town Of Bethlehem'. The way you do it reminds me a little of an Irish rebel song. There's something almost defiant in the way you sing, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." I don't want to put you on the spot, but you sure deliver that song like a true believer.

**BD: Well, I am a true believer.**

BF: You know, some people will think that Bob Dylan doing a Christmas album is meant to be ironic or a put-on. This sounds to me like one of the most sincere records you've ever made. Did anybody at your record company or management resist the idea?

**BD: No it was my record company who compelled me to do it.**

BF: Why now?

**BD: Well, it just came my way now, at this time. Actually, I don't think I would have been experienced enough earlier anyway.**

BF: Some critics don't seem to know what to make of this record. Bloomberg news said, "Some of the songs sound ironic. Does he really mean have yourself a Merry Little Christmas?" Is there any ironic content in these songs?

**BD: No not at all. Critics like that are on the outside looking in. They are definitely not fans or the audience that I play to. They would have no gut level understanding of me and my work, what I can and can't do – the scope of it all. Even at this point in time they still don't know what to make of me.**

BF: Derek Barker in the Independent compared this record with the shock of you going electric. So many artists have released Christmas records, from Bing Crosby to Huey Piano Smith. Why is it a shock if you do it?

**BD: You'll have to ask them.**

BF: The Chicago Tribune felt this record needed more irreverence. Doesn't that miss the point?

**BD: Well, sure it does, that's an irresponsible statement anyway. Isn't there enough irreverence in the world? Who would need more? Especially at Christmas time.**

BF: The profits from this album are going to buy Christmas dinners for folks who are having a hard time financially. When I heard that I thought of the Woody Guthrie song 'Pretty Boy Floyd' – "Here's a Christmas dinner for the families on relief."

**BD: Exactly. 'Pretty Boy Floyd'. "Pretty Boy grabbed the log chain and the deputy grabbed his gun." Did you ever notice how Pretty Boy Floyd looks exactly like Babe Ruth?**

BF: Yeah, I have.

**BD: Did you ever think it could be the same guy?**

BF: Maybe they're interchangeable?

**BD: Yeah, in the real world Pretty Boy would be batting clean up for the Yankees and Babe Ruth would be robbing banks.**

BF: Yeah, and they're both legends.

**BD: Right.**

BF: Why did you pick Feeding America, Crisis UK and The World Food Program to give the proceeds of this record to?

**BD: They get food straight to the people. No military organization, no bureaucracy, no governments to deal with.**

BF: Do you still send out Christmas cards?

**BD: I haven't for a while.**

BF: Do you have a favourite Christmas album?

**BD: Maybe the Louvin Brothers. I like all the religious Christmas albums. The ones in Latin. The songs I sang as a kid.**

BF: A lot of people like the secular ones.

**BD: Religion isn't meant for everybody.**

BF: What sort of gifts do you like to give?

**BD: I try to match the person with the gift.**

BF: Are you a last minute shopper?

**BD: Always.**

BF: Do you drop any hints about what you hope to get from your family?

**BD: Nope. Their well-being – that's enough of a gift for me.**

BF: I know we're out of time but I have to ask, what's the best Christmas gift you ever got?

**BD: Let me think… oh yeah, I think it was a sled.**

# Midsummer 2012, Mikal Gilmore

Source: full version in: *Rolling Stone*, US magazine, Issue 1166, 27 September 2012, pages 42-51, 80-81.

The interview took place in Santa Monica, California.

**Bob Dylan: The Rolling Stone Interview**

**"I'm trying to explain something that can't be explained,"** says Bob Dylan. **"Help me out."** It's a midsummer day, an hour or so before evening, and we are seated at a table on a shaded patio, at the rear of a Santa Monica restaurant. Dylan is dressed warmer than the Southern California weather invited, in a buttoned black leather jacket over a thick white T-shirt. He also wears a ski cap – black around its lower half, white at its dome – pulled down over his ears and low on his forehead. A fringe of moptop-style reddish-blond hair, clearly a wig, curls slightly out from the front of the cap, above his eyebrows. He has a glass of cold water in front of him. In the 15 years since his 1997 album, *Time Out of Mind*, Dylan – who is now 71 – has enjoyed the most sustained period of creativity of his lifetime. His new album, *Tempest*, tells tales of mortal ends, moral faithlessness and hard-earned (if arbitrary) grace, culminating in a swirling, 14-minute epic about the Titanic, which mixes fact and fantasy, followed by a loving, mystical song about his late friend and peer John Lennon. It's unlikely, though, that Dylan will ever eclipse the renown of his explosion of music and style in the 1960s, which transformed him into a definitive mythic force of those times. But Dylan wasn't always comfortable with the effects of that reputation. In 1966, following a series of mind-blazing and controversial electric performances, the young hero removed himself from his own moment after he was laid low by a motorcycle accident, in Woodstock. The music that he returned with, in the late 1960s – *John Wesley Harding* and *Nashville Skyline* – sounded as if Dylan had become a different man. In truth, he now says, that's what he was – or rather, what he was becoming. What Bob Dylan believes really happened to him after he survived his radical pinnacle is much more transformational than he has fully revealed before. This was an incident he'd alluded to briefly in his 2004 autobiography, *Chronicles: Volume One*, but in this interview the matter took on deeper implications.

At moments, I pushed in on some questions, and Dylan pushed back. We continued the conversation over the next many days, on the phone and by way of some written responses. Dylan didn't hedge or attempt to guard himself as we went along. Just the opposite: He opened up unflinchingly, with no apologies. This is Bob Dylan as you've never known him before.

*Do you see "Tempest" as an eventful album, like "Time Out of Mind" or "Love and Theft"?*

***Tempest* was like all the rest of them: The songs just fall together. It's not the album I wanted to make, though. I had another one in mind. I wanted to make something more religious. That takes a lot more concentration – to pull that off 10 times with the same thread – than it does with a record like I ended up with, where anything goes and you just gotta believe it will make sense.**

*Nonetheless, this seems among your bigger works, like Time Out of Mind, though more outward, less inward.*

**Well… the *Time Out of Mind* record, that was the beginning of me making records for an audience that I was playing to night after night. They were different people from different walks of life, different environments and ages. There was no reason for these new people to hear songs I'd written 30 years earlier for different purposes. If I was going to continue on, what I needed were new songs, and I had to write them, not necessarily to make records, but to play for the public.**

**The songs on *Time Out of Mind* weren't meant for somebody to listen to at home. Most of the songs work, whereas before, there might have been better records, but the songs don't work. So I'll stick with what I was doing after *Time Out of Mind*, rather than what I was doing in the Seventies and Eighties, where the songs just don't work.**

*That album was plainly received as a turning point. It began a sustained winning streak. Everything since then is a body of work that can stand on its own.*

**I hope it can. It should connect with people. The thing about it is that there is the old and the new, and you have to connect with them both. The old goes out and the new comes in, but there is no sharp borderline. The old is still happening while the new enters the scene, sometimes unnoticed. The new is overlapping at the same time the old is weakening its hold. It goes on and on like that. Forever through the centuries. Sooner or later, before you know it, everything is new, and what happened to the old? It's like a magician trick, but you have to keep connecting with it.**

**It's just like when talking about the Sixties. If you were here around that time, you would know that the early Sixties, up to maybe '64, '65, was really the Fifties, the late Fifties. They were still the Fifties, still the same culture, in America anyway. And it was still going strong but fading away. By '66, the new Sixties probably started coming in somewhere along that time and had taken over by the end of the decade. Then, by the time of Woodstock, there was no more Fifties. I really wasn't so much a part of what they call "the Sixties."**

*Even though you're so identified with it?*

**Evidently I was, and maybe even still am. I was there during that time, but I really couldn't identify with what was happening. It didn't mean that much to me. I had my own family by then. You know, for instance,** [Timothy] **Leary and others like him, they wouldn't have lasted a second in earlier days. Of course, the Vietnam War didn't help any.**

*Do you ever worry that people interpreted your work in misguided ways? For example, some people still see "Rainy Day Women" as coded about getting high.*

**It doesn't surprise me that some people would see it that way. But these are people that aren't familiar with the Book of Acts.**

*Sometimes you seem to have a distaste for the 1960s.*

**The Fifties were a simpler time, at least for me and the situation I was in. I didn't really experience what a lot of the other people my age experienced, from the more mainstream towns and cities. Where I grew up was as far from the cultural center as you could get. It was way out of the beaten path. You had the whole town to roam around in, though, and there didn't seem to be any sadness or fear or insecurity. It was just woods and sky and rivers and streams, winter and summer, spring, autumn. The changing of the seasons. The culture was mainly circuses and carnivals, preachers and barnstorming pilots, hillbilly shows and comedians, big bands and whatnot. Powerful radio shows and powerful radio music. This was before supermarkets and malls and multiplexes and Home Depot and all the rest. You know, it was a lot simpler. And when you grow up that way, it stays in you. Then I left, which was, I guess, toward the end of the Fifties, but I saw and felt a lot of things in the Fifties, which generates me to this day. It's sort of who I am.**

**I guess the Fifties would have ended in about '65. I don't really have a warm feeling for that period of time. Why would I? Those days were cruel.**

*Why is that? Was it just too much upheaval, being at the white-hot center of it?*

**Yeah, that and a whole lot of other stuff. Things were beginning to get corporatized. That wouldn't have mattered to me, but it was happening to the music, too. And I truly loved the music. I saw the death of what I love and a certain way of life that I'd come to take for granted.**

*Yet people thought your music spoke to and reflected the 1960s. Do you feel that's also the case with your music since 1997?*

**Sure, my music is always speaking to times that are recent. But let's not forget human nature isn't bound to any specific time in history. And it always starts with that. My songs are personal music; they're not communal. I wouldn't want people singing along with me. It would sound funny. I'm not playing campfire meetings. I don't remember anyone singing along with Elvis, or Carl Perkins, or Little Richard. The thing you have to do is make people feel their own emotions. A performer, if he's doing what he's supposed to do, doesn't feel any emotion at all. It's a certain kind of alchemy that a performer has.**

*Don't you think you're a particularly American voice – for how your songs reference our history, or have commented on it?*

**They're historical. But they're also biographical and geographical. They represent a particular state of mind. A particular territory.**

**What others think about me, or feel about me, that's so irrelevant. Any more than it is for me, when I go see a movie, say, *Wuthering Heights* or something, and have to wonder what's Laurence Olivier really like. When I see an actor on the stage or something, I don't think about what they're like. I'm there because I want to forget about myself, forget about what I care or do not care about. Entertaining is a type of sport.**

[*Dylan suddenly seems excited.*] **Let me show you something. I want to show you something. You might be interested in this. You might take this someplace. You might want to rephrase your questions, or think of new ones** [*laughs*]**. Let me show you this.** [*Gets up and walks to another table.*]

*You want me to come with you?*

**No, no, no, I got it right here. I thought this might interest you.** [*Brings a weathered paperback to the table!*] **See this book? Ever heard of this guy?** [*Shows me* Hell's Angel: The Life and Times of Sonny Barger and the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club*, by Sonny Barger.*]

*Yeah, sure.*

**He's a Hell's Angel.**

*He was "the" Hell's Angel.*

**Look who wrote this book.** [*Points at coauthors' names, Keith Zimmerman and Kent Zimmerman.*] **Do those names ring a bell? Do they look familiar? Do they? You wonder, "What's that got to do with me?" But they do look familiar, don't they? And there's two of them there. Aren't there two? One's not enough? Right?** [*Dylan's now seated, smiling.*]

**I'm going to refer to this place here.** [*Opens the book to a dog-eared page.*] **Read it out loud here. Just read it out loud into your tape recorder.**

*"One of the early presidents of the Berdoo Hell's Angels was Bobby Zimmerman. On our way home from the 1964 Bass Lake Run, Bobby was riding in his customary spot – front left – when his muffler fell off his bike. Thinking he could go back and retrieve it, Bobby whipped a quick U-turn from the front of the pack. At that same moment, a Richmond Hell's Angel named Jack Egan was hauling ass from the back of the pack toward the front. Egan was on the wrong side of the road, passing a long line of speeding bikes, just as Bobby whipped his U-turn. Jack broadsided poor Bobby and instantly killed him. We dragged Bobby's lifeless body to the side of the road. There was nothing we could do but to send somebody on to town for help." Poor Bobby.*

**Yeah, poor Bobby. You know what this is called? It's called transfiguration. Have you ever heard of it?**

*Yes.*

**Well, you're looking at somebody.**

*That… has been transfigured?*

**Yeah, absolutely. I'm not like you, am I? I'm not like him, either. I'm not like too many others. I'm only like another person who's been transfigured. How many people like that or like me do you know?**

*By transfiguration, you mean it in the sense of being transformed? Or do you mean transmigration, when a soul passes into a different body?*

**Transmigration is not what we are talking about. This is something else. I had a motorcycle accident in 1966. I already explained to you about new and old. Right? Now, you can put this together any way you want. You can work on it any way you want. Transfiguration: You can go and learn about it from the Catholic Church, you can learn about it in some old mystical books, but it's a real concept. It's happened throughout the ages. Nobody knows who it's happened to, or why. But you get real proof of it here and there. It's not like something you can dream up and think. It's not like conjuring up a reality or like reincarnation – or like when you might think you're somebody from the past but have no proof. It's not anything to do with the past or the future.**

**So when you ask some of your questions, you're asking them to a person who's long dead. You're asking them to a person that doesn't exist. But people make that mistake about me all the time. I've lived through a lot. Have you ever heard of a book called *No Man Knows My History*? It's about Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet. The title could refer to me.**

**Transfiguration is what allows you to crawl out from under the chaos and fly above it. That's how I can still do what I do and write the songs I sing and just keep on moving.**

*When you say I'm talking to a person that's dead, do you mean the motorcyclist Bobby Zimmerman, or do you mean Bob Dylan?*

**Bob Dylan's here! You're talking to him.**

*Then your transfiguration is…*

**It is whatever it is. I couldn't go back and find Bobby in a million years. Neither could you or anybody else on the face of the Earth. He's gone. If I could, I would go back. I'd like to go back. At this point in time, I would love to go back and find him, put out my hand. And tell him he's got a friend. But I can't. He's gone. He doesn't exist.**

*OK, so when you speak of transfiguration…*

**I only know what I told you. You'll have to go and do the work yourself to find out what it's about.**

*I'm trying to determine whom you've been transfigured from, or as.*

**I just showed you. Go read the book.**

*That's who you have in mind? What could the connection to that Bobby Zimmerman be other than name?*

**I don't have it in mind. I didn't write that book. I didn't make it up. I didn't dream that. I'm not telling you I had a dream last night. Remember the song "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream"? I didn't write that, either.**

**I'm showing you a book that's been written and published. I mean, look at all the connecting things: motorcycles, Bobby Zimmerman, Keith and Kent Zimmerman, 1964, 1966. And there's more to it than even that. If you went to find this guy's family, you'd find a whole bunch more that connected. I'm just explaining it to you. Go to the grave site.**

*When did you come across this book?*

**Uh, you know. When did I come across that book? Somebody put it in my hand years ago. I'd met Sonny Barger in the Sixties, but didn't know him very well. He was friends with Jerry Garcia. Maybe I saw it on a bookshelf out there and the bookseller slipped it into my hand. But I began to read it, and I thought I was reading about Sonny, but then I got to that part and realized it wasn't about him at all. I didn't even really check the authors' names until later and that blew my mind, too. About a year later, I went to a library in Rome and I found a book about transfiguration, because it's nothing you really hear about every day, and it's in that mystical realm, and I found out only enough to know that, uh, OK, I'm not an authority on it, but it kind of sets you straight on what sets you apart.**

**I'd always been different than other people, but this book told me why. Like certain people are set apart. You know, it's just like the phrase, "peers" – I mean, I see this, "Well, your peers this, your peers that." And I've always wondered, who are my peers? When I received the Medal of Freedom I started thinking more about it. Like, who are they? But then it became clear. My peers are Aretha Franklin, Duke Ellington, B.B. King, John Glenn, Madeleine Albright, Pat Summitt, Toni Morrison, Jasper Johns, Martha Graham, Sidney Poitier. People like that, and they are set apart, too. And I'm proud to be counted among them.**

**You don't write the kind of songs I write just being a conventional type of songwriter. And I don't think anybody will write them like this again, any more than anybody will ever write a Hank Williams or Irving Berlin song. That's pretty much for sure. I just think I've taken things to a new level because I've had to. Because I've been forced to. You have to constantly reshape things because everything keeps expanding on you. Life has a way of spreading out.**

*Why do you have that need to constantly reshape things?*

**Because that's the nature of existence. Nothing stays where it is for very long. Trees grow tall, leaves fall, rivers dry up and flowers die. New people are born every day. Life doesn't stop.**

*Is that part of what touring is about for you?*

**Touring is about anything you want it to be about. Is there something strange about touring? About playing live shows? If there is, tell me what it is. Willie** [Nelson]**'s been playing them for years, and nobody ever asks him why he still tours. Look, you travel to different places and you encounter things that you might not encounter every day if you stayed home. And you get to play music for the people – all of the people, every nationality and in every country. Ask any performer or entertainer that does this, they'll all tell you the same thing. That they like doing it and that it means a lot to people. It's just like any other line of work, only different.**

*Yet for a long time, from, 1966 to 1974, you left touring behind. Did you always expect to return to live performance, as part of doing what it is that you do?*

**I know I left it behind, but then I picked it up again. Things change. Also, there are performers that don't go on the road. They might go to Vegas and just stay there. You could do it that way – who knows, I may do that, too, someday. There are a lot of worse ways to end up.**

**It's always been this way for everybody who's ever done it, going back to those ancient days. The carnival came to town, the carnival left and you ran off with them. It's just what you did. You don't travel to the end of the line until someone gives you a gold watch and a pat on the back. That's not the way the game works. People really don't retire. They fade away. They run out of steam. People aren't interested in them anymore.**

*What do you think of Bruce Springsteen? U2?*

**I love Bruce like a brother. He's a powerful performer – unlike anybody. I care about him deeply. U2's a force to be reckoned with. Bono's energy has far-reaching effects, and in some ways, he's his own tempest.**

*Miles Davis had this idea that music was best heard in the moments in which it was performed – that that's where music is truly alive. Is your view similar?*

**Yeah, it's exactly the same as Miles' is. We used to talk about that. Songs don't come alive in a recording studio. You try your best, but there's always something missing. What's missing is a live audience. Sinatra used to make records like that – used to bring people into the studio as an audience. It helped him get into the songs better.**

*So live performance is a purpose you find fulfilling?*

**If you're not fulfilled in other ways, performing can never make you happy. Performing is something you have to learn how to do. You do it, you get better at it and you keep going. And if you don't get better at it, you have to give it up. Is it a fulfilling way of life? Well, what kind of way of life is fulfilling? No kind of life is fulfilling if your soul hasn't been redeemed.**

*You've described what you do not as a career but as a calling.*

**Everybody has a calling, don't they? Some have a high calling, some have a low calling. Everybody is called but few are chosen. There's a lot of distraction for people, so you might not never find the real you. A lot of people don't.**

*How would you describe your calling?*

**Mine? Not any different than anybody else's. Some people are called to be a good sailor. Some people have a calling to be a good tiller of the land. Some people are called to be a good friend. You have to be the best at whatever you are called at. Whatever you do. You ought to be the best at it – highly skilled. It's about confidence, not arrogance. You have to know that you're the best whether anybody else tells you that or not. And that you'll be around, in one way or another, longer than anybody else. Somewhere inside of you, you have to believe that.**

*Some of us have seen your calling as somebody who has done his best to pay witness to the world, and the history that made that world.*

**History's a funny thing, isn't it? History can be changed. The past can be changed and distorted and used for propaganda purposes. Things we've been told happened might not have happened at all. And things that we were told that didn't happen actually might have happened. Newspapers do it all the time; history books do it all the time. Everybody changes the past in their own way. It's habitual, you know? We always see things the way they really weren't, or we see them the way we want to see them. We can't change the present or the future. We can only change the past, and we do it all the time.**

*There's that old wisdom "History is written by the victors."*

**Absolutely. And then there's Henry Ford. He didn't have much use for history at all.**

*But you have a use for it. In Chronicles, you wrote about your interest in Civil War history. You said that the spirit of division in that time made a template for what you've written about in your music. You wrote about reading the accounts from that time. Reading, say, Grant's remembrances is different than reading Shelby Foote's history of the Civil War.*

**The reports are hardly the same. Shelby Foote is looking down from a high mountain, and Grant is actually down there in it. Shelby Foote wasn't there. Neither were any of those guys who fight Civil War re-enactments. Grant was there, but he was off leading his army. He only wrote about it all once it was over. If you want to know what it was about, read the daily newspapers from that time from both the North and South. You'll see things that you won't believe. There is just too much to go into here, but it's nothing like what you read in the history books. It's way more deadly and hateful.**

**There doesn't seem to be anything heroic or honorable about it at all. It was suicidal. Four years of looting and plunder and murder done the American way. It's amazing what you see in those newspaper articles. Places like the Pittsburgh Gazette, where they were warning workers that if the Southern states have their way, they are going to overthrow our factories and use slave labor in place of our workers and put an end to our way of life. There's all kinds of stuff like that, and that's even before the first shot was fired.**

*But there were also claims and rumors from the South about the North…*

**There's a lot of that, too, about states' rights and loyalty to our state. But that didn't make any sense. The Southern states already had rights. Sometimes more than the Northern states. The North just wanted them to stop slavery, not even put an end to it – just stop exporting it. They weren't trying to take the slaves away. They just wanted to keep slavery from spreading. That's the only right that was being contested. Slavery didn't provide a working wage for people. If that economic system was allowed to spread, then people in the North were going to take up arms. There was a lot of fear about slavery spreading.**

*Do you see any parallels between the 1860s and present-day America?*

**Mmm, I don't know how to put it. It's like… the United States burned and destroyed itself for the sake of slavery. The USA wouldn't give it up. It had to be grinded out. The whole system had to be ripped**

**out with force. A lot of killing. What, like, 500,000 people? A lot of destruction to end slavery. And that's what it really was all about.**

**This country is just too fucked up about color. It's a distraction. People at each other's throats just because they are of a different color. It's the height of insanity, and it will hold any nation back – or any neighborhood back. Or any anything back. Blacks know that some whites didn't want to give up slavery – that if they had their way, they would still be under the yoke, and they can't pretend they don't know that. If you got a slave master or Klan in your blood, blacks can sense that. That stuff lingers to this day. Just like Jews can sense Nazi blood and the Serbs can sense Croatian blood.**

**It's doubtful that America's ever going to get rid of that stigmatization. It's a country founded on the backs of slaves. You know what I mean? Because it goes way back. It's the root cause. If slavery had been given up in a more peaceful way, America would be far ahead today. Whoever invented the idea "lost cause…" There's nothing heroic about any lost cause. No such thing, though there are people who still believe it.**

*Did you hope or imagine that the election of President Obama would signal a shift, or that it was in fact a sea change?*

**I don't have any opinion on that. You have to change your heart if you want to change.**

*Since his election, there's been a great reaction by some against him.*

**They did the same to Bush, didn't they? They did the same thing to Clinton, too, and Jimmy Carter before that. Look what they did to Kennedy. Anybody who's going to take that job is going to be in for a rough time.**

*Don't you think some of the reaction has stemmed from that kind of racial resonance you were talking about?*

**I don't know. I don't know, but I don't think that's the same thing. I have no idea what they are saying for or against him. I really don't. I don't know how deep it goes or how shallow it is.**

*You are aware that he's been branded as un-American or a socialist –*

**You can't pay any attention to that kind of stuff, as if you've never heard those kind of words before. Eisenhower was accused of being un-American. And wasn't Nixon a socialist? Look what he did in China. They'll say bad things about the next guy, too.**

*So you don't think some of the reaction against Obama has been in reaction to the event that a black man has become president of the United States?*

**Do you want me to repeat what I just said, word for word? What are you talking about? People loved the guy when he was elected. So what are we talking about? People changing their minds? Well, who are these people that changed their minds? Talk to them. What are they changing their minds for? What'd they vote for him for? They should've voted for somebody else if they didn't think they were going to like him.**

*The point I'm making is that perhaps lingering American resentments about race are resonant in the opposition to President Obama, which has not been a quiet opposition.*

**You mean in the press? I don't know anybody personally that's saying this stuff that you're just saying. The press says all kinds of stuff. I don't know what they would be saying. Or why they would be saying it. You can't believe what you read in the press anyway.**

*Do you vote?*

**Uh…**

*Should we do that? Should we vote?*

**Yeah, why not vote? I respect the voting process. Everybody ought to have the right to vote. We live in a democracy. What do you want me to say? Voting is a good thing.**

*I was curious if you vote.*

[Smiling] **Huh?**

*What's your estimation of President Obama been when you've met him?*

**What do I think of him? I like him. But you're asking the wrong person. You know who you should be asking that to? You should be asking his wife what she thinks of him. She's the only one that matters.**

**Look, I only met him a few times. I mean, what do you want me to say? He loves music. He's personable. He dresses good. What the fuck do you want me to say?**

*You live in these times, you have reactions to various national ups and downs. Are you, for example, disappointed by the resistance the president has met with? Would you like to see him re-elected?*

**I've lived through a lot of presidents! And you have too! Some are re-elected and some aren't. Being re-elected isn't the mark of a great president. Sometimes the guy you get rid of is the guy you wish you had back.**

*I've brought up the subject partly because of something you said the night he was elected: "It looks like things are gonna change now." Do you feel that the change you anticipated has been borne out?*

**You want to repeat that again? I have no idea what I said.**

*It was Election Night 2008. Onstage at the University of Minnesota, introducing your band's members, you indicated your bassist and said, "Tony Gamier, wearing the Obama button. Tony likes to think it's a brand-new time right now. An age of light. Me, I was born in 1941 – that's the year they bombed Pearl Harbor. Well, I been living in a world of darkness ever since. But it looks like things are gonna change now."*

**I don't know what I said or didn't say. As far as Tony goes, yeah, maybe he was wearing an Obama button and maybe I said some stuff because right there in the moment it all made sense. Maybe I said things looked like they could change. And maybe they did change. I don't think I could have predicted how they would change, but whatever was said, it was said for people in that hall for that night. You know what I'm saying? It wasn't said to be played on a record forever. Or did I go down to the middle of town and give a speech?**

*It was onstage.*

**It was on the streets?**

*Stage. Stage.*

**OK. It was on the stage. I don't know what I could have meant by that. You say things sometimes, you don't know what the hell you mean. But you're sincere when you say it. I would hope that things have changed. That's all I can say, for whatever it is that I said. I'm not going to deny what I said, but I would have hoped that things would've changed. I certainly hope they have.**

*I get the impression when we talk that you're reluctant to say much about the president or how he's been criticized.*

**Well, you know, I told you what I could.**

*In that case, let's return to Tempest. Can you talk a little about your songwriting method these days?*

**I can write a song in a crowded room. Inspiration can hit you anywhere. It's magical. It's really beyond me.**

*What about your role as a producer? How would you describe the sound that you were trying to achieve here?*

**The sound goes with the song. But that's funny. Somebody was telling me that Justin Bieber couldn't sing any of these songs. I said I couldn't sing any of his songs either. And that person said, "Baby, I'm so grateful for that."**

*There's a fair amount of mortality, certainly in the last three songs – "Tin Angel," "Tempest" and "Roll On John." People come to hard endings.*

**The people in "Frankie and Johnny," "Stagger Lee" and "El Paso" have come to hard endings, too, and definitely it's that way in one of my favorite songs, "Delia." I can name you a hundred songs where everything ends in tragedy. It's called tradition, and that's what I deal in. Traditional, with a capital T. Maybe people have to have a simplistic way of identifying something, if they can't grasp it properly – use some term that they think they can understand, like mortality. Oh, like, "These songs must be about mortality. I mean, Dylan, isn't he an old guy? He must be thinking about that." You know what I say to that horseshit? I say these idiots don't know what they're talking about. Go find somebody else to pick on.**

**There's plenty of death songs. You may well know, in folk music every other song deals with death. Everybody sings them. Death is a part of life. The sooner you know that, the better off you'll be. That's the only way to look at it. As far as agreeing with what the common consensus is of what my songs mean or don't mean, it's just foolish. I can't really verify or not verify what other people say my songs are about.**

*It was interesting that in the aftermath of the "Titanic" sinking there were many folk and blues and country songs on the subject. Why do you think that was?*

**Folk musicians, blues musicians did write a lot of songs about the Titanic. That's what I feel that I'm best at, being a folk musician or a blues musician, so in my mind it's there to be done. If you're a folk singer, blues singer, rock & roll singer, whatever, in that realm, you oughta write a song about the Titanic, because that's the bar you have to pass.**

**Today we have so much media that before something happens, you see it. You know about it or you think you do. No one can tell you a thing. You don't need a song about the fire that happened in**

**Chinatown last night because it was all over the news. In songs, you have to tell people about something they didn't see and weren't there for, and you have to do it as if you were. Nobody can contradict you on a song about the Titanic any more than they can contradict you on a song about Billy the Kid.**

*Those folk musicians, though, were people who never would've been let aboard the "Titanic," or would've been in steerage.*

**No, but all the old country singers, country blues, hillbilly singers, rock & roll singers, what they all had in common was a powerful imagination. And I have that, too. It's not that unusual for me to write a song about the Titanic tragedy any more than it was for Leadbelly. It might be unusual to write such a long ballad about it, but not necessarily about the disaster itself.**

*In some "Titanic" songs, there were those who saw the event as a judgment on modern times, on mankind for assuming that it could be unsinkable. Is there some of that in your song?*

**No, no, I try to stay away from all that stuff. I don't imply any of it. I'm not interested in it. I'm just interested in showing you what happened, on the level that it happened on. That's all. The meaning of it is beyond me.**

*You also have a song about John Lennon, "Roll On John," on this album. What moved you to record this now?*

**I can't remember – I just felt like doing it, and now would be as good a time as any. I wasn't even sure that song fit on this record. I just took a chance and stuck it on there. I think I might've finished it to include it. It's not like it was just written yesterday. I started practicing it late last year on some stages.**

*Lennon said that he was inspired by you, but also felt competitive with you. You and Lennon were cultural lions in the 1960s and 1970s. Did that ever make for unease or for a sense of competition in each other's company?*

**I think we covered peers a while back, did we not? John came from the northern regions of Britain. The hinterlands. Just like I did in America, so we had some kind of environmental things in common. Both places were pretty isolated. Though mine was more landlocked than his. But everything is stacked against you when you come from that. You have to have the talent to overcome everything. That was something I had in common with him. We were all about the same age and heard the same exact things growing up. Our paths crossed at a certain time, and we both had faced a lot of adversity. We even had that in common. I wish that he was still here because we could talk about a lot of things now.**

*You went to visit Liverpool, where Lennon grew up. How long ago was that?*

**A couple years ago? Strawberry Field is right in back of his house. Didn't know that. Evidently, he grew up with his aunt. He'd be out there in the Strawberry Field, a park behind his house that was fenced off. Being in Britain, there's all this hanging history, chopping off heads. I mean, you grow up with that, if you're a Brit. I didn't quite understand the line about getting hung – "Nothing to get hung about" – well, time had moved on, it was like "hung up," nothing to be hung up about. But he was speaking literally: "What are you doing out there, John?" "Don't worry, Mum, nothing they're going to hang me about, nothing to get hung about." I found that kind of interesting.**

*In "Roll On John," there's a sense that Lennon was trapped in America, far away from home. Did you feel empathy for those experiences?*

**How could you not? There's so much you can say about any person's life. It's endless, really. I just picked out stuff that I thought that I was close enough to, to understand.**

*I hear various sources and tributes in Tempest and your other recent music, including the sounds of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, the spirit of Charley Patton. Do you think of yourself as a bluesman?*

**Bluesmen lead lives of great hardship. And I've got too much rock & roll in my blood to call myself a blues singer. Country blues, folk music and rock & roll make up the kind of music that I play.**

*I also hear echoes of Bing Crosby, going all the may back to Nashville Skyline. Does he bear influence for you?*

**A lot of people would like to sing like Bing Crosby, but very few could match his phrasing or depth of tone. He's influenced every real singer whether they know it or not. I used to hear Bing Crosby as a kid and not really pay attention to him. But he got inside me nevertheless. Him and Nat King Cole were my father's favorite singers, and those records played in our house.**

*You said that you originally wanted to make a more religious album this time – can you tell me more about that?*

**The songs on Tempest were worked out in rehearsals on stages during sound-checks before live shows. The religious songs maybe I felt were too similar to each other to release as an album.**

**Someplace along the line, I had to go with one or the other, and Tempest is what I went with. I'm still not sure it was the right decision.**

*When you say religious songs…*

**Newly written songs, but ones that are traditionally motivated.**

*More like "Slow Train Coming"?*

**No. No. Not at all. They're more like "Just a Closer Walk With Thee."**

*From the 1980s on, there's been a lot of dark territory in your songs. Has any of this been a reflection of an ongoing religious struggle for you?*

**Nah, I don't have any of those religious struggles. I just showed you that book. Transfiguration eliminates all that stuff. You don't have those kinds of struggles. You never did, and you never will. No. You have to amplify your faith. Those are struggles for other people. Other people that you don't know and never will. Everybody's facing some kind of struggle for sure.**

*Has your sense of your faith changed?*

**Certainly it has, o ye of little faith. Who's to say that I even have any faith or what kind? I see God's hand in everything. Every person, place and thing, every situation. I mean, we can have faith in just about anything. Can't we? You might have faith in that bloody mary you're drinking. It might quiet your nerves.**

*[Laughs] It's water – not a bloody mary.*

**Well** [*laughs*]**, it looks like a bloody mary to me. I'm gonna say that it is. I'll rewrite your history for you.**

*You've been willing to talk about these matters before.*

**Yeah, but that was before and this is now. I have enough faith for me to be faithful to myself. Faith is good – it could move mountains. Not that bloody-mary faith that you have, but the kind of faith that people like me have. You can tell whether other people have faith or no faith by the way they behave, by the shit that comes out of their mouths. A little faith can go a long ways. It's the right thing for people to have. When we have little else, that will do. But it takes a while to acquire it. You just got to keep looking.**

*Sometimes people have acquired it, then feel like they lose faith.*

**Yeah, absolutely. You get hit hard in life. People get hit with everything. We all do. We all get hit upside the head. And some of us get hit harder than others. Some of us get no chance at all. Some of us get more than one chance. No two are alike. You have to push on. Make the best of it. Just like the Woody Guthrie song "Hard Travelin'."**

*Clearly, the language of the Bible still provides imagery in your songs.*

**Of course, what else could there be? I believe in the Book of Revelation. I believe in disclosure, you know? There's truth in all books. In some kind of way. Confucius, Sun Tzu, Marcus Aurelius, the Koran, the Torah, the New Testament, the Buddhist sutras, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and many thousands more. You can't go through life without reading some kind of book.**

*"Time Out of Mind" started with this image of somebody walking through streets that are dead.*

**A lot of walking in that record, right? I've heard that.**

*When that narrator talks about walking this or that road, do you have pictures of those roads in your mind?*

**Yeah, but not in a specific kind of way. You can feel it, without being able to see it. It's an old-time thing: the walking blues.**

*The walking could be what somebody witnesses. It could be the road to death; it could be the road to illumination.*

**Sure, all those roads. How many roads must a man walk down? Not run down, drive down or crawl down? I've been raised on that. The walking blues. "Walking to New Orleans," "Cadillac Walk," "Hand Me Down My Walkin' Cane." It's the only way I know. It comes natural.**

*The person who's walking in these songs, is he walking alone?*

**Sometimes, but then again, sometimes not. Sometimes you got to get into your own space for a while. It never really dawns on me, though, whether I'm walking alone or not. Seems like I'm always walking with somebody.**

*In "Sugar Baby," on "Love and Theft," you sang, "Every moment of existence seems like some dirty trick." Did these words convey a significant change from how you may have felt before?*

**No, there's been no change whatsoever. I used to think most people felt that way about existence, and I still think that.**

*I want to know more about the matter of transfiguration. Is there a specific moment in which you became aware of it?*

**Yeah, I can refer you to the book** [the Sonny Barger biography]**. It happens gradually. I'd say that that accident, however, if you want to call it that, I think that was about '64?** [*Referring to the death of Bobby Zimmerman, which, in fact, took place in 1961.*] **As I said earlier, I had a motorcycle accident myself, in '66, so we're talking maybe about two years – a gradual kind of slipping away, and, uh, some kind of something else appearing out of nowhere.**

**And it makes perfect sense, because in the truth world, nothing does begin or end. You know, it's like things begin while something else is ending. There's never any sharp borderline or dividing line. We've talked about this. You know how we have dividing lines between countries. We have boundaries. Well, boundaries in the cosmological world don't really exist, any more than they do between night and day.**

*After your motorcycle accident, you were in some ways a different person?*

**I'm trying to explain something that can't be explained. Help me out. Read the pages of the book. Some people never really develop into who they're supposed to be. They get cut off. They go off another way. It happens a lot. We all see people that that's happened to. We see them on the street. It's like they have a sign hanging on them.**

*Did you have an inkling of this before you read the Barger book?*

**I didn't know who I was before I read the Barger book.**

**Here's one way of looking at this: In the 1960s, people saw you as a revolutionary fireball up until the motorcycle accident. Afterward, with the music made in Woodstock with the Band, and with "John Wesley Harding" and "Nashville Skyline," some were bewildered by your transformation. You came back from that hiatus looking different, sounding different, in voice, music and words.**

**Why is it that when people talk about me they have to go crazy? What the fuck is the matter with them? Sure, I had a motorcycle accident. Sure, I played with the Band. Yeah, I made a record called John Wesley Harding. And sure, I sounded different. So fucking what? They want to know what can't be known. They are searching – they are seekers. Like in the Pete Townshend song where he's trying to find his way to 50 million fables. For what? Why are they doing this? They don't really know. It's sad. It really is. May the Lord have mercy on them. They are lost souls. They really don't know. It's sad – it really is. It's sad for me, and it's sad for them.**

*Why do you think that is the case?*

**I don't have a clue. If you ever find out, come and tell me.**

*Are you saying that you can't really be known?*

**Nobody knows nothing. Who knows who's been transfigured and who has not? Who knows? Maybe Aristotle? Maybe he was transfigured? I can't say. Maybe Julius Caesar was transfigured. I have no idea. Maybe Shakespeare. Maybe Dante. Maybe Napoleon. Maybe Churchill. You just never know, because it doesn't figure into the history books. That's all I'm saying.**

*Sometimes we can deepen ourselves or give aid to other people by trying to know them.*

**If we're responsible to ourselves, then we can be responsible for other people, too. But we have to know ourselves first. People listen to my songs and they must think I'm a certain type of way, and maybe I am. But there's more to it than that. I think they can listen to my songs and figure out who they are, too.**

*When you say that those who conjecture about you don't really know what they're talking about, does that mean that you feel misunderstood?*

**It doesn't mean that at all!** [*Laughs*] **I mean, what's there, like, to understand? I mean – no, no. Just the opposite. Who's supposed to understand? My in-laws? Am I supposed to be some misunderstood artist living in an attic? You tell me. What's there to understand? Please, can we stop now?**

*With this sort of question? Just one more: In the past 10 years, you've written an autobiography; there was a fictional film biography, I'm Not There; and there was Martin Scorsese's documentary, No Direction Home – three big attempts to come to terms with your history, the biggest being your book, Chronicles. Wasn't that, in a way, an attempt to explain certain things about your life?*

**If you read *Chronicles*, you know it doesn't attempt to be any more than what it is. You're not going to find the meaning of life in it. Mine or anyone else's. And if you've seen *No Direction Home*, you might have noticed that it ended in '66. And *I'm Not There* – I don't know anything about that movie. All I know is they licensed about 30 of my songs for it.**

*Did you like I'm Not There?*

**Yeah, I thought it was all right. Do you think that the director was worried that people would understand it or not? I don't think he cared one bit. I just think he wanted to make a good movie. I thought it looked good, and those actors were incredible.**

*I think the movie grew from a long-stated perception of you as somebody with a lot of phases and identities.*

**I don't see myself that way. But what does it matter? It's only a movie.**

*In Chronicles, you wrote about declining to write songs for a 1971 play by Archibald MacLeish because you thought the play, Scratch, "spelled death for society with humanity lying facedown in its own blood." Wouldn't that same vision apply to the 2003 film you co-wrote, Masked and Anonymous?*

**Uh, yeah. You could look at it that way.**

*Were you happy with Masked and Anonymous?*

**No. Whatever vision I had for that movie, that never could've carried to the screen. When you want to make a film and you're using outside money, there's just too many people you have to listen to.**

*I love that film.*

**I'm glad some people like it. I know people who do. There's some performances in there. John Goodman. Isn't he great? And Jessica Lange. Everybody was really good in it. Everybody except me. Ha-ha! I had no business being in it, to tell you the truth. What's her name, Cate Blanchett** [*among the actors who played Dylan in* I'm Not There]**, should've played the character that I played. It probably would've been a hit movie.**

*Will there be a Chronicles 2?*

**Oh, let's hope so. I'm always working on parts of it. But the last *Chronicles* I did all by myself. I'm not even really so sure I had a proper editor for that. I don't want really to say too much about that. But it's a lot of work. I don't mind writing it, but it's the rereading it and the time it takes to reread it – that for me is difficult.**

*You've said before there are certain things you just don't remember. I came away from Chronicles thinking that you remember almost everything. Why didn't you ever talk before about that life of the mind you've gone through?*

**It's not like I have a great memory. I remember what I want to remember. And what I want to forget, I forget. When you're writing like that, it's just kind of like one thing leads to another and another, you just keep opening doors and sliding in and finding a way out. It's like links in a chain – you make connections as you go along.**

*In recent years, you've received numerous high honors, including one recently at the White House, where you were presented with a Medal of Freedom. You weren't always comfortable with this sort of event. What makes you more accepting now of these laurels?*

**I turn down far more of those medals and honors than I pick up. They come in from all over the place – all parts of the world. Most of them will get turned down because I can't physically be there to get them all. But every once in a while, there's something that is important, an incredibly high honor that I would never have dreamed to be receiving, like the Medal of Freedom. There's no way I would turn that down.**

*Do you accept the awards in part for your family, for your posterity?*

**I accept them for myself and myself only. And I don't think about it any other way, and I don't waste a lot of time over-thinking it. It's an incredible honor.**

*Receiving the Medal of Freedom had to be a bit of a thrill.*

**Oh, of course it's a thrill! I mean, who wouldn't want to get a letter from the White House? And the kind of people they were putting me in the category with was just amazing. People like John Glenn and Madeleine Albright, Toni Morrison and Pat Summitt, John Doer, William Foege and some others, too. These people who have done incredible things and have outstanding achievements. Pat Summitt alone has won more basketball games with her teams than any NCAA coach. John Glenn, we all know what he did. And Toni Morrison is as good as it gets. I loved spending time with them. What's the alternative? Hanging around with hedge-fund hucksters or Hollywood gigolos? You know what I mean?**

*The Medal of Freedom, it's an encircled star on a ribbon that hangs around your neck?*

**Yeah, I guess so. You should've told me you wanted to see it. I'd've brought it by and you could look at it, if you wanted.**

*Maybe next time.*

**Yeah. Sure, next time.**

*In July 2009, the police picked you up in Long Branch, New Jersey, while you were on a walk, supposedly looking for Bruce Springsteen's old home. What happened on that occasion?*

**We were staying at a hotel. The bus was pulling out; I just decided I'd go for a walk. It was raining, and I guess that in that neck of the woods, they're not used to seeing people walking in the rain. I was the only one on the street. Somebody saw me out of a window and reported me. Next thing I know, a cop car pulled up and asked me for ID. Well, I didn't have any** [*laughs*]**. I wear so many changes of clothes all the time. The woman who was the police officer, she didn't know me. Because most people don't. They've heard the name. I might be in a place, nobody knows me. Right? All of a sudden, somebody will walk in who knows me, and I'll have to tell everybody in the place, and then… it gets uncomfortable.**

**That's the side of people I see. People like to betray people. There's something in people that they just want to betray somebody. "That's him over there." They want to deliver you up. Like they delivered Jesus. They want to be the one to do it. There's something in people that's just like that. I've experienced that. A lot.**

*Before we end the conversation, I want to ask about the controversy over your quotations in your songs from the works of other writers, such as Japanese author Junichi Saga's "Confessions of a Yakuza," and the Civil War poetry of Henry Timrod. Some critics say that you didn't cite your sources clearly. Yet in folk and jazz, quotation is a rich and enriching tradition. What's your response to those kinds of charges?*

**Oh, yeah, in folk and jazz, quotation is a rich and enriching tradition. That certainly is true. It's true for everybody, but me. I mean, everyone else can do it but not me. There are different rules for me. And as far as Henry Timrod is concerned, have you even heard of him? Who's been reading him lately? And who's pushed him to the forefront? Who's been making you read him? And ask his descendants what they think of the hoopla. And if you think it's so easy to quote him and it can help your work, do it yourself and see how far you can get. Wussies and pussies complain about that stuff. It's an old thing – it's part of the tradition. It goes way back. These are the same people that tried to pin the name Judas on me. Judas, the most hated name in human history! If you think you've been called a bad name, try to work your way out from under that. Yeah, and for what? For playing an electric guitar? As if that is in some kind of way equitable to betraying our Lord and delivering him up to be crucified. All those evil motherfuckers can rot in hell.**

*Seriously?*

**I'm working within my art form. It's that simple. I work within the rules and limitations of it. There are authoritarian figures that can explain that kind of art form better to you than I can. It's called songwriting. It has to do with melody and rhythm, and then after that, anything goes. You make everything yours. We all do it.**

*When those lines make their way into a song, you're conscious of it happening?*

**Well, not really. But even if you are, you let it go. I'm not going to limit what I can say. I have to be true to the song. It's a particular art form that has its own rules. It's a different type of thing. All my stuff comes out of the folk tradition – it's not necessarily akin to the pop world.**

*Do you find that sort of criticism irrelevant, or silly?*

**I try to get past all that. I have to. When you ask me if I find criticism of my work irrelevant or silly, no, not if it's constructive. If someone could point out here or there where my work could be improved upon, I guess I'd be willing to listen. The people who are obsessed with criticism – it's not honest criticism. They are not the people who I play to anyway.**

*But surely you've heard about this particular controversy?*

**People have tried to stop me every inch of the way. They've always had bad stuff to say about me. *Newsweek* magazine lit the fuse way back when. Newsweek printed that some kid from New Jersey wrote "Blowin' in the Wind" and it wasn't me at all. And when that didn't fly, people accused me of stealing the melody from a 16th-century Protestant hymn. And when that didn't work, they said they made a mistake and it was really an old Negro spiritual. So what's so different? It's gone on for so long I might not be able to live without it now. Fuck 'em. I'll see them all in their graves.**

**Everything people say about you or me, they are saying about themselves. They're telling about themselves. Ever notice that? In my case, there's a whole world of scholars, professors and Dylanologists, and everything I do affects them in some way. And, you know, in some ways, I've given them life. They'd be nowhere without me.**

*And inspiration.*

**No, they're not good for that.**

*The flip side of people being critical…*

**Yeah, to hold someone in high admiration [*laughs*].**

*The flip side is, there's also the audience that really loves you.*

**Of course. They think they do. They love the music and songs I play, not me.**

*Why do you say that?*

**Because that's the way people are. People say they love a lot of things, but they really don't. It's just a word that's been overused. When you put your life on the line for somebody, that's love. But you'll never know it until you're in the moment. When someone will die for you, that's love, too.**

# Mid 2014, Unknown Interviewer (The Basement Tapes Continued)

Source: soundtrack to the DVD, *Lost Songs: The Basement Tapes Continued*, Eagle Vision, EREDV1181, November 2014.

The interview took place at an unknown location. Dylan's responses only.

**We had the place pretty much on our own. Whatever was on top of the pile, somebody grabbed it and said, "Let's do that for a while." It was a kind of music that made you feel that you were part of something very, very special, and nobody else was a part of it. And back then it was hard to get to.**

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**You can't record everything you wrote, so it's understandable that a lot of this stuff just fell by the wayside or… I don't even know where it was kept all these years. I have never seen these lyrics since they were written. Never seen them.**

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**How did I wind up in Woodstock? I don't know.**

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**How did the songs from 'The Basement Tapes' come about? Well, you know, I decided this… kinda I was gonna stay up in Woodstock for a while, so my band from the tour we had done together, those guys all just came on up there and they liked it, too. And Robbie called me up one day and said, "What's happening?" You know, "What's happening?" And I said, "Nothing." He said… Well, he was in the mood for some nothing, too.**

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**And it had a basement. Typical basement, filled with pipes and a concrete floor, washer, drier.**

*-----*-----*

**We were just kind of, like, sitting around recording the songs and before we went down into the basement to put it on tape.**

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**It was like, one song after another, you know, seldom make any changes.**

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**T Bone, he's like a master musician. Who else could make sense of all these scraps of paper? He knows song writing. He knows performing. No part of making music that T Bone's not familiar with and experienced, and he knows performers that can perform all types of music.**

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**Woodstock was a place where you could kind of go get your thoughts together. It was an artist colony; there were plenty of painters who lived in that area. But very few musicians. We certainly knew of nobody up there playing any music. Later there was, but when we were up there middle 60s we were pretty much by ourselves.**

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**The events of the day, they were just happening and they seemed to be a million miles away. We weren't really participating in any of that stuff.**

*-----*-----*

**It was The Summer Of Love but we weren't there, so, you know, we did our thing, we wrote 'Million Dollar Bash', you know, to go along with The Summer Of Love.**

*-----*-----*

**I had nothing else to do, so I started writing a bunch of songs. I'd write them in longhand and I'd write them on the typewriter. Whatever was handy, pencil, pen, typewriter.**

*-----*-----*

**How do we go about writing these songs? I'd know I wasn't going to write anything about myself. I didn't have nothing to say about myself that I figure anybody else would be interested in anyway. You kind of look for ideas, and the TV would be on, you know, like, 'As The World Turns' or 'Dark Shadows' or something and… Just any old thing would create a beginning to a song. Names out of phonebooks**

**and things. When China first exploded that hydrogen bomb, that just, kind of flashed across the headlines in newspapers, so, you know, we just go in and write 'Tears Of Rage.' Things were just happening, you know. There was riots in the street. There were… They were rioting in Rochester, New York, and that was… wasn't that far away, so we write 'Too Much Of Nothing.' And just one thing led to another, you know. The human heart. That's the first time anybody'd ever heard of a human heart being transplanted. That was incredible. It was a real breakthrough. So we came up with a song and then after we got the lyrics down, we took the song to the basement.**

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**I don't remember when I became aware of these songs being bootlegged. I had no intention of putting them out. I don't even… I wouldn't know where to get this record. I guess they were selling them in record stores.**

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**It's always interesting when someone takes a song of yours and re-records it. But these songs weren't tailor-made for anybody. I just wrote what I felt like writing.**

# January 2015, Robert Love

Source: Full version published on-line on the AARP magazine website: aarp.org/magazine.

The interview took place in California.

**Bob Dylan Does the American Songbook His Way**

THE SONGS

**"You have to believe what the words are saying and the words are as important as the melody. Unless you believe the song and have lived it, there's little sense in performing it."**

**"I've always been drawn to spiritual songs,"** Bob Dylan tells me. **"In 'Amazing Grace,' that line – 'that saved a wretch like me' – isn't that something we could all say if we were honest enough?"** At 73, Dylan is still in the game, still brutally honest and authentically himself, as you will see in this extended version of the exclusive interview that appeared in the February/March issue of AARP The Magazine and can be found online here.

In the 9,000 or so words that follow, Dylan goes where he has rarely gone before in public conversation: he explores his creative process and offers his insights on songwriting, performing, recording, and the creative destruction unleashed by rock and roll. For fun, perhaps, he tosses us a few pointed asides on contemporaries like Elton John, Rod Stewart and Eric Clapton, but reserves his undiluted praise for Chuck Berry's poetry and Billy Graham's soul-searing hellfire.

You may be struck, as I was time and again, at just how powerful a force music has played in Dylan's life. At various times he was hypnotized, spellbound, lifted, knocked out by what he'd heard. Listening to the Staple Singers for the first time at 14, he said, he couldn't sleep that night. **"It just went through me like my body was invisible."** From the moment he stumbled upon blues, country and gospel at the nether end of the radio dial, he never stopped listening closely, absorbing the best. A student and professor of America's truest music, he begins our conversation by explaining his decision to record ten beloved standards for Shadows in the Night.

Q: After several critically acclaimed records of original songs, why did you make this record now?

A: **Now is the right time. I've been thinking about it for a while ever since I heard Willie's Stardust record in the late '70s. I thought I could do that, too. So I went to see Walter Yetnikoff, he was the president of Columbia Records. I told him I wanted to make a record of standards, like Willie's record. What he said was, "You can go ahead and make that record, but we won't pay for it, and we won't release it. But go ahead and make it if you want to." So I went and made Street Legal instead. In retrospect, Yetnikoff was probably right. It was most likely too soon for me to make a record of standards.**

**All through the years, I've heard these songs being recorded by other people and I've always wanted to do that. And I wondered if anybody else saw it the way I did. I was looking forward to hearing Rod** [Stewart]**'s records of standards. I thought if anybody could bring something different to these songs, Rod certainly could. But the records were disappointing. Rod's a great singer. He's got a great voice, but there's no point to put a 30-piece orchestra behind him. I'm not going to knock anybody's right to make a living but you can always tell if somebody's heart and soul is into something, and I didn't think Rod was into it in that way. It sounds like so many records where the vocals are overdubbed and these kind of songs don't come off well if you use modern recording techniques.**

**To those of us who grew up with these kinds of songs and didn't think much of it, these are the same songs that rock 'n' roll came to destroy – music hall, tangos, pop songs from the '40s, fox-trots, rumbas, Irving Berlin, Gershwin, Harold Arlen, Hammerstein. Composers of great renown. It's hard for modern singers to connect with that kind of music and song. When we finally went to record, I had about 30 songs, and these 10 fall together to create a certain kind of drama. They all seem connected in one way or another. We were playing a lot of these songs at sound checks on stages around the world without a vocal mic, and you could hear everything pretty well. You usually hear these songs with a full-out orchestra. But I was playing them with a five-piece band and didn't miss the orchestra. Of course, a producer would have come in and said, "Let's put strings here and a horn section there." But I wasn't going to do that. I wasn't even going to use keyboards or a grand piano. The piano covers too much territory and can dominate songs like this in ways you don't want them to. One of the keys to making this record was to get the piano right off the floor and not be influenced by it in any way.**

Q: It's going to be something of a surprise to your traditional fans, don't you think?

A: **Well, they shouldn't be surprised. There's a lot of types of songs I've sung over the years, and they definitely have heard me sing standards before.**

Q: Did you know many of these songs from your childhood? Some of them are pretty old.

A: **Yeah, I did. I don't usually forget songs if I like them. It could be 30 years ago or something.**

Q: What was your process like?

A: **Once you think you know the song, then you have go and see how other people have done it. One version led to another until we were starting to assimilate even Harry James' arrangements. Or even Pérez Prado's. My pedal steel player is a genius at that. He can play anything from hillbilly to bebop. There are only two guitars in there, and one is just playing the pulse. Stand-up bass is playing orchestrated moving lines. It's almost like folk music in a way. I mean, there are no drums in a Bill Monroe band. Hank Williams didn't use them either. Sometimes the beat takes the mystery out of the rhythm. Maybe all the time. I could only record these songs one way, and that was live on the floor with a very small number of mics. No headphones, no overdubs, no vocal booth, no separate tracking. I know it's the old-fashioned way, but to me it's the only way that would have worked for songs like this. Vocally, I think I sang about 6 inches away from the mic. It's a board mix, for the most part, mixed as it was recorded. We played the song a few times for the engineer. He put a few microphones around. I told him we would play it as many times as he wanted. That's the way each song was done.**

Q: It sounds like the microphone was right in your face.

A: **Yeah, yeah.**

Q: It is a very intimate rendering of this material. I assume that's what you wanted.

A: **Exactly. We recorded it in the Capitol studios, which is good for a record like this. But we didn't use any of the new equipment. The engineer had his own equipment left over from bygone days, and he brought all that in. Like I said before, I rehearsed the band all last fall in a tour we were doing over in Europe. We rehearsed a whole bunch of things on the stage, with no microphones so we could play at the right volume. By the time we went in to make this record, it was almost like we'd done it already.**

Q: Beautiful horns. Really low-key. Atmospheric almost.

A: **Yeah, but there are only a few. French horn, a trumpet, a trombone, all played in harmony. Together they make a beautiful sound.**

Q: Did you do the arrangements?

A: **No. The original arrangements were for up to 30 pieces. We couldn't match that and didn't even try. What we had to do was fundamentally get to the bottom of what makes these songs alive. We took only the necessary parts to make that happen. In a case like this, you have to trust your own instincts.**

Q: Did you listen to multiple versions and then throw them away, cleanse your palate and come up with your own version?

A: **Well, a lot of these songs, you know, have been pounded into the ground over the years. I wanted to use songs that everybody knows or thinks they know. I wanted to show them a different side of it and opened up that world in a more unique way. You have to believe what the words are saying and the words are as important as the melody. Unless you believe the song and have lived it, there's little sense in performing it. "Some Enchanted Evening" – that would be one. Another one would be "Autumn Leaves." That's a song that's been done to death. I mean, who hasn't done that song? You sing "Autumn Leaves" and you have to know something about love and loss and feel it just as much, or there's no point in doing it. It's too deep a song. A schoolboy could never do it convincingly. People talk about Frank** [Sinatra] **all the time – and they should talk about Frank – but he had the greatest arrangers. And not only that, but he brought out the best in these guys. Billy May and Nelson Riddle or Gordon Jenkins. Whoever they were. They worked for him in a different kind of way than they worked for other people. They gave him arrangements that are just sublime on every level. And he, of course, could match that because he had this ability to get inside of the song in a sort of a conversational way. Frank sang to you, not at you, like so many pop singers today. Even singers of standards. I never wanted to be a singer that sings at somebody. I've always wanted to sing to somebody. I would have gotten that subliminally from Frank many years ago. Hank Williams did that, too. He sang to you.**

Q: This is a wide-ranging curation of songs from what people call the American Songbook. But I noticed Frank recorded all 10 of them. Was he on your mind?

A: **You know, when you start doing these songs, Frank's got to be on your mind. Because he is the mountain. That's the mountain you have to climb even if you only get part of the way there. And it's hard to find a song he did not do. He'd be the guy you got to check with. I particularly like Nancy, too!**

**I think Nancy is head and shoulders above most of these girl singers today. She's so soulful also in a conversational way. And where'd she get that? Well, she's Frank's daughter, right? Just naturally. Frank Jr. can sing, too. Just the same way, if you want to do a Woody Guthrie song, you have to go past Bruce Springsteen and get to Jack Elliott. Eventually, you'll get to Woody, but it might be a long process.**

Q: You've written about how Frank's version of the classic song "Ebb Tide" knocked you back on your heels in the '60s. But you said, "I couldn't listen to the stuff now. It wasn't the right time."

A: **Totally… Yeah. Really. There are a lot of things like that in my past that I've had to let be and keep moving in my own direction. It would overwhelm me at times, because that's a world that is not your world. "Ebb Tide" was a song that I kind of grew up with. I don't know exactly when it was. But it was a hit song, a pop song. Roy Hamilton did it and he was a fantastic singer, and he did it in a grandiose way. And I thought I knew it. Then I was at somebody's house, and they had one of Frank's records, and "Ebb Tide" was on it. I must have listened to that thing 100 times. I realized then that I didn't know it. I still don't know it to this day. I don't know how he did it. The performance hypnotizes you. It's a spellbinding performance. I never heard anything so supreme – on every single level.**

Q: Maybe that music was just too square to admit to liking back then?

A: **Square? I don't think anybody would have been bold enough to call Frank Sinatra square. Kerouac listened to him, along with Bird** [Charlie Parker] **and Dizzy** [Gillespie]. **But I myself never bought any Frank Sinatra records back then, if that's what you mean. I never listened to Frank as an influence. All I had to go on were records, and they were all over the place, orchestrated in one way or another. Swing music, Count Basie, romantic ballads, jazz bands – it was hard to get a fix on him. But like I say, you'd hear him anyway. You'd hear him in a car or a jukebox. You were conscious of Frank Sinatra no matter what age you were. Certainly nobody worshipped Frank Sinatra in the '60s like they did in the '40s. But he never went away. All those other things that we thought were here to stay, they did go away. But he never did.**

Q: Do you think of this album as risky? These songs have fans who will say you can't touch Sinatra's version.

A: **Risky? Like walking across a field laced with land mines? Or working in a poison gas factory? There's nothing risky about making records. Comparing me with Frank Sinatra? You must be joking. To be mentioned in the same breath as him must be some sort of high compliment. As far as touching him goes, nobody touches him. Not me or anyone else.**

Q: What do you think Frank would make of this album?

A: **I think first of all he'd be amazed I did these songs with a five-piece band. I think he'd be proud in a certain way.**

## THE HISTORY

"They brought me down to earth and they lifted me up all in the same moment. And Mavis was a great singer **–** deep and mysterious. And even at the young age, I felt that life itself was a mystery." **–** Dylan on the first time he heard the Staples Sisters.

Q: What other kinds of music did you listen to growing up?

A: **Early on, before rock 'n' roll, I listened to big band music: Harry James, Russ Columbo, Glenn Miller. Singers like Jo Stafford, Kay Starr, Dick Haymes. Anything that came over the radio and music played by bands in hotels that our parents could dance to. We had a big radio that looked like a jukebox, with a record player on the top.**

**All the furniture had been left in the house by the previous owners, including a piano. The radio/record player played 78-rpm records. And when we moved to that house, there was a record on there. The record had a red label, and I think it was a Columbia record. It was Bill Monroe singing, or maybe it was the Stanley Brothers. And they were singing "Drifting Too Far From Shore." I'd never heard anything like that before. Ever. And it moved me away from all the conventional music that I was hearing.**

**To understand that, you'd have to understand where I came from. I come from way north. We'd listen to radio shows all the time. I think I was the last generation, or pretty close to the last one, that grew up without TV. So we listened to the radio a lot. Most of these shows were theatrical radio dramas. For us, this was like our TV. Everything you heard, you could imagine what it looked it. Even singers that I would hear on the radio, I couldn't see what they looked like, so I imagined what they looked like. What they were wearing. What their movements were. Gene Vincent? When I first pictured him, he was a tall, lanky blond-haired guy.**

Q: Did it make you a better listener?

A: **It made me the listener that I am today. It made me listen for little things: the slamming of the door, the jingling of car keys. The wind blowing through trees, the songs of birds, footsteps, a hammer hitting a nail. Just random sounds. Cows mooing. I could string all that together and make that a song. It made me listen to life in a different way. I still listen to some of those old radio shows, and most of them still hold up. I mean, the jokes might be a little outdated, but the situations seem to be about the same. I don't listen to *The Fat Man* or *Superman* or *Inner Sanctum* in any way you could call nostalgic. They don't bring back any memories. I just like them.**

Q: What did you listen to besides the radio dramas?

A: **Up north, at night, you could find these radio stations with no name on the dials, you know, that played pre-rock 'n' roll things – country blues. We would hear Slim Harpo or Lightnin' Slim and gospel groups, the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Five Blind Boys of Alabama. I was so far north, I didn't even know where Alabama was. And then there'd be at a different hours the blues – you could hear Jimmy Reed, Wynonie Harris and Little Walter. Then there was a station out of Chicago. WSM? Is that the one I'm thinking of? Played all hillbilly stuff. Riley Puckett, Uncle Dave Macon, the Delmore Brothers. We also heard the Grand Ole Opry from Nashville every Saturday night. I heard Hank Williams way early, when he was still alive. A lot of those Opry stars, except for Hank, of course, came through the town I lived in and played at the armory building. Webb Pierce, Hank Snow, Carl Smith, Porter Wagoner. I saw all those country stars growing up.**

**One night I was lying in bed and listening to the radio. I think it was a station out of Shreveport, Louisiana. I wasn't sure where Louisiana was either. I remember listening to the Staple Singers' "Uncloudy Day." And it was the most mysterious thing I'd ever heard. It was like the fog rolling in. I heard it again, maybe the next night, and its mystery had even deepened. What was that? How do you make that? It just went through me like my body was invisible. What is that? A tremolo guitar? What's a tremolo guitar? I had no idea, I'd never seen one. And what kind of clapping is that? And that singer is pulling things out of my soul that I never knew were there. After hearing "Uncloudy Day" for the second time, I don't think I could even sleep that night. I knew these Staple Singers were different than any other gospel group. But who were they anyway?**

**I'd think about them even at my school desk. I managed to get down to the Twin Cities and get my hands on an LP of the Staple Singers, and one of the songs on it was "Uncloudy Day." And I'm like, "Man!" I looked at the cover and studied it, like people used to do with covers of records. I knew who Mavis was without having to be told. I knew it was she who was singing the lead part. I knew who Pops was. All the information was on the back of the record. Not much, but enough to let me in just a little ways. Mavis looked to be about the same age as me in her picture. Her singing just knocked me out. I listened to the Staple Singers a lot. Certainly more than any other gospel group. I like spiritual songs. They struck me as truthful and serious. They brought me down to earth and they lifted me up all in the same moment. And Mavis was a great singer – deep and mysterious. And even at the young age, I felt that life itself was a mystery.**

**This was before folk music had ever entered my life. I was still an aspiring rock 'n' roller, the descendant, if you will, of the first generation of guys who played rock 'n' roll – who were thrown down. Buddy Holly, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Carl Perkins, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis. They played this type of music that was black and white. Extremely incendiary. Your clothes could catch fire. It was a mixture of black culture and hillbilly culture. When I first heard Chuck Berry, I didn't consider that he was black. I thought he was a white hillbilly. Little did I know, he was a great poet, too. "Flying across the desert in a TWA, I saw a woman walking 'cross the sand. She been walking 30 miles en route to Bombay to meet a brown-eyed handsome man." I didn't think about poetry at that time – those words just flew by. Only later did I realize how hard it is to write those kind of lyrics.**

**Chuck Berry could have been anything in the music business. He stopped where he was, but he could have been a jazz singer, a ballad singer, a guitar virtuoso. He could have been a lot of things. But there's a spiritual aspect to him, too. In 50 or 100 years he might even be thought of as a religious icon. There's only one him, and what he does physically is even hard to do. If you see him in person, you know he goes out of tune a lot. But who wouldn't? He has to constantly be playing eighth notes on his guitar and sing at the same time, plus play fills and sing. People think that singing and playing is easy. It's not. It's easy to strum along with yourself, as you are singing a song and that's OK, but if you actually want to really play, where it's important, that's a hard thing and not too many people are good at it.**

Q: And he was always the main guitar player in his band.

A: **He was the only guitar player. Yeah. And there was Jerry Lee** [Lewis], **his counterpart, and people like that. There must have been some elitist power that had to get rid of all these guys, to strike down rock 'n' roll for what it was and what it represented – not least of all it being a black-and-white thing. Tied together and welded shut. If you separate the pieces, you're killing it.**

Q: Do you mean it's musical race-mixing, and that's what made it dangerous?

A: **Well, racial prejudice has been around a while, so yeah. And that was extremely threatening for the city fathers, I would think. When they finally recognized what it was, they had to dismantle it, which they did, starting with payola scandals and things like that. The black element was turned into soul music and the white element was turned into English pop. They separated it. I think of rock 'n' roll as a combination of country blues and swing band music, not Chicago blues, and modern pop. Real rock 'n' roll hasn't existed since when? 1961, 1962? Well, it was a part of my DNA, so it never disappeared from me. I just incorporated it into other aspects of what I was doing. I don't know if this is answering the question.** [Laughs.] **I can't remember what the question was.**

Q: We were talking about your influences and your crush on Mavis Staples.

A: **Oh, the Staple Singers! Mavis! So I had seen this picture of the Staple Singers. And I said to myself, "You know, one day you'll be standing there with your arm around that girl." I remember thinking that. Ten years later, there I was – with my arm around her. But it felt so natural. Felt like I'd been there before, many times. Well I was, in my mind.**

Q: Did you recall your original thought?

A: **No! I was moving too fast. Not until 10 years more beyond that did I remember anything about it.**

Q: I was thinking how important it was to you when you were young to chase down those Woody Guthrie records. And I was thinking about how Mick [Jagger] and Keith [Richards] ran all over London to get blues records, and how Neil Young pumped quarters into the jukebox to hear Ian and Sylvia. And now the Internet has all of it **–** you can just touch a button and hear almost anything in the history of recorded music. Has it made music better? Or worse? More valued or less valued?

A: **Well, if you're just a member of the general public, and you have all this music available to you, what do you listen to? How many of these things are you going to listen to at the same time? Your head is just going to get jammed – it's all going to become a blur, I would think. Back in the day, if you wanted to hear Memphis Minnie, you had to seek a compilation record, which would have a Memphis Minnie song on it. And if you heard Memphis Minnie back then, you would just accidentally discover her on a record that also had Son House and Skip James and the Memphis Jug Band. And then maybe you'd seek Memphis Minnie in some other places – a song here, a song there. You'd try to find out who she was. Is she still alive? Does she play? Can she teach me anything? Can I hang out with her? Can I do anything for her? Does she need anything? But now, if you want to hear Memphis Minnie, you can go hear a thousand songs. Likewise, all the rest of those performers, like Blind Lemon [Jefferson]. In the old days, maybe you'd hear "Matchbox" and "Prison Cell Blues." That would be all you would hear, so those songs would be prominent in your mind. But when you hear an onslaught of 100 more songs of Blind Lemon, then it's like, "Oh man! This is overkill!" It's so easy you might appreciate it a lot less.**

## THE ALBUM

Q: Are the songs on this album laid down in the order you would like people to listen to them? Or do you care whether Apple sells them one by one?

A: **The business end of the record – it's none of my business. I sure hope it sells, and I would like people to listen to it. But the way people listen to music has changed, and I hope they get a chance to hear all the songs in one way or another. But! I did record those songs, believe it or not, in that same order that you hear them. Not that it matters, really. I didn't pay any attention to the sequencing like on other records. We would usually get one song done in three hours. There's no mixing. That's just the way it sounded. No dials, nothing enhanced, nothing – that's it. Capitol's got those big echo chambers. So some of that was probably used. We used as little technology as possible. It's been done wrong too many other times. I wanted to do it rightly.**

Q: Was this recording an experiment?

A: **It was more than an experiment. Because we had played these songs, we were dead sure that we could do them. It's just a question of could it be recorded right. We did it the old-fashioned way, I guess you would say. That's the way I used to make records anyway. I never did use earphones up until into the '80s or '90s. I don't like to use earphones.**

Q: You feel that's a distancing thing?

A: **Yeah. There's a complete disconnect. You can overwhelm yourself in your own head. I've never heard anybody sing with those things in their ears effectively. They just give you a false sense of security. A lot of us don't need earphones. I don't think Springsteen does. I know Mick doesn't. I don't think he does. But other people you see, more or less have given in. They just do it. But they ought not to do it. They don't need to. Especially if they have a good band.**

**Recording studios are filled with technology. They are set in their ways. And to update them means you'd have to change them back. That would be my idea of upgrading. And this will never happen. As far as I know, recording studios are booked all the time. So obviously people like all the improvements. The more technically advanced they are, the more in demand they become. The corporations have taken over. Even in the recording studio. Actually, the corporate companies have taken over American life most everywhere. Go coast to coast and you will see people all wearing the same clothes, thinking the same thoughts and eating the same food. Everything is processed.**

Q: Let's talk about the first song on the album, "I'm a Fool To Want You." I'm interested in how you put across the heartbreak that's on this record. It's believed that Frank Sinatra wrote it for Ava Gardner, his great love. You wrote once that the performer, the artist transmits emotion via alchemy. "I'm not feeling this," you're saying. "What I'm doing is I'm putting it across." Is that right?

A: **You're right, but you don't want to overstate that. Look, it all has to do with technique. Every singer has three or four or five techniques, and you can force them together in different combinations. Some of the techniques you discard along the way, and pick up others. But you do need them. It's just like anything. You have to know certain things about what you're doing that other people don't know. Singing has to do with techniques and how many you use at the same time. One alone doesn't work. There's no point to going over three. But you might interchange them whenever you feel like it. So yes, it's a bit like alchemy. It's different than being an actor where you call up sources from your own experience that you can apply to whatever Shakespeare drama you're in or whatever television show. With a song it's not quite the same way. An actor is pretending to be somebody, but a singer isn't. He's not hiding behind anything. And that's the difference. Singers today have to sing songs where there's very little emotion involved. That and the fact that they have to sing hit records from years gone by doesn't leave a lot of room for any kind of intelligent creativity. In a way, having hits buries a singer in the past. A lot of singers hide in the past because its safer back there. If you've ever heard today's country music, you'll know what I'm talking about. Why do all these songs fall flat? I think technology has a lot to do with it. Technology is mechanical and contrary to the emotions that inform a person's life. The country music field has especially been hit hard by this turn of events.**

**These songs** [on my album] **have been written by people who went out of fashion years ago. I'm probably someone who helped put them out of fashion. But what they did is a lost art form. Just like da Vinci and Renoir and van Gogh. Nobody paints like that anymore either. But it can't be wrong to try.**

**So a song like "I'm a Fool to Want You" – I know that song. I can sing that song. I've felt every word in that song. I mean, I know that song. It's like I wrote it. It's easier for me to sing that song than it is to sing, "Won't you come see me, Queen Jane." At one time that wouldn't have been so. But now it is. Because "Queen Jane" might be a little bit outdated. It can't be outrun. But this song is not outdated. It has to do with human emotion, which is a constant thing. There's nothing contrived in these songs. There's not one false word in any of them. They're eternal, lyrically and musically.**

Q: Do you wish you wrote them?

A: **In a way I'm glad I didn't write any of them. I'm good with songs that I haven't written, if I like them. I already know how the song goes, so I have more freedom with it. I understand these songs. I've known them for 40 years, 50 years, maybe longer, and they make a lot of sense. So I'm not coming to them like a stranger. I've written all the songs that I feel are… I don't know how to put this… You travel the world, you go see different things. I like to see Shakespeare plays, so I'll go – I mean, even if it's in a different language. I don't care, I just like Shakespeare, you know. I've seen Othello and Hamlet and Merchant of Venice over the years, and some versions are better than others. Way better. It's like hearing a bad version of a song. But then somewhere else somebody has a great version.**

Q: **I like your version of "Lucky Old Sun." Can you talk about what drew you to this one in particular? Did you have a memory of it?**

A: **Oh, I've never not known that song. I don't think anybody my age can tell you that they ever remember not knowing that song. I mean, it's been recorded hundreds of times. I've sung it in concert.**

Q: Have you?

A: **Yeah. But I never really got to the heart of the song until recently.**

Q: So how do you do that?

A: **Well, you cut the song down to the bone and see if it's really there for you to do. Most songs have bridges in them. A bridge is something that distracts a listener from the main verses of a song so the listener doesn't get repetitively bored. My songs don't have a lot of bridges because lyric poetry never had them. But when a song like "Autumn Leaves" presents itself, you have to decide what's real about it and what's not. Listen to how Eric Clapton does it. He sings the song, and then he plays the guitar for 10 minutes and then he sings the song again. He might even play the guitar again, I can't**

**remember. But when you listen to his version, where do you think the importance is? Well obviously, it's in the guitar playing. He sings the song twice both the same way. And there's really no reason to do that unless you're singing the song in a different way. It's OK for Eric because he's a master guitar player and, of course, that's what he wants to feature on any song he records. But other people couldn't do it and get away with it. It's not exactly getting to the heart of what "Autumn Leaves" is about. And as a performer, you don't get many chances to do that. And when you get the opportunity, you don't want to blow it. With all these songs you have to study the lyrics. You have to look at every one of these songs and be able to identify with them in a meaningful way. You can hardly sing these songs unless you're in them. If you want to fake it, go ahead. Fake it if you want. But I'm not that kind of singer.**

Q: Can we talk about some of the melodies of these songs?

A: **Yeah, they're incredible, aren't they? All these songs have classical music under-themes. Why? Because all these composers learned from classical music. They were composers who understood music theory, and they went to music academies. It could be a little piece of Mozart, Bach – Paul Simon did an entire song using a Bach melody – or it could be a piece of Beethoven or Liszt, Chopin, Rachmaninoff, or Stravinsky or Tchaikovsky. You can get a lot of great melodies listening to Tchaikovsky if you're a commercial songwriter or composer, and these guys did that. Not that I myself recognize where these melodies and parts came from, but I know they came from somewhere in that direction. Most of these songs are written by two people, one for the music and one for the words.**

**There's only one guy that I know of who did it all, and that was Irving Berlin. He wrote the melody and the lyrics. This guy was a flat-out genius. I mean, he had a gift, like, it just wouldn't stop giving, classical themes not withstanding, because I don't think he used any. But everyone else who wrote lyrics had to depend on a piece of music. Lyricists themselves, they were a funny breed. They are not who you would think they would be. They came from all walks of life. Highbrow, lowbrow. Could be a telephone repairman, a typesetter, insurance salesman. One was a house painter, another a car mechanic. Jimmy Van Heusen was a stunt pilot. All these people knew how to keep it simple and understood ordinary daily existence, common life. And they did good.**

Q: Who could speak the vernacular.

A: **Who spoke the vernacular. Exactly. So there's nothing contrived about these songs. There's not one false word in any of them.**

Q: Do you like Johnny Mercer?

A: **I love Johnny Mercer. Yeah. I love…**

Q: He did the English lyrics for "Autumn Leaves."

A: **Yeah, he did. Well it doesn't surprise me. I love all of his stuff – one of the most gifted lyricists. Yeah. "Jeepers Creepers." "Lazy Bones." "Blues in the Night." We do a lot of his songs at sound checks. If he was around now, I'd like to give him some of my instrumental tapes. See what he could do with them. But they might be beneath him.**

Q: Your renditions and these arrangements are very respectful. The arrangements are almost austere, but your renditions are very respectful of these melodies **–** more than you are of your own songs when you perform.

A: **Well, I love these songs, and I'm not going to bring any disrespect to them or treat them irreverently. To trash those songs would be sacrilegious. We've all heard those songs being trashed, and we're used to it. They go by without even being heard. In some kind of ways you want to right the wrong, maybe unconsciously. But I'm not on a crusade. I think if others want to pick it up, they can and should. But if not, that's OK, too. I don't think of these songs as covers. I think of them as songs that have all been done before in many ways. The word "covers" has crept into the musical vernacular. Nobody would have understood it in the '50s or '60s. It's kind of a belittling term. What does it mean when you cover something up? You hide it. I've never understood that term. Am I doing a bunch of covers? Well, yeah, if you say so.**

Q: So you're really uncovering.

A: **Exactly. That's a good point.**

THE FANS

**"I wouldn't say there is one type of fan. … Just all kinds of people. I can see that there's a difference in character, and it has nothing to do with age."**

Q: These songs will have a different audience than they originally had. Do you feel like a musical archaeologist?

A: **No. I just like these songs and feel I can connect with them. I would hope people will connect with them the same way that I do. I have no idea what people like or don't like. It would be presumptuous to think these songs are going to find some new audience as if they're going to appear out of nowhere. Certainly, the people who first heard these songs, like my parents and people like that, they're not with us anymore. I can't generalize who these songs are going to appeal to. Besides, when I look out from the stage, I see something different than maybe other performers do.**

Q: What are you seeing from the stage?

A: **Definitely not a sea of conformity. People I cannot categorize easily. I wouldn't say there is one type of fan. I see a guy dressed up in a suit and tie next to a guy in blue jeans. I see another guy in a sport coat next to another guy wearing a T-shirt and cowboy boots. I see women sometimes in evening gowns and I see punky-looking girls. Just all kinds of people. I can see that there's a difference in character, and it has nothing to do with age. I went to an Elton John show, and it was interesting. There must have been at least three generations of people there. But they were all the same. Even the little kids. They looked just like their grandparents. It was strange. People make a fuss about how many generations follow a certain type of performer. But what does it matter if all the generations are the same? I'm content to not see a certain type of person that could be easily tracked. I don't care about age, but the adolescent youth market, I think it goes without saying, might not have the experience it takes to understand these songs and appreciate them.**

Q: So we at AARP represent people who are 50 and older. The magazine reaches 35 million readers.

A: **Well, a lot of those readers are going to like this record. If it were up to me, I'd give you the records for nothing, and you give them to every** [reader of your] **magazine. I think a lot of your readers will identify with these songs.**

Q: The songs on this album conjure a kind of romantic love that is nearly antique, because there's no longer much resistance in romance. People date and they climb into bed. That sweet, painful pining of the '40s and '50s doesn't exist anymore. Do you think these songs will fall on younger ears as corny?

A: **You tell me. I mean, I don't know why they would, but what's the word "corny" mean exactly? I've heard it but don't use it much. It's like "tacky." I don't say that word either. There's just no power in those words. These songs, take 'em or leave 'em, if nothing else, are songs of great virtue. That's what they are. If they sound trite and corny to somebody, well so much for that. But people's lives today are filled on so many levels with vice and the trappings of it. Ambition, greed and selfishness all have to do with vice. Sooner or later, you have to see through it or you don't survive. We don't see the people that vice destroys. We just see the glamour of it on a daily basis — everywhere we look, from billboard signs to movies, to newspapers, to magazines. We see the destruction of human life and the mockery of it, everywhere we look. These songs are anything but that. Romance never does go out of fashion. It's radical. Maybe it's out of step with the current media culture. If it is, it is.**

Q: What is the best song you've ever written about heartbreak and loss?

A: **I think "Love Sick"** [from 1997's *Time Out of Mind*].

Q: A fellow Minnesotan, F. Scott Fitzgerald, said famously, "There are no second acts in American life." You are a man who has probably had four or five second acts. Poet, Voice of a Generation, troubadour, rocker and now crooner!

A: **Yeah** [Laughs]. **I know. Right. Well, look, he said that in a day and age where he was probably speaking the truth.**

Q: You once said that as a folk artist you came into the music business through the side door.

A: **I did?**

Q: **You did. And I think I know what you meant, because nobody thought folk music was going to amount to anything in the music business at the time. Now here you are with this grand parade of iconic American songs. Are you finally coming in through the front door?**

A: **I would say that's pretty right on. You just have to keep going to find that thing that lets you in the door, if you actually want to get in the door. Sometimes in life when that day comes and you're given the key, you throw it away. You find that whatever you were looking for your entire life isn't where you thought it was. Folk music came at exactly the right time in my life. It wouldn't have happened 10 years later, and 10 years earlier I wouldn't have known what kind of songs those were. They were just so different than popular music. But it came at the right time, so I went that way. Then folk music became relegated to the sidelines. It either became commercial or the Beatles killed it. Maybe it couldn't have gone on anyway. But actually, in this day and age, it still is a vibrant form of music, and many people sing and play it much better than we ever did. It's just not what you would call part of the pop realm. I had gotten in there at a time when nobody else was there or knew it even existed, so I had**

**the whole landscape to myself. I went into songwriting. I figured I had to – I couldn't be that hellfire rock 'n' roller. But I could write hellfire lyrics.**

**When I was growing up, Billy Graham was very popular. He was the greatest preacher and evangelist of my time – that guy could save souls and did. I went to two or three of his rallies in the '50s or '60s. This guy was like rock 'n' roll personified – volatile, explosive. He had the hair, the tone, the elocution – when he spoke, he brought the storm down. Clouds parted. Souls got saved, sometimes 30- or 40,000 of them. If you ever went to a Billy Graham rally back then, you were changed forever. There's never been a preacher like him. He could fill football stadiums before anybody. He could fill Giants Stadium more than even the Giants football team. Seems like a long time ago. Long before Mick Jagger sang his first note or Bruce strapped on his first guitar – that's some of the part of rock 'n' roll that I retained. I had to. I saw Billy Graham in the flesh and heard him loud and clear.**

## THE PROCESS

**"Once I can focus in on something, I just play it in my mind until an idea comes from out of nowhere, and it's usually the key to the whole song. It's the idea that matters. The idea is floating around long before me."**

Q: A lot of your newer songs deal with aging. You once said that people don't retire, they fade away, they run out of steam. And now you're 73, you're a great-grandfather.

A: **Look, you get older. Passion is a young man's game, OK? Young people can be passionate. Older people gotta be more wise. I mean, you're around awhile, you leave certain things to the young and you don't try to act like you're young. You could really hurt yourself.**

Q: In a period around 1966, you went into seclusion for more than a year, and there was much speculation about your motives. But it was to protect your family, wasn't it?

A: **Totally. That's right.**

Q: And I think that people didn't quite want to understand that, because your idiosyncratic view of the world as an artist made them think you were an idiosyncratic person, but in reality you were a typical dad who was trying to protect his kids.

A: **Totally. I gave up my art to do that.**

Q: And was that painful?

A: **Totally frustrating and painful, of course, because that intuitive gift – which for me went musically – had carried me so far. I did do that, yeah, and it hurt to have to do it. But I didn't have a choice.**

Q: Now your life is largely spent on the road: a hundred nights a year. I read that your grandmother once told you that happiness is not the road to anything. She said it is the road.

A: **My grandmother was a wonderful lady.**

Q: You obviously get great joy and connection from the people who come to see you.

A: **It's not unlike a sportsman who's on the road a lot. Roger Federer, the tennis player, I mean, you know, he's working most of the year. Like maybe 250 days a year, every year, year in and year out. I mean, I think that's more than B.B. King does. So it's relative. I mean, yeah, you must go where the people are. You can't bring them to where you are unless you have a contract to play in Vegas. But happiness – are we talking about happiness?**

Q: Yeah.

A: **OK, a lot of people say there is no happiness in this life, and certainly there's no permanent happiness. But self-sufficiency creates happiness. Happiness is a state of bliss. Actually, it never crosses my mind. Just because you're satisfied one moment – saying yes, it's a good meal, makes me happy – well, that's not going to necessarily be true the next hour. Life has its ups and downs, and time has to be your partner, you know? Really, time is your soul mate. Children are happy. But they haven't really experienced ups and downs yet. I'm not exactly sure what happiness even means, to tell you the truth. I don't know if I personally could define it.**

Q: Have you touched it?

A: **Well, we all do.**

Q: Held it?

A: **We all do at certain points, but it's like water – it slips through your hands. As long as there's suffering, you can only be so happy. How can a person be happy if he has misfortune? Does money make a person happy? Some wealthy billionaire who can buy 30 cars and maybe buy a sports team, is that guy happy? What then would make him happier? Does it make him happy giving his money away**

**to foreign countries? Is there more contentment in that than giving it here to the inner cities and creating jobs? Nowhere does it say that one of the government's responsibilities is to create jobs. That is a false premise. But if you like lies, go ahead and believe it. The government's not going to create jobs. It doesn't have to. People have to create jobs, and these big billionaires are the ones who can do it. We don't see that happening. We see crime and inner cities exploding, with people who have nothing to do but meander around, turning to drink and drugs, into killers and jailbirds. They could all have work created for them by all these hotshot billionaires. For sure, that would create a lot of happiness. Now, I'm not saying they have to – I'm not talking about communism – but what do they do with their money? Do they use it in virtuous ways? If you have no idea what virtue is all about, look it up in a Greek dictionary. There's nothing namby-pamby about it.**

Q: So they should be moving their focus?

A: **Well, I think they should, yeah, because there are a lot of things that are wrong in America and especially in the inner cities that they could solve. Those are dangerous grounds, and they don't have to be. There are good people there, but they've been oppressed by lack of work. Those people can all be working at something. These multibillionaires, and there seem to be more of them every day, can create industries right here in the inner cities of America. But no one can tell them what to do. God's got to lead them.**

Q: And productive work is a kind of salvation in your view? To feel worth and pride in what you do?

A: **Absolutely.**

Q: Let me talk to you for a minute about your gift. There are artists like George Balanchine, the choreographer, who felt that he was a servant to his muse. Somebody else like Picasso felt that he was the boss in the creative process. How have you dealt with your own gift over the years? I mean your songwriting, your inspiration, your creativity.

A: [Laughter]

Q: That makes you laugh?

A: **Well, I might trade places with Picasso if I could, creatively speaking. I'd like to think I was the boss of my creative process, too, and I could just do anything I wanted whenever I wanted and it would all be on a grand scale. But of course, that's not true. Like Sinatra, there was only one Picasso. As far as George the choreographer, I'm more inclined to feel the same way that he does about what I do. It's not easy to pin down the creative process.**

Q: Is it elusive?

A: **It totally is. It totally is. It's uncontrollable. It makes no sense in literal terms. I wish I could enlighten you, but I can't – just sound stupid trying. But I'll try. It starts like this. What kind of song do I need to play in my show? What don't I have? It always starts with what I don't have instead of doing more of the same. I need all kinds of songs – fast ones, slow ones, minor key, ballads, rumbas – and they all get juggled around during a live show. I've been trying for years to come up with songs that have the feeling of a Shakespearean drama, so I'm always starting with that. Once I can focus in on something, I just play it in my mind until an idea comes from out of nowhere, and it's usually the key to the whole song. It's the idea that matters. The idea is floating around long before me. It's like electricity was around long before Edison harnessed it. Communism was around before Lenin took over. Pete Townshend thought about Tommy for years before he actually wrote any songs for it. So creativity has a lot to do with the main idea. Inspiration is what comes when you are dealing with the idea. But inspiration won't invite what's not there to begin with.**

Q: You've been generous to take up all of these questions.

A: **I found the questions really interesting. The last time I did an interview, the guy wanted to know about everything except the music. Man, I'm just a musician, you know? People have been doing that to me since the '60s – they ask questions like they would ask a medical doctor or a psychiatrist or a professor or a politician. Why? Why are you asking me these things?**

Q: What do you ask a musician about?

A: **Music! Exactly.**

# Early February 2015, Bill Flanagan

Source: published on-line on the website bobdylan.com, 13 February 2015.

The interview took place at an unknown location.

**A Post-MusiCares Conversation.**

Flanagan: I noticed that some people who were not at the event read the transcript of your speech and didn't get that some of it was tongue in cheek. When you said, "why me, lord?" In the room you were laughing and so was the audience. In print, some people thought it was all serious.

Dylan: **Yeah, well you had to be there.**

Flanagan: How did you select all the performers for the musicares tribute, was that difficult?

Dylan: **It really wasn't. Most all of them had recorded versions of those songs over the years. Garth had made "Make You Feel My Love" a number one hit. Tom Jones had done an incredible version of "What Good Am I." Beck had recorded "Leopard skin Pillbox Hat." Bonnie had recorded astonishing versions of "Standing in the Doorway" and "Million Miles." John Doe had done "Pressin' On" for that movie and that was just a once in a lifetime recording. Los Lobos had also recorded "On a Night Like This," same thing with Crosby, Stills and Nash. I had heard them do a beautiful version of "Girl From The North Country." So no, it wasn't that hard. I'd even seen Alanis Morissette sing "Subterranean Homesick Blues" somewhere and I couldn't believe she got that so right, something I'd never been able to do. Neil of course, he's been doing "Blowin' In the Wind" for a while and he does it the way it should be done and that song needed to be there. Some people called up right away and wanted to be on the show, so Don Was found a few songs for them. But mostly, they were all recorded versions that we were hearing except maybe for Aaron Neville's version of "Shooting Star." I could always hear him singing that song. He's recorded other songs of mine, all great performances, but for some reason I kept thinking about "Shooting Star," something he's never recorded but I knew that he could. I could always hear him singing it for some reason, even when I wrote it. I mean, what can you say? He's the most soulful of singers, maybe in all of recorded history. If angels sing, they must sing in that voice. I just think his gift is so great. The man has no flaws, never has. He's always been one of my favorite singers right from the beginning. "Tell it Like it Is," that could be my theme song. It's strange, because he's the kind of performer that can do your songs better than you, but you can't do his better than him. Really, you can't say enough about Aaron Neville. We won't see his likes again. I wanted to get hold of Eric, he's recorded a lot of my songs too, all great versions. But I didn't want to impose on him, because I don't think he's performing anymore. Rod's done some early songs of mine as well. I just didn't think to ask him – I probably should have. There were others, Toots and the Maytals, Chrissie Hynde, Stevie Wonder, even the Rolling Stones. But it gets overwhelming after a while and you just can't get to everybody.**

Flanagan: What was that thing about Merle, sounds like you were dissing him, what was that about?

Dylan: **No, not at all, I wasn't dissing Merle, not the Merle I know. What I was talking about happened a long time ago, maybe in the late sixties. Merle had that song out called "Fighting Side of Me" and I'd seen an interview with him where he was going on about hippies and Dylan and the counter culture, and it kind of stuck in my mind and hurt, lumping me in with everything he didn't like. But of course times have changed and he's changed too. If hippies were around today, he'd be on their side and he himself is part of the counter culture … so yeah, things change. I've toured with him and have the highest regard for him, his songs, his talent - I even wanted him to play fiddle on one of my records and his Jimmie Rodgers tribute album is one of my favorites that I never get tired of listening to. He's also a bit of a philosopher. He's serious and he's funny. He's a complete man and we're friends these days. We have a lot in common. Back then, though, Buck and Merle were closely associated; two of a kind. They defined the Bakersfield sound. Buck reached out to me in those days, and lifted up my spirits when I was down, I mean really down - oppressed on all sides and down and that meant a lot, that Buck did that. I wasn't dissing Merle at all, we were different people back then. Those were difficult times. It was more intense back then and things hit harder and hurt more.**

Flanagan: Leiber and Stoller too?

Dylan: **Yeah, them too.**

Flanagan: What did you think of Bruce's performance?

Dylan: **Incredible! He did that song like the record, something I myself have never tried. I never even thought it was worth it. Maybe never had the manpower in one band to pull it off. I don't know, but I never thought about it. To tell you the truth, I'd forgotten how the song ought to go. Bruce pulled all the power and spirituality and beauty out of it like no one has ever done. He was faithful, truly faithful to the version on the record, obviously the only one he has to go by. I'm not a nostalgic person, but for a second there it all came back, Peckinpah, Slim Pickens, Katy Jurado, James Coburn, the dusty lawless streets of Durango, my first wife, my kids when they were small. For a second it all came back … it was that powerful. Bruce is a deep conscientious cat and the evidence of that was in the performance. He can get to your heart, my heart anyway.**

Flanagan: He played some explosive guitar that wasn't on the original recording.

Dylan: **Yeah, well that's just Bruce being Bruce. He's got to remind people that he can play that thing. It wasn't incessant though. It didn't detract from the song. He brought it in quick and pulled it back quick. He definitely knows when and how to stick something in and then move it back. He's a great performer all around.**

Flanagan: Did you really mean what you said about the critics? Certainly not all of them get on your nerves?

Dylan: **No, not at all, I got no bitterness towards critics. Like Elvis said, "I know they have a job to do." Some critics are better than others … some know how to write better, think better, some understand more of what they're seeing and hearing better … some are more experienced in life. There are all kinds of critics … they're not all on the same level. And sometimes, if they're not saying bad things about you, you don't really count. It's nice to have their support, but then on a lot of different levels, it really doesn't matter one way or another. The people will decide. Some seem to do a lot of griping for no reason, but you have to be sort of understanding. They don't have any idea what it takes to be on a public stage and couldn't do what you do not even for one single second. I particularly don't like the ones who talk down with that attitude of superiority, like they know and you don't. It's nice to have their support, but if you don't, you can't let it bother you, they're not players. I have no bitterness towards any of them, not at all.**

Flanagan: What was that thing about the blues being a combination of Strauss waltzes and arabic violins? Where did you get that?

Dylan: **I read it in a musicology book. In the 16 or 1700s there were African tribal wars and instead of slaughtering their enemies like they would do today, the African chiefs roped up their captives and sold them as slaves to Arab slave traders, who were basically middlemen in the slave trading business. Then the slaves had to be marched to where the ships were at the landings; Dutch ships, English ships, Spanish ships, whatever. And that march was a long hard tedious journey, sometime covering hundreds of miles. The Arabs played their violins at night around campfires. And that sound must have drifted into their dreams. A lot of these slaves died before they even got to the boats. When they got to the ports they'd be sold to the sea captains, then they'd make another long journey over the water to the New World. Hard to tell how many of them actually survived from the whole ordeal. Agents in America would buy the slaves from the sea captains, then the agents would sell them to plantation owners. In the new world, they'd hear a lot of minuets played at plantation parties … that's sort of how it happened according to the book, two different influences, it was so interesting. The 12 bar blues pattern, that's something else. That evidently comes out of field hollers, where one guy sings a line and a whole bunch of others repeat that line and maybe after that there is a third different line. It all gets mixed up. I can't remember everything in the book, but this one chapter intrigued me. It pertained to the Delta blues and for that type of music it made sense. North Carolina stuff and Georgia and Florida songs are different - have less of a twang and are more melodic, seem to have more of a waltz minuet vibe, maybe because of who the slaves were and what they were exposed to along the way, musically speaking. The Delta blues has always been eerie and suspenseful, middle eastern in tone, so to me it made sense. I've always had a feeling for the blues, even back when I was a little boy … before I even knew what it was … mostly the sound of the Delta blues, because it's probably in my DNA. I guess I must have both Arab in me and waltz time European blood as well.**

Flanagan: You talked about rock & roll ending in the early sixties and I take your point - the early rock & roll was displaced by the British invasion and Motown. But the Hall of Fame takes a broader view - that all the music that grew out of that first explosion, from Led Zeppelin to p-funk to Tom Waits are branches on the tree of rock & roll and deserve to be represented in the Hall of Fame. You don't buy it?

Dylan: **I don't buy what I don't need, but I see your point. Perhaps mine is more of a pedantic point of view, maybe one I ought not have.**

Flanagan: Are there any other performers besides Billy Lee Riley that you can recommend for the Hall of Fame?

Dylan: **Yeah sure, Willy DeVille for one, he stood out, his voice and presentation ought to have gotten him in there by now.**

Flanagan: I agree with you, maybe he's been overlooked. He carried a lot of history. The Drifters, Ben E. King, Solomon Burke, Street Corner Doo Wop and John Lee Hooker were all there in what he did and how he performed.

Dylan: **I think so too.**

Flanagan: You suggested that some of the acts in the Hall of Fame might not be true rock & roll. You mentioned the Mamas and the Papas, Abba, Alice Cooper. I have to stick up for Steely Dan. Not everything they did was rock & roll but "Bodhisattva," "Show Biz Kids," "My Old School" - those songs rocked like a bastard.

Dylan: **Yeah they might have rocked like a bastard, and I'm not saying that they didn't, but put on any one of those records and then put on "In The Heat of the Moment" by Willy or "Steady Driving Man" or even "Cadillac Walk." I'm not going to belittle Steely Dan but there is a difference.**

# Before 10 October 2016, David Remnick

Source: *The New Yorker*, US magazine, 17 October 2016, pages 46, 48-54, 56-59; the Dylan quotes are on pages 51-52.

The interview took place at an unknown location.

**How the Light Gets In : Leonard Cohen at eighty-two**

When Leonard Cohen was twenty-five, he was living in London, sitting in cold rooms writing sad poems. He got by on a three-thousand-dollar grant from the Canada Council for the Arts. This was 1960, long before he played the festival at the Isle of Wight in front of six hundred thousand people. In those days, he was a Jamesian Jew, the provincial abroad, a refugee from the Montreal literary scene. Cohen, whose family was both prominent and cultivated, had an ironical view of himself. He was a bohemian with a cushion whose first purchases in London were an Olivetti typewriter and a blue raincoat at Burberry. Even before he had much of an audience, he had a distinct idea of the audience he wanted. In a letter to his publisher, he said that he was out to reach "inner-directed adolescents, lovers in all degrees of anguish, disappointed Platonists, pornography-peepers, hair-handed monks and Popists."

Cohen was growing weary of London's rising damp and its gray skies. An English dentist had just yanked one of his wisdom teeth. After weeks of cold and rain, he wandered into a bank and asked the teller about his deep suntan. The teller said that he had just returned from a trip to Greece. Cohen bought an airline ticket.

Not long afterward, he alighted in Athens, visited the Acropolis, made his way to the port of Piraeus, boarded a ferry, and disembarked at the island of Hydra. With the chill barely out of his bones, Cohen took in the horseshoe-shaped harbor and the people drinking cold glasses of retsina and eating grilled fish in the cafés by the water; he looked up at the pines and the cypress trees and the whitewashed houses that crept up the hillsides. There was something mythical and primitive about Hydra. Cars were forbidden. Mules humped water up the long stairways to the houses. There was only intermittent electricity. Cohen rented a place for fourteen dollars a month. Eventually, he bought a whitewashed house of his own, for fifteen hundred dollars, thanks to an inheritance from his grandmother.

Hydra promised the life Cohen had craved: spare rooms, the empty page, eros after dark. He collected a few paraffin lamps and some used furniture: a Russian wrought-iron bed, a writing table, chairs like "the chairs that van Gogh painted." During the day, he worked on a sexy, phantasmagoric novel called "The Favorite Game" and the poems in a collection titled "Flowers for Hitler." He alternated between extreme discipline and the varieties of abandon. There were days of fasting to concentrate the mind. There were drugs to expand it: pot, speed, acid. "I took trip after trip, sitting on my terrace in Greece, waiting to see God," he said years later. "Generally, I ended up with a bad hangover."

Here and there, Cohen caught glimpses of a beautiful Norwegian woman. Her name was Marianne Ihlen, and she had grown up in the countryside near Oslo. Her grandmother used to tell her, "You are going to meet a man who speaks with a tongue of gold." She thought she already had: Axel Jensen, a novelist from home, who wrote in the tradition of Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs. She had married Jensen, and they had a son, little Axel. Jensen was not a constant husband, however, and, by the time their child was four months old, Jensen was, as Marianne put it, "over the hills again" with another woman.

One spring day, Ihlen was with her infant son in a grocery store and café. "I was standing in the shop with my basket waiting to pick up bottled water and milk," she recalled decades later, on a Norwegian radio program. "He is standing in the doorway with the sun behind him." Cohen asked her to join him and his friends outside. He was wearing khaki pants, sneakers, a shirt with rolled sleeves, and a cap. The way Marianne remembered it, he seemed to radiate "enormous compassion for me and my child." She was taken with him. "I felt it throughout my body," she said. "A lightness had come over me."

Cohen had known some success with women. He would know a great deal more. For a troubadour of sadness – "the godfather of gloom," he was later called – Cohen found frequent respite in the arms of others. As a young man, he had a kind of Michael Corleone Before the Fall look, sloe-eyed, dark, a little hunched, but high courtesy and verbal fluency were his charm. When he was thirteen, he read a book on hypnotism. He tried out his new discipline on the family housekeeper, and she took off her clothes. Not everyone over the years was quite as bewitched. Nico spurned him, and Joni Mitchell, who had once been his lover, remained a friend but dismissed him as a "boudoir poet." But these were the exceptions.

Leonard began spending more and more time with Marianne. They went to the beach, made love, kept house. Once, when they were apart – Marianne and Axel in Norway, Cohen in Montreal scraping up some money – he sent her a telegram: "Have house all I need is my woman and her son. Love, Leonard."

There were times of separation, times of argument and jealousy. When Marianne drank, she could go into a dark rage. And there were infidelities on both sides. ("Good gracious. All the girls were panting for him," Marianne recalled. "I would dare go as far as to say that I was on the verge of killing myself due to it.")

In the mid-sixties, as Cohen started to record his songs and win worldly success, Marianne became known to his fans as that antique figure – the muse. A memorable photograph of her, dressed only in a towel, and sitting at the desk in the house on Hydra, appeared on the back of Cohen's second album, "Songs from a Room." But, after they'd been together for eight years, the relationship came apart, little by little – "like falling ashes," as Cohen put it.

Cohen was spending more time away from Hydra pursuing his career. Marianne and Axel stayed on awhile on Hydra, then left for Norway. Eventually, Marianne married again. But life had its burdens, particularly for Axel, who has had persistent health problems. What Cohen's fans knew of Marianne was her beauty and what it had inspired: "Bird on the Wire," "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye," and, most of all, "So Long, Marianne." She and Cohen stayed in touch. When he toured in Scandinavia, she visited him backstage. They exchanged letters and e-mails. When they spoke to journalists and to friends of their love affair, it was always in the fondest terms.

In late July this year, Cohen received an e-mail from Jan Christian Mollestad, a close friend of Marianne's, saying that she was suffering from cancer. In their last communication, Marianne had told Cohen that she had sold her beach house to help insure that Axel would be taken care of, but she never mentioned that she was sick. Now, it appeared, she had only a few days left. Cohen wrote back immediately:

> Well Marianne, it's come to this time when we are really so old and our bodies are falling apart and I think I will follow you very soon. Know that I am so close behind you that if you stretch out your hand, I think you can reach mine. And you know that I've always loved you for your beauty and your wisdom, but I don't need to say anything more about that because you know all about that. But now, I just want to wish you a very good journey. Goodbye old friend. Endless love, see you down the road.

Two days later, Cohen got an e-mail from Norway:

> Dear Leonard
>
> Marianne slept slowly out of this life yesterday evening. Totally at ease, surrounded by close friends.
>
> Your letter came when she still could talk and laugh in full consciousness. When we read it aloud, she smiled as only Marianne can. She lifted her hand, when you said you were right behind, close enough to reach her.
>
> It gave her deep peace of mind that you knew her condition. And your blessing for the journey gave her extra strength…. In her last hour I held her hand and hummed "Bird on the Wire," while she was breathing so lightly. And when we left the room, after her soul had flown out of the window for new adventures, we kissed her head and whispered your everlasting words.
>
> So long, Marianne…

Leonard Cohen lives on the second floor of a modest house in Mid-Wilshire, a diverse, unglamorous precinct of Los Angeles. He is eighty-two. Between 2008 and 2013, he was on tour more or less continuously. It is highly unlikely that his health will permit such rigors ever again. Cohen has an album coming out in October – obsessed with mortality, God-infused, yet funny, called "You Want It Darker" – but friends and musical associates say they'd be surprised to see him onstage again except in a limited way: a single performance, perhaps, or a short residency at one venue. When I e-mailed ahead to ask Cohen out for dinner, he said that he was more or less "confined to barracks."

Not long ago, one of Cohen's most frequent visitors, and an old friend of mine – Robert Faggen, a professor of literature – brought me by the house. Faggen met Cohen twenty years ago in a grocery store, at the foot of Mt. Baldy, the highest of the San Gabriel Mountains, an hour and a half east of Los Angeles. They were both living near the top of the mountain: Bob in a cabin where he wrote about Frost and Melville and drove down the road to teach his classes at Claremont McKenna College; Cohen in a small Zen Buddhist monastery, where he was an ordained monk. As Faggen was shopping for cold cuts, he heard a familiar basso voice across the store; he looked down the aisle and saw a small, trim man, his head shaved, talking intently with a clerk about varieties of potato salad. Faggen's musical expertise runs more to Mahler's lieder than to popular song. But he is an admirer of Cohen's work and introduced himself. They have been close friends ever since.

Cohen greeted us. He sat in a large blue medical chair, the better to ease the pain from compression fractures in his back. He is now very thin, but he is still handsome, with a full head of gray-white hair and razory dark eyes. He wore a well-tailored midnight-blue suit – even in the sixties he wore suits – and a stickpin through his collar. He extended a hand like a courtly retired capo.

"Hello, friends," he said. "Please, please, sit right there." The depth of his voice makes Tom Waits sound like Eddie Kendricks.

And then, like my mother, he offered what could only have been the complete catalogue of his larder: water, juice, wine, a piece of chicken, a slice of cake, "maybe something else." In the hours we spent together, he offered many refreshments, and, always, kindly. "Would you like some slices of cheese and olives?" is not an offer you are likely to get from Axl Rose. "Some vodka? A glass of milk? Schnapps?" And, as with my mother, it is best, sometimes, to say yes. One day, we had cheeseburgers-with-everything ordered from a Fatburger down the street and, on another, thick slices of gefilte fish with horseradish.

Marianne's death was only a few weeks in the past, and Cohen was still amazed at the way his letter – an e-mail to a dying friend – had gone viral, at least in the Cohen-ardent universe. He hadn't set out to be public about his feelings, but when one of Marianne's closest friends, in Oslo, asked to release the note, he didn't object. "And since there's a song attached to it, and there's a story…" he said. "It's just a sweet story. So in that sense I'm not displeased."

Like anyone of his age, Cohen counts the losses as a matter of routine. He seemed not so much devastated by Marianne's death as overtaken by the memory of their time together. "There would be a gardenia on my desk perfuming the whole room," he said. "There would be a little sandwich at noon. Sweetness, sweetness everywhere."

Cohen's songs are death-haunted, but then they have been since his earliest verses. A half century ago, a record executive said, "Turn around, kid. Aren't you a little old for this?" But, despite his diminished health, Cohen remains as clear-minded and hardworking as ever, soldierly in his habits. He gets up well before dawn and writes. In the small, spare living room where we sat, there were a couple of acoustic guitars leaning against the wall, a keyboard synthesizer, two laptops, a sophisticated microphone for voice recording. Working with an old collaborator, Pat Leonard, and his son, Adam, who has the producer's credit, Cohen did much of his work for "You Want It Darker" in the living room, e-mailing recorded files to his partners for additional refinements. Age and the end of age provide a useful, if not entirely desired, air of quiet.

"In a certain sense, this particular predicament is filled with many fewer distractions than other times in my life and actually enables me to work with a little more concentration and continuity than when I had duties of making a living, being a husband, being a father," he said. "Those distractions are radically diminished at this point. The only thing that mitigates against full production is just the condition of my body.

"For some odd reason," he went on, "I have all my marbles, so far. I have many resources, some cultivated on a personal level, but circumstantial, too: my daughter and her children live downstairs, and my son lives two blocks down the street. So I am extremely blessed. I have an assistant who is devoted and skillful. I have a friend like Bob and another friend or two who make my life very rich. So in a certain sense I've never had it better… At a certain point, if you still have your marbles and are not faced with serious financial challenges, you have a chance to put your house in order. It's a cliché, but it's underestimated as an analgesic on all levels. Putting your house in order, if you can do it, is one of the most comforting activities, and the benefits of it are incalculable."

Cohen came of age after the war. His Montreal, however, was nothing like Philip Roth's Newark or Alfred Kazin's Brownsville. He was brought up in Westmount, a predominantly Anglophone neighborhood, where the city's well-to-do Jews lived. The men in his family, particularly on his father's side, were the "dons" of Jewish Montreal. His grandfather, Cohen told me, "was probably the most significant Jew in Canada," the founder of a range of Jewish institutions; in the wake of anti-Semitic pogroms in the Russian imperium, he saw to it that countless refugees made it to Canada. Nathan Cohen, Leonard's father, ran Freedman Company, the family clothing business. His mother, Masha, came from a family of more recent immigrants. She was loving, depressive, "Chekhovian" in her emotional range, according to Leonard: "She laughed and wept deeply." Masha's father, Solomon Klonitzki-Kline, was a distinguished Talmudic scholar from Lithuania who completed a "Lexicon of Hebrew Homonyms." Leonard went to fine schools, including McGill and, for a while, Columbia. He never resented the family's comforts.

"I have a deep tribal sense," he said. "I grew up in a synagogue that my ancestors built. I sat in the third row. My family was decent. They were good people, they were handshake people. So I never had a sense of rebellion."

When Leonard was nine, his father died; this moment, a primal wound, was when he first used language as a kind of sacrament. "I have some memories of him," Cohen said, and recounted the story of his father's funeral, which was held at their house. "We came down the stairs, and the coffin was in the living room." Contrary to Jewish custom, the funeral workers had left the coffin open. It was winter, and Cohen thought of the gravediggers: it would be difficult to break the frozen ground. He watched his father lowered into the earth. "Then I came back to the house and I went to his closet and I found a premade bow tie. I don't know why I did this, I can't even own it now, but I cut one of the wings of the bow tie off and I wrote something on a piece of paper – I think it was some kind of farewell to my father – and I buried it in a little hole in the back yard. And I put that curious note in there…. It was just some attraction to a ritual response to an impossible event."

Cohen's uncles made sure that Masha and her two children, Leonard and his sister, Esther, did not suffer any financial decline after her husband's death. Leonard studied; he worked in an uncle's foundry, W. R. Cuthbert

& Company, pouring metal for sinks and piping, and at the clothing factory, where he picked up a useful skill for his career as a touring musician: he learned to fold suits so they didn't wrinkle. But, as he wrote in a journal, he always imagined himself as a writer, "raincoated, battered hat pulled low above intense eyes, a history of injustice in his heart, a face too noble for revenge, walking the night along some wet boulevard, followed by the sympathy of countless audiences… loved by two or three beautiful women who could never have him."

And yet a rock-and-roll life was far from his mind. He set out to be an author. As Sylvie Simmons makes plain in her excellent biography "I'm Your Man," Cohen's apprenticeship was in letters. As a teen-ager, his idols were Yeats and Lorca (he named his daughter after Lorca). At McGill, he read Tolstoy, Proust, Eliot, Joyce, and Pound, and he fell in with a circle of poets, particularly Irving Layton. Cohen, who published his first poem, "Satan in Westmount," when he was nineteen, once said of Layton, "I taught him how to dress, he taught me how to live forever." Cohen has never stopped writing verse; the poem "Steer Your Way" was published in this magazine in June.

Cohen was also taken with music. As a kid, he had learned the songs in the old lefty folk compendium "The People's Song Book," listened to Hank Williams and other country singers on the radio, and, at sixteen, dressed in his father's old suède jacket, he played in a country-music combo called the Buckskin Boys.

He took some informal guitar lessons in his twenties from a Spaniard he met next to a local tennis court. After a few weeks, he picked up a flamenco chord progression. When the man failed to appear for their fourth lesson, Cohen called his landlady and learned that the man had killed himself. In a speech many years later, in Asturias, Cohen said, "I knew nothing about the man, why he came to Montreal… why he appeared at that tennis court, why he took his life…. It was those six chords, it was that guitar pattern, that has been the basis of all my songs, and all my music."

Cohen loved the masters of the blues – Robert Johnson, Sonny Boy Williamson, Bessie Smith – and the French storyteller-singers like Édith Piaf and Jacques Brel. He put coins in the jukebox to listen to "The Great Pretender," "Tennessee Waltz," and anything by Ray Charles. And yet when the Beatles came along he was indifferent. "I'm interested in things that contribute to my survival," he said. "I had girlfriends who really irritated me by their devotion to the Beatles. I didn't begrudge them their interest, and there were songs like 'Hey Jude' that I could appreciate. But they didn't seem to be essential to the kind of nourishment that I craved."

The same set of ears that first tuned in to Bob Dylan, in 1961, discovered Leonard Cohen, in 1966. This was John Hammond, a patrician related to the Vanderbilts, and by far the most perceptive scout and producer in the business. He was instrumental in the first recordings of Count Basie, Big Joe Turner, Benny Goodman, Aretha Franklin, and Billie Holiday. Tipped off by friends who were following the folk scene downtown, Hammond called Cohen and asked if he would play for him.

Cohen was thirty-two, a published poet and novelist, but, though a year older than Elvis Presley, a musical novice. He had turned to songwriting largely because he wasn't making a living as a writer. He was staying on the fourth floor of the Chelsea Hotel, on West Twenty-third Street, and filled notebooks during the day. At night, he sang his songs in clubs and met people on the scene: Patti Smith, Lou Reed (who admired Cohen's novel "Beautiful Losers"), Jimi Hendrix (who jammed with him on, of all things, "Suzanne"), and, if just for a night, Janis Joplin ("giving me head on the unmade bed / while the limousines wait in the street").

After taking Cohen to lunch one day, Hammond suggested that they go to Cohen's room, and, sitting on his bed, Cohen played "Suzanne," "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye," "The Stranger Song," and a few others.

When Cohen finished, Hammond grinned and said, "You've got it."

A few months after his audition, Cohen put on a suit and went to the Columbia recording studios in midtown to begin work on his first album. Hammond was encouraging after every take. And after one he said, "Watch out, Dylan!"

Cohen's links to Dylan were obvious – Jewish, literary, a penchant for Biblical imagery, Hammond's tutelage – but the work was divergent. Dylan, even on his earliest records, was moving toward more surrealist, free-associative language and the furious abandon of rock and roll. Cohen's lyrics were no less imaginative or charged, no less ironic or self-investigating, but he was clearer, more economical and formal, more liturgical.

Over the decades, Dylan and Cohen saw each other from time to time. In the early eighties, Cohen went to see Dylan perform in Paris, and the next morning in a café they talked about their latest work. Dylan was especially interested in "Hallelujah." Even before three hundred other performers made "Hallelujah" famous with their cover versions, long before the song was included on the soundtrack for "Shrek" and as a staple on "American Idol," Dylan recognized the beauty of its marriage of the sacred and the profane. He asked Cohen how long it took him to write.

"Two years," Cohen lied.

Actually, "Hallelujah" had taken him five years. He drafted dozens of verses and then it was years more before he settled on a final version. In several writing sessions, he found himself in his underwear, banging his head against a hotel-room floor.

Cohen told Dylan, "I really like 'I and I,' " a song that appeared on Dylan's album "Infidels." "How long did it take you to write that?"

**"About fifteen minutes,"** Dylan said.

When I asked Cohen about that exchange, he said, "That's just the way the cards are dealt." As for Dylan's comment that Cohen's songs at the time were "like prayers," Cohen seemed dismissive of any attempt to plumb the mysteries of creation.

"I have no idea what I am doing," he said. "It's hard to describe. As I approach the end of my life, I have even less and less interest in examining what have got to be very superficial evaluations or opinions about the significance of one's life or one's work. I was never given to it when I was healthy, and I am less given to it now."

Although Cohen was steeped more in the country tradition, he was swept up when he heard Dylan's "Bringing It All Back Home" and "Highway 61 Revisited." One afternoon, years later, when the two had become friendly, Dylan called him in Los Angeles and said he wanted to show him a piece of property he'd bought. Dylan did the driving.

"One of his songs came on the radio," Cohen recalled. "I think it was 'Just Like a Woman' or something like that. It came to the bridge of the song, and he said, 'A lot of eighteen-wheelers crossed that bridge.' Meaning it was a powerful bridge."

Dylan went on driving. After a while, he told Cohen that a famous songwriter of the day had told him, "O.K., Bob, you're Number 1, but I'm Number 2."

Cohen smiled. "Then Dylan says to me, 'As far as I'm concerned, Leonard, *you're* Number 1. I'm Number Zero.' Meaning, as I understood it at the time – and I was not ready to dispute it – that his work was beyond measure and my work was pretty good."

Dylan, who is seventy-five, doesn't often play the role of music critic, but he proved eager to discuss Leonard Cohen. I put a series of questions to him about Number 1, and he answered in a detailed, critical way – nothing cryptic or elusive.

**"When people talk about Leonard, they fail to mention his melodies, which to me, along with his lyrics, are his greatest genius,"** Dylan said. **"Even the counterpoint lines – they give a celestial character and melodic lift to every one of his songs. As far as I know, no one else comes close to this in modern music. Even the simplest song, like 'The Law,' which is structured on two fundamental chords, has counterpoint lines that are essential, and anybody who even thinks about doing this song and loves the lyrics would have to build around the counterpoint lines.**

**"His gift or genius is in his connection to the music of the spheres,"** Dylan went on. **"In the song 'Sisters of Mercy,' for instance, the verses are four elemental lines which change and move at predictable intervals… but the tune is anything but predictable. The song just comes in and states a fact. And after that anything can happen and it does, and Leonard allows it to happen. His tone is far from condescending or mocking. He is a tough-minded lover who doesn't recognize the brush-off. Leonard's always above it all. 'Sisters of Mercy' is verse after verse of four distinctive lines, in perfect meter, with no chorus, quivering with drama. The first line begins in a minor key. The second line goes from minor to major and steps up, and changes melody and variation. The third line steps up even higher than that to a different degree, and then the fourth line comes back to the beginning. This is a deceptively unusual musical theme, with or without lyrics. But it's so subtle a listener doesn't realize he's been taken on a musical journey and dropped off somewhere, with or without lyrics."**

In the late eighties, Dylan performed "Hallelujah" on the road as a roughshod blues with a sly, ascending chorus. His version sounds less like the prettified Jeff Buckley version than like a work by John Lee Hooker. **"That song 'Hallelujah' has resonance for me,"** Dylan said. **"There again, it's a beautifully constructed melody that steps up, evolves, and slips back, all in quick time. But this song has a connective chorus, which when it comes in has a power all of its own. The 'secret chord' and the point-blank I-know-you-better-than-you-know-yourself aspect of the song has plenty of resonance for me."**

I asked Dylan whether he preferred Cohen's later work, so colored with intimations of the end. **"I like all of Leonard's songs, early or late,"** he said. **" 'Going Home,' 'Show Me the Place,' 'The Darkness.' These are all great songs, deep and truthful as ever and multidimensional, surprisingly melodic, and they make you think and feel. I like some of his later songs even better than his early ones. Yet there's a simplicity to his early ones that I like, too."**

Dylan defended Cohen against the familiar critical reproach that his is music to slit your wrists by. He compared him to the Russian Jewish immigrant who wrote "Easter Parade**." "I see no disenchantment in Leonard's lyrics at all,"** Dylan said. **"There's always a direct sentiment, as if he's holding a conversation and telling you something, him doing all the talking, but the listener keeps listening. He's very much a descendant of Irving Berlin, maybe the only songwriter in modern history that Leonard can be directly**

**related to. Berlin's songs did the same thing. Berlin was also connected to some kind of celestial sphere. And, like Leonard, he probably had no classical-music training, either. Both of them just hear melodies that most of us can only strive for. Berlin's lyrics also fell into place and consisted of half lines, full lines at surprising intervals, using simple elongated words. Both Leonard and Berlin are incredibly crafty. Leonard particularly uses chord progressions that seem classical in shape. He is a much more savvy musician than you'd think."**

Cohen has always found performing unnerving. His first major attempt came in 1967, when Judy Collins asked him to play at Town Hall, in New York, at an anti-Vietnam War benefit. The idea was that he would make his stage début by singing "Suzanne," an early song of his that Collins had turned into a hit after he sang it to her on the telephone.

"I can't do it, Judy," he told her. "I would die from embarrassment."

As Collins writes in her memoir, she finally cajoled him into it, but that night, from the wings, she could see that Cohen, "his legs shaking inside his trousers," was in trouble. He got halfway through the first verse and then stopped and mumbled an apology. "I can't go on," he said and walked off into the wings.

Out of sight, Cohen rested his head on Collins's shoulder as she tried to get him to respond to the encouraging shouts from the crowd. "I can't do it," he said. "I can't go back."

"But you will," she said, and, finally, he acceded. He went out, with the crowd cheering, and finished singing "Suzanne."

Since then, Cohen has played thousands of concerts all over the world, but it did not become second nature until he was in his seventies. He was never one of those musicians who talk about feeling most alive and at home onstage. Although he has had many successful performance strategies – wry self-abnegation, drugs, drink – the act of giving concerts often made him feel like "some parrot chained to his stand." He is also a perfectionist; a classic like "Famous Blue Raincoat" still feels "unfinished" to him.

"It stems from the fact that you are not as good as you want to be – that's really what nervousness is," Cohen told me. "That first time I went out with Judy Collins, it wasn't to be the last time I felt this."

In 1972, Cohen, now accompanied by a full complement of musicians and singers, arrived in Jerusalem at the end of a long tour. Just to be in that city was, for Cohen, a charged situation. (The following year, during the war with Egypt, Cohen showed up in Israel, hoping to replace someone who had been drafted. "I am committed to the survival of the Jewish people," he told an interviewer at the time. He ended up performing, often many times a day, for the troops on the front.) Out onstage, Cohen started singing "Bird on the Wire." He stopped after the audience greeted the opening chords and phrase with applause.

"I really enjoy your recognizing these songs," he said. "But I'm scared enough as it is out here, and I think something is wrong every time you begin to applaud. So if you do recognize this song, would you just wave your hands?"

He fumbled again, and what at first had seemed like performative charm now appeared to signal genuine anxiety. "I hope you bear with me," he said. "These songs become meditations for me and sometimes, you know, I just don't get high on it and I feel that I'm cheating you. I'll try it again. If it doesn't work, I'll stop in the middle. There's no reason why we should mutilate a song just to save face."

Cohen began singing "One of Us Cannot Be Wrong."

"I lit a thin green candle…"

He stopped again, laughing, unnerved. More fumbling, more deflective jokes.

"I have my rights up here, too, you know," he said, still smiling. "I can sit around and talk if I want to."

By then, it was apparent that there was a problem. "Look, if it doesn't get any better, we'll just end the concert and I'll refund your money," Cohen said. "I really feel that we're cheating you tonight. Some nights, one is raised off the ground, and some nights you just can't get off the ground. And there's no point in lying about it. And tonight we just haven't been getting off the ground, and it says in the Kabbalah…" The Jerusalem audience laughed at the mention of the Jewish mystical text. "It says in the Kabbalah that if you can't get off the ground you should stay on the ground! No, it says in the Kabbalah that, unless Adam and Eve face each other, God does not sit on his throne, and somehow the male and female parts of me refuse to encounter one another tonight – and God does not sit on his throne. And this is a terrible thing to have happen in Jerusalem. So, listen, we're going to leave the stage now and try to profoundly meditate in the dressing room to get ourselves back into shape."

I recalled this incident to Cohen – it's captured on a documentary film that floats around the Internet – and he remembered it well.

"It was at the end of the tour," he told me. "I thought I was doing very poorly. I went back to the dressing room, and I found some acid in my guitar case." He took the acid. Meanwhile, out in the hall, the audience started

singing to Cohen as if to inspire him and call him back. The song was a traditional one, "Hevenu Shalom Aleichem," "We Have Brought Peace Upon You."

"How sweet can an audience possibly be?" Cohen recalled. "So I go out on the stage with the band… and I started singing 'So Long, Marianne.' And I see Marianne straight in front of me and I started crying. I turned around and the band was crying, too. And then it turned into something in retrospect quite comic: the entire audience turned into one Jew! And this Jew was saying, 'What else can you show me, kid? I've seen a lot of things, and this don't move the dial!' And this was the entire skeptical side of our tradition, not just writ large but manifested as an actual gigantic being! Judging me hardly begins to describe the operation. It was a sense of invalidation and irrelevance that I felt was authentic, because those feelings have always circulated around my psyche: Where do you get to stand up and speak? For what and whom? And how deep is your experience? How significant is anything you have to say? … I think it really invited me to deepen my practice. Dig in deeper, whatever it was, take it more seriously."

Back inside the dressing room, Cohen wept fiercely. "I can't make it, man," he said. "I don't like it. Period. So I'm splitting."

He went out one last time to speak to the audience.

"Listen, people, my band and I are all crying backstage. We're too broken up to go on. But I just want to tell you, thank you and good night."

The next year, he told the press, half-seriously, that the "rock life" was overwhelming him. "I don't find myself leading a life that has many good moments in it," he told a reporter for *Melody Maker*. "So I've decided to screw it. And go."

For many years, Cohen was more revered than bought. Although his albums generally sold well enough, they did not move on the scale of big rock acts. In the early eighties, when he presented his record company with "Various Positions" – a magnificent album that included "Hallelujah," "Dance Me to the End of Love," and "If It Be Your Will" – Walter Yetnikoff, the head of CBS Records, argued with him about the mix.

"Look, Leonard," he said, "we know you're great, but we don't know if you're any good." Eventually, Cohen learned that CBS had decided not to release the album in the U.S. Years later, accepting an award, he thanked his record company by saying, "I have always been touched by the modesty of their interest in my work."

Suzanne Vega, a singer-songwriter who is in her late fifties, sometimes tells a funny story onstage about Cohen's secret-handshake appeal. When she was eighteen, she was teaching dance and folksinging at a summer camp in the Adirondacks. One night, she met a handsome young man, a counsellor from another camp up the road. He was from Liverpool. And his opening line was "Do you like Leonard Cohen?"

This was nearly four decades ago, and, in Vega's memory, admirers of Leonard Cohen in those days were a kind of "secret society." What's more, there was a particular way to answer the young man's semi-innocent question: "Yes, I *love* Leonard Cohen – but only in certain moods." Otherwise, your new friend might think you were a depressive.

But because the young man was English, and not given to the "fake cheer" of Americans, he replied, "I love Leonard Cohen all the time." The result, she says, was an affair that lasted for the rest of the summer.

In the years to come, Cohen's songs were fundamental to Vega's own sense of lyrical precision and possibility. "It was the way he wrote about complicated things," Vega told me recently. "It was very intimate and personal. Dylan took you to the far ends of the expanding universe, eight minutes of 'one hand waving free,' and I loved that, but it didn't sound like anything I did or was likely to do – it wasn't very earthly. Leonard's songs were a combination of very real details and a sense of mystery, like prayers or spells."

And there was the other thing, too. Once, after Cohen and Vega became friendly, he called and asked her to visit him at his hotel. They met out by the pool. He asked if she wanted to hear his latest song.

"And as I listened to him recite this song – it was a long one – I watched as one woman after another, all in bikinis, arranged themselves on beach chairs behind Leonard," Vega recalled. "After he finished reciting, I said to Leonard, 'Have you noticed these women in bikinis arranging themselves here?' And completely deadpan, without glancing around, Leonard said, 'It works every time.' "

A world of such allurements had costs as well as rewards. In the seventies, Cohen had two children, Lorca and Adam, with his common-law wife, Suzanne Elrod. That relationship fizzled when the decade did. Touring had its charms, but it, too, wore down his spirits. After a tour in 1993, Cohen felt utterly depleted. "I was drinking at least three bottles of Château Latour before performances," he said, allowing that he always poured a glass for others. "The wine bill was enormous. Even then, I think, Château Latour was over three hundred bucks a bottle. But it went so beautifully with the music! I don't know why. When I tried to drink it when there wasn't a performance coming, it meant nothing! I might as well have been drinking Wild Duck or whatever they call it. I mean, it had no significance."

At the same time, a long relationship with the actress Rebecca De Mornay was beginning to come undone. “She got wise to me,” Cohen has said. “Finally she saw I was a guy who just couldn’t come across. In the sense of being a husband and having more children and the rest.” De Mornay, who remains friends with Cohen, told the biographer Sylvie Simmons that he was “having all these relationships with women and not really committing… and having this long relationship to his career and yet feeling like it’s the last thing he wants to be doing.”

Since his days davening next to his uncles in his grandfather’s synagogue, Cohen has been a spiritual seeker. “Anything, Roman Catholicism, Buddhism, LSD, I’m for anything that works,” he once said. In the late sixties, when he was living in New York, he studied briefly at a Scientology center and emerged with a certificate that declared him “Grade IV Release.” In recent years, he spent many Shabbat mornings and Monday evenings at Ohr HaTorah, a synagogue on Venice Boulevard, talking about Kabbalistic texts with the rabbi there, Mordecai Finley. Sometimes, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Finley, who says that he considers Cohen “a great liturgical writer,” read from the pulpit passages from “Book of Mercy,” a 1984 collection of Cohen’s that is steeped in the Psalms. “I participated in all these investigations that engaged the imagination of my generation at that time,” Cohen has said. “I even danced and sang with the Hare Krishnas – no robe, I didn’t join them, but I was trying everything.”

To this day, Cohen reads deeply in a multivolume edition of the Zohar, the principal text of Jewish mysticism; the Hebrew Bible; and Buddhist texts. In our conversations, he mentioned the Gnostic Gospels, Lurianic Kabbalah, books of Hindu philosophy, Carl Jung’s “Answer to Job,” and Gershom Scholem’s biography of Sabbatai Sevi, a self-proclaimed Messiah of the seventeenth century. Cohen is also very much at home in the spiritual reaches of the Internet, and he listens to the lectures of Yakov Leib HaKohain, a Kabbalist who has converted, serially, to Islam, Catholicism, and Hinduism, and lives in the San Bernardino mountains with two pit bulls and four cats.

For forty years, Cohen was associated with a Japanese Zen master named Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi. (“Roshi” is an honorific for a venerated teacher, and Cohen always refers to him that way.) Roshi, who died two years ago at the age of a hundred and seven, arrived in Los Angeles in 1962 but never quite learned the language of his adoptive home. Through his translators, though, he adapted traditional Japanese koans for his American students: “How do you realize Buddha nature while driving a car?” Roshi was short, stout, a drinker of sake and expensive Scotch. “I came to have a good time,” he once said of his sojourn in the States. “I want Americans to learn how to truly laugh.”

Until the early nineties, Cohen used to study with Roshi at the Zen Center, on Mt. Baldy, for periods of learning and meditation that stretched over two or three months a year. He considered Roshi a close friend, a spiritual master, and a deep influence on his work. And so, not long after getting home from the Château Latour tour, in 1993, Cohen went up to Mt. Baldy. This time, he stayed for nearly six years.

“Nobody goes into a Zen monastery as a tourist,” Cohen told me. “There are people who do, but they leave in ten minutes because the life is very rigorous. You are getting up at two-thirty in the morning; the camp wakes up at three, but you have to light fires in the zendo. The cabins are only heated a few hours a day. There’s snow coming in under the badly carpentered doors. You’re shovelling snow half the day. And the other half of the day you’re sitting in the *zendo*. So in a certain sense you toughen up. Whether it has a spiritual aspect is debatable. It helps you endure, and it makes whining the least appropriate response to suffering. Just on that level it’s very valuable.”

Cohen lived in a tiny cabin that he outfitted with a coffeemaker, a menorah, a keyboard, and a laptop. Like the other adepts, he cleaned toilets. He had the honor of cooking for Roshi and eventually lived in a cabin that was linked to his teacher’s by a covered walkway. For many hours a day, he sat in half lotus, meditating. If he, or anyone else, nodded off during meditation or lost the proper position, one of the monks would come by and rap him smartly on the shoulder with a wooden stick.

“People have the idea that a monastery is a place of serenity and contemplation,” Cohen said. “It isn’t that at all. It’s a hospital, and a lot of the people who end up there can barely walk or speak. So a lot of the activity there is to get people to learn how to walk and speak and breathe and prepare their own meals or shovel their own paths in the winter.”

Allen Ginsberg once asked Cohen how he could reconcile his Judaism with Zen. Cohen said that he wasn’t looking for a new religion, that he was well satisfied with the religion he had. Zen made no mention of God; it demanded no scriptural devotion. For him, Zen was a discipline rather than a religion, a practice of investigation. “I put on those robes because that was Roshi’s school and that was the uniform,” he said. Had Roshi been a professor of physics at the University of Heidelberg, Cohen says, he would have learned German and moved to Heidelberg.

Roshi, toward the end of his life, was accused of sexual misconduct. He was never charged with any crime, but some former students, writing in Internet chat rooms and in letters to Roshi himself, said that he had sexually groped or coerced many Buddhist students and nuns. An independent Buddhist panel determined that

the behavior had been going on since the seventies, and that those "who chose to speak out were silenced, exiled, ridiculed, or otherwise punished," according to the *Times*.

One morning, Bob Faggen drove me up the mountain to the Zen Center. A former Boy Scout camp, the center comprises a series of rough-hewn cabins surrounded by pines and cedars. It was striking how few people were around. One monk told me that Roshi had left no successor and that the center had not yet recovered from the scandal. Cohen, for his part, took pains to explain Roshi's transgressions without excusing them. "Roshi," he said, "was a very naughty guy."

In 1996, Cohen became a monk, but that did not safeguard him from depression, a lifelong nemesis; two years later, it overwhelmed him. "I've dealt with depression ever since my adolescence," he said. "Moving into some periods, which were debilitating, when I found it hard to get off the couch, to periods when I was fully operative but the background noise of anguish still prevailed." Cohen tried antidepressants. He tried throwing them out. Nothing worked. Finally, he told Roshi he was "going down the mountain." In a collection of poems called "Book of Longing," he wrote:

> I left my robes hanging on a peg
> in the old cabin
> where I had sat so long
> and slept so little.
> I finally understood
> I had no gift
> for Spiritual Matters.

In fact, Cohen was hardly done with his searching. Just a week after returning home, he boarded a flight to Mumbai to study with another spiritual guide. He took a room in a modest hotel and went to daily *satsangs*, spiritual discussions, at the apartment of Ramesh Balsekar, a former president of the Bank of India and a teacher of Advaita Vedanta, a Hindu discipline. Cohen read Balsekar's book "Consciousness Speaks," which teaches a single universal consciousness, no "you" or "me," and denies a sense of individual free will, any sense that any one person is a "doer."

Cohen spent nearly a year in Mumbai, calling on Balsekar in the mornings, and spending the rest of the day swimming, writing, and wandering the city. For reasons that he now says are "impossible to penetrate," his depression lifted. He was ready to come home. The story, and the way Cohen tells it now, full of uncertainty and modesty, reminded me of the chorus of "Anthem," a song that took him ten years to write and that he recorded just before he first headed up the mountain:

> Ring the bells that still can ring
> Forget your perfect offering
> There is a crack in everything
> That's how the light gets in.

Even if he was now freed of depression, the next crisis was not far off. Aside from a few indulgences, Cohen was not obsessed with luxury. "My project has been completely different than my contemporaries'," he says. His circle in Montreal valued modesty. "The minimum environment that would enable you to do your work with the least distraction and the most aesthetic deliverance came from a modest surrounding. A palace, a yacht would be an enormous distraction from the project. My fantasies went the other way. The way I lived on Mt. Baldy was perfect for me. I liked the communal life, I liked living in a little shack."

And yet he had made a considerable fortune from album sales, concerts, and the publishing rights to his songs. "Hallelujah" was recorded so often and so widely that Cohen jokingly called a moratorium on it. He certainly had enough money to feel secure about his two children and their mother, and a few other dependents.

Before he left on his spiritual adventures, Cohen had ceded nearly absolute control of his financial affairs to Kelley Lynch, his business manager for seventeen years and, at one time, briefly, his lover. In 2004, however, he discovered that his accounts had been emptied. Millions of dollars were gone. Cohen fired Lynch and sued her. The court ruled in Cohen's favor, awarding him more than five million dollars.

In Los Angeles County Superior Court, Cohen testified that Lynch had been so outraged by the suit that she started calling him twenty, thirty times a day and inundating him with e-mails, some directly threatening, eventually ignoring a restraining order. "It makes me feel very conscious about my surroundings," Cohen said, according to the *Guardian's* account of the trial. "Every time I see a car slow down, I get worried." Lynch was sentenced to eighteen months in prison and five years' probation.

After thanking the judge and his attorney in his usual high style, Cohen turned to his antagonist. "It is my prayer," Cohen told the court, "that Ms. Lynch will take refuge in the wisdom of her religion, that a spirit of

understanding will convert her heart from hatred to remorse, from anger to kindness, from the deadly intoxication of revenge to the lowly practices of self-reform."

Cohen has never managed to collect the awarded damages, and, because the situation is still a matter of litigation, he does not like to talk about it. But one result was plain: he would need to return to the stage. Even a Zen monk has to earn some coin.

There is something irresistible about Cohen's charm. For proof, take a look at a YouTube clip called "Why It's Good to Be Leonard Cohen": a filmmaker follows Cohen backstage as a beautiful German-accented actress tries to coax him, in front of a full dressing room, to "go somewhere" with her as he wryly rebuffs her. He is no less charming with men.

So it was more than a little surprising when Faggen and I returned to the house one afternoon thinking that we were on time and were informed, in the sternest terms imaginable, that we were not. In fact, Cohen, wearing a dark suit and a fedora, settled into his medical chair and gave us the most forbidding talking-to I have experienced since grade school. I'm one of those tiresome people who are rarely, if ever, late; who show up, old-mannishly, for flights much too early. But there had apparently been a misunderstanding about the time of our visit, and a text to him and his assistant seemed to have gone unseen. Every effort to apologize or explain, mine and Faggen's, was dismissed as "not the point." Cohen reminded us of his poor health. This was an abuse of his time. A violation. Even "a form of elder abuse." More apologies, more rebuffs. This wasn't about anger or apology, he went on. He felt no rage, no, but we had to understand that we were not "doers," none of us have free will…. And so on. I recognized the language of his teacher in Mumbai. But that didn't make it sting any less.

The lecture – steely, ominous, high-flown – went on quite a long time. I felt humiliated, but also defensive. In the dynamic of people getting something off their chest, the speaker feels cleansed, the listener accused and miserable.

Finally, Cohen eased into other matters. And the subject that he was happiest to talk about was the tour that began as a means of restoring what had been stolen from him. In 2007, he started conceiving a tour with a full band: three backup singers, two guitarists, drummer, keyboard player, bassist, and saxophonist (later replaced by a violinist). He rehearsed the band for three months.

"I hadn't played any of these songs for fifteen years," he said. "My voice had changed. My range had changed. I didn't know what to do. There was no way I could transpose the positions that I knew." Instead, Cohen tuned the strings on his guitar down two whole steps, so, for instance, the low E was now a low C. Cohen had always had a deep, intimate voice, but now, with age, and after countless cigarettes, it is a fantastical growl, confiding, lordly. In concert, he always got a knowing laugh with this line from "Tower of Song": "I was born like this, I had no choice / I was born with the gift of a golden voice."

Neil Larsen, who played keyboards in Cohen's band, said that the preparation was meticulous. "We rehearsed very close to the way you would record," he told me. "We did one song over and over and made adjustments. He was locking the lyrics into his memory, too. Usually it takes a while before a tour jells. Not this one. We went out ready."

The tour started in Canada, and then went everywhere during the next five years – three hundred and eighty shows, from New York to Nice, Moscow to Sydney. Cohen began every performance saying that he and the band would give "everything we've got," and they did. "I think he was competing with Springsteen," Sharon Robinson, a singer and frequent co-writer, joked about the length of the shows. "They were close to four hours some nights."

Cohen was in his mid-seventies by this time, and his manager did everything possible for the performer to marshal his energies. It was a first-class operation: a private plane, where Cohen could write and sleep; good hotels, where he could read and compose on a keyboard; a car to take him to the hotel the minute he stepped off the stage. Some of the most memorable musical performances Cohen had ever seen were by Alberta Hunter, the blues singer, who had a long residency in the late seventies at the Cookery, in the Village. Hunter had retired from music for decades and worked as a nurse, and then made a comeback in the last six years of her life. Leonard Cohen was following suit: an elderly man, full of sap, singing his heart out for hours, several nights a week.

"Everybody was rehearsed not only in the notes but also in something unspoken," Cohen recalled. "You could feel it in the dressing room as you moved closer to the concert, you could feel the sense of commitment, tangible in the room." This time, there was no warmup with Château Latour. "I didn't drink at all. Occasionally, I'd have half a Guinness with Neil Larsen, but I had no interest in alcohol."

The show that I saw, at Radio City, was among the most moving performances I've ever experienced. Here was Cohen, an old master of his art, serving up the thick cream of his catalogue with a soulful corps of exacting musicians. Time and again, he would enact the song as well as sing it, taking one knee in gratitude to the object of affection, taking both knees to emphasize his devotion, to the audience, to the musicians, to the song.

The tour not only restored Cohen's finances (and then some); it also brought a sense of satisfaction rarely associated with him. "One time I asked him on the bus, 'Are you enjoying this?' And he would never really own up to enjoying it," Sharon Robinson recalled. "But after we finished I was at his house one day, and he admitted to me that there was something extremely fulfilling about that tour, something that brought his career full circle that he hadn't expected."

In 2009, Cohen gave his first performance in Israel since 1985, at a stadium in Ramat Gan, donating the proceeds to Israeli-Palestinian peace organizations. He had wanted to perform in Ramallah, in the West Bank, too, but Palestinian groups decided that this was politically untenable. And yet he persisted, dedicating the concert to the cause of "reconciliation, tolerance, and peace," and the song "Anthem" to the bereaved. At the end of the show, Cohen raised his hands, rabbinically, and recited in Hebrew the *birkat kohanim*, the priestly blessing, over the crowd.

"It's not self-consciously religious," Cohen told me. "I know that it's been described that way, and I am happy with that. It's part of the intentional fallacy. But when I see James Brown it has a religious feel. Anything deep does."

When I asked him if he intended his performances to reflect a kind of devotion, he hesitated before he answered. "Does artistic dedication begin to touch on religious devotion?" he said. "I start with artistic dedication. I know that if the spirit is on you it will touch on to the other human receptors. But I dare not begin from the other side. It's like pronouncing the holy name – you don't do it. But if you are lucky, and you are graced, and the audience is in a particular salutary condition, then these deeper responses will be produced."

The final night of the tour happened to be in Auckland, in late December, 2013, and the last songs were exit songs: the prayerful "If It Be Your Will," and then "Closing Time," "I Tried to Leave You," and, finally, a cover of the Drifters song "Save the Last Dance for Me."

The musicians all knew this was not only the last night of a long voyage but, for Cohen, perhaps the last voyage. "Everybody knows that everything has to end some time," Sharon Robinson told me. "So, as we left, there was the thought: This is it."

There is probably no more touring ahead. What is on Cohen's mind now is family, friends, and the work at hand. "I've had a family to support, so there's no sense of virtue attached to it," he said. "I've never sold widely enough to be able to relax about money. I had two kids and their mother to support and my own life. So there was never an option of cutting out. Now it's a habit. And there's the element of time, which is powerful, with its incentive to finish up. Now I haven't gotten near finishing up. I've finished up a few things. I don't know how many other things I'll be able to get to, because at this particular stage I experience deep fatigue…. There are times when I just have to lie down. I can't play anymore, and my back goes fast also. Spiritual things, *baruch Hashem*" – thank God – "have fallen into place, for which I am deeply grateful."

Cohen has unpublished poems to arrange, unfinished lyrics to finish and record or publish. He's considering doing a book in which poems, like pages of the Talmud, are surrounded by passages of interpretation.

"The big change is the proximity to death," he said. "I am a tidy kind of guy. I like to tie up the strings if I can. If I can't, also, that's O.K. But my natural thrust is to finish things that I've begun."

Cohen said he had a "sweet little song" that he'd been working through, one of many, and, suddenly, he closed his eyes and began reciting the lyrics:

> Listen to the hummingbird
> Whose wings you cannot see
> Listen to the hummingbird
> Don't listen to me.
>
> Listen to the butterfly
> Whose days but number three
> Listen to the butterfly
> Don't listen to me.
>
> Listen to the mind of God
> Which doesn't need to be
> Listen to the mind of God
> Don't listen to me.

He opened his eyes, paused awhile. Then he said, "I don't think I'll be able to finish those songs. Maybe, who knows? And maybe I'll get a second wind, I don't know. But I don't dare attach myself to a spiritual strategy. I

don't dare do that. I've got some work to do. Take care of business. I am ready to die. I hope it's not too uncomfortable. That's about it for me."

Cohen's hand has been bothering him, so he plays the guitar less than he did – "I've lost my 'chop' " – but he was eager to show me his synthesizer. He sets a chord progression going with his left hand, flips some switches to one mode or another, and plays a melody with his right. At one point, he flipped on the "Greek" mode, and suddenly he was singing a Greek fisherman's song, as if we had suddenly transported ourselves back in time, to Dousko's Taverna, "in the deep night of fixed and falling stars" on the island of Hydra.

In his chair, Cohen waved away any sense of what might follow death. That was beyond understanding and language: "I don't ask for information that I probably wouldn't be able to process even if it were granted to me." Persistence, living to the last, loose ends, work – that was the thing. A song from four years ago, "Going Home," made clear his sense of limits: "He will speak these words of wisdom / Like a sage, a man of vision / Though he knows he's really nothing / But the brief elaboration of a tube."

The new record opens with the title track, "You Want It Darker," and in the chorus, the singer declares:

> *Hineni Hineni*
>
> I'm ready my Lord.

*Hineni* is Hebrew for "Here I am," Abraham's answer to the summons of God to sacrifice his son Isaac; the song is clearly an announcement of readiness, a man at the end preparing for his service and devotion. Cohen asked Gideon Zelermyer, the cantor at Shaar Hashomayim, the synagogue of his youth in Montreal, to sing the backing vocals. And yet the man sitting in his medical chair was anything but haunted or defeated.

"I know there's a spiritual aspect to everybody's life, whether they want to cop to it or not," Cohen said. "It's there, you can feel it in people – there's some recognition that there is a reality that they cannot penetrate but which influences their mood and activity. So that's operating. That activity at certain points of your day or night insists on a certain kind of response. Sometimes It's just like: 'You are losing too much weight, Leonard. You're dying, but you don't have to coöperate enthusiastically with the process.' Force yourself to have a sandwich.

"What I mean to say is that you hear the *Bat Kol*." The divine voice. "You hear this other deep reality singing to you all the time, and much of the time you can't decipher it. Even when I was healthy, I was sensitive to the process. At this stage of the game, I hear it saying, 'Leonard, just get on with the things you have to do.' It's very compassionate at this stage. More than at any time of my life, I no longer have that voice that says, 'You're fucking up.' That's a tremendous blessing, really."

# Between 14 and 28 October 2016, Edna Gundersen

Source: *Daily Telegraph*, UK newspaper, 29 October 2016, main section, pages 27-28.

The interview took place in Oklahoma.

**The Nobel… whoever dreams about something like that?**

Ahead of a new exhibition of his artwork at London's Halcyon Gallery, Bob Dylan finally gives his verdict on being awarded the highest honour in literature.

**"Isn't that something…?"** Bob Dylan isn't exactly making a big deal out of being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. But at least the Sixties trailblazer is finally acknowledging his becoming the first musician to be granted admission to the world's most elite literary club.

When I ask him about his reaction to hearing the news a fortnight ago that he is to follow in the footsteps of George Bernard Shaw, TS Eliot, Winston Churchill, William Faulkner, Günter Grass, Ernest Hemingway and Harold Pinter, I have no idea what to expect. Dylan, now 75, is on tour in Oklahoma, and we had been due to discuss his new exhibition of artworks, depicting iconic images of American landscapes and urban scenes, which opens to the public at the Halcyon Gallery on London's New Bond Street next week.

Since it was announced he had been chosen by the Swedish Academy to receive the Nobel, Dylan has made no public reference at all to it, save for a fleeting mention on his own website that was deleted within 24 hours. More than that, he has also reportedly refused to pick up the phone to speak to representatives of the Nobel committee. They apparently remain in the dark about whether he will be attending the ceremony on December 10, when he is due to receive a cheque for £750,000 from King Carl XIV Gustaf.

Well, I can put them out of their misery. For when I ask about his Nobel, Dylan is all affability. Yes, he is planning to turn up to the awards ceremony in Stockholm.

**"Absolutely,"** he says. **"If it's at all possible."**

And as he talks, he starts to sound pretty pleased about becoming a Nobel laureate. **"It's hard to believe,"** he muses. His name has been mentioned as being on the shortlist for a number of years, but the announcement was certainly not expected. When he was first told, it was, Dylan confides, **"amazing, incredible. Whoever dreams about something like that?"**

In which case, I can't help but ask, why the long public silence about what it means? Jean-Paul Sartre famously declined the award in 1964, but Dylan has these past weeks seemed intent on simply refusing to acknowledge its existence, so much so that one of the normally tight-lipped Nobel committee labelled him "impolite and arrogant".

For his part, Dylan sounds genuinely bemused by the whole ruckus. It is as if he can't quite fathom where all the headlines have come from, that others have somehow been over-reacting. Couldn't he just have taken the calls from the Nobel Committee?

**"Well, I'm right here,"** he says playfully, as if it was simply a matter of them dialling his number, but he offers no further explanation.

It is over a quarter of a century since I first interviewed Bob Dylan. That was back in 1989, and he started off so reticent that he was monosyllabic. When I asked him a question about the Sixties, he snapped at me. What I did then was start all over and ask all the same questions again. It worked. We ended up doing a two-and-a-half hour interview.

If there is one thing I have learned about Dylan over the years, and the several interviews he has granted me, it is that he always does the unexpected. Bob Dylan has never made a secret of the fact that he doesn't like the media. It is two years since he last spoke to a journalist. He does it his way.

So, for all the speculation over the last two weeks about the reasons behind his blanket silence on the Nobel award, I can only say that he is a radical personality – which is why he is still of so much interest over six decades since he first emerged on the Manhattan music scene in 1962 – and cannot be tied down, even by the Nobel Prize committee.

In interviews over the years, the famously unpredictable Dylan has been by turns combative, amiable, taciturn, philosophical, charismatic, caustic and cryptic. He has seemed intent, most of all, on being fiercely private and

frustratingly unknowable. His apparent toying with the Nobel committee cannot be said to have come entirely out of the blue.

Perhaps it is just that he has grown casual about garlands that would send the rest of us into orbit, as he has received so many in the course of his long career since songs such as *Blowin' in the Wind* and *The Times They Are a-Changin'* became anthems for the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s. Among many others, he has received a Special Citation Pulitzer (2008), the National Medal of Arts (2009), Presidential Medal of Freedom (2012), as well as France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1990) and the Légion d'Honneur (2013).

So, does he agree with the Nobel committee, I ask. Do his lyrics belong alongside great works of literature? Sara Danius, permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, for example, has compared Dylan's contribution to that of the writers of ancient Greece. "If you look back, far back, 2,500 years or so," she has said, "you discover Homer and Sappho, and they wrote poetic texts that were meant to be listened to, they were meant to be performed, often together with instruments, and it's the same way with Bob Dylan. But we still read Homer and Sappho… and we enjoy it, and same thing with Bob Dylan. He can be read, and should be read."

Dylan treats her words with a certain hesitation. **"I suppose so, in some way. Some** [of my own] **songs – *Blind Willie*, *The Ballad of Hollis Brown*, *Joey*, *A Hard Rain*, *Hurricane*, and some others – definitely are Homeric in value."**

He has never, of course, been one to explain his lyrics. **"I'll let other people decide what they are,"** he tells me. **"The academics, they ought to know. I'm not really qualified. I don't have any opinion."**

On the associated question of whether those same lyrics can be considered poetry, Dylan has long delighted in publicly changing his mind. He is capable in one interview of saying that they can, and then the next time he grants a journalist an audience saying that they can't.

At heart, he just likes to remain beyond reach. He is as elusive over his religion as he is over his songs. Born Jewish, in the late 1970s he released two Christian-themed albums that appeared to suggest he was born-again, but followed them by holding his eldest son Jesse's bar mitzvah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the holiest of Jewish sites. (In total, Dylan has six children from two marriages.)

This refusal to explain extends to other aspects of his work. Dylan has been working as a visual artist, in tandem with his music, since the 1960s. **"I'm not obsessed with painting,"** he laughs. **"It's not all I do."**

But news of his Nobel award has coincided with the opening at London's Halcyon Gallery of *The Beaten Path*, a new exhibition of his watercolours and acrylics – his fourth at the Mayfair venue since 2008.

Is there a parallel between song-writing and painting?

**"There's a certain intensity in writing a song,"** he replies, **"and you have to keep in mind why you are writing it and for who and what for,"** he says. **"Paintings, and to a greater extent movies, can be created for propaganda purposes, whereas songs can't be."**

His artwork has been on walls in museums and in private collections since 2007, but devotees first noticed his painterly ways when he did album covers for The Band's *Music from Big Pink* in 1967, and his own *Self-Portrait* in 1970. A book of drawings, 1994's *Drawn Blank*, grew into a series of paintings that went public nine years ago in Germany before travelling to London, Edinburgh, Tokyo and Turin.

He later assembled collections inspired by trips to Asia and Brazil, before Halcyon directors Paul Green and Udi Sheleg suggested he look in his own backyard for inspiration. (When he's not on the road, Dylan lives in Malibu, California.)

For his four exhibitions at the gallery, he has crossed America, often combining his painting with touring. **"Well, it's the land I know best, really, and Halcyon Gallery was probably aware of that, too,"** he says. **"At first, it was just a series of landscapes they suggested – landscapes without people – so I did that. To me, that meant mountains, lakes, rivers, fields and so forth. Sometime later they expanded the idea to include city façades, bridges, automobiles, streets and theatres. Anything outdoors. It's not an idea I would have thought of myself, although I could relate to it."**

While straightforward, many of the images – a shadowy figure in a phone booth in *Midnight Caller* or deserted tables in *Ice Cream Shack* – suggest stories and secrets. Others, such as *Staring at the Moon*, *Rooftop Parking Lot*, *Night Train* and *Del Rio*, convey isolation, solitude, even loneliness.

When it comes to meaning, Dylan is, it becomes clear, no more keen to explain his paintings than he is his lyrics. **"Different people read different things into what they see,"** he says. **"It's all subjective."**

Having been touring practically non-stop since 1988, Dylan grabs opportunities on the road to sketch and paint. This way, he's not tied to timetables, methods or locations.

**"I just do it,"** he says. **"All kinds of places. Wherever I am, really. You can carry a sketchbook anywhere. Watercolours are easy to work with. You can set them up anywhere. The easels and paints are transferable. As far as acrylics and oils, I do them in a barn-like studio or a larger space. I can work in other painters' studios, too.**

**"As a rule, I avoid overcrowded streets. You just have to find some vantage point that feels right. All of these things take time, and you are not going to get it down all at one time.**

**"Once I put the generic forms down, later I can use pixelated imagery, photographs, advertisements, optical devices and so forth, to reconfigure things to complete the picture. There's a process to it. I usually work on more than one painting at a time. Each one is different, depending how simple or complex they are. They all take different lengths of time."**

A few years ago, Dylan began exhibiting huge iron installations, a number of which appear in the new Halcyon show. Bill Clinton was given one of his gates for his 65th birthday, and a 26x15ft archway entitled *Portal* will become Dylan's first public artwork when it goes on permanent display in Maryland later this year.

**"I was putting iron together even as far back as in my hometown** [Hibbing, Minnesota, an iron-mining town], **but it was always only a hobby,"** he says.

**"I can't remember not doing it. It's just not something I thought anybody else would be interested in. Most of my iron pieces up until the recent years were just for friends and family or myself."**

As a painter, writer, film-maker, actor and disc jockey, Dylan plainly sees no limitations to artistic expression. But he does recognise his own limitations.

**"There's a lot of things I'd like to do,"** he says. **"I'd like to drive a race car on the Indianapolis track. I'd like to kick a field goal in an NFL football game. I'd like to be able to hit a hundred-mile-an-hour baseball. But you have to know your place. There might be some things that are beyond your talents.**

**"Everything worth doing takes time. You have to write a hundred bad songs before you write one good one. And you have to sacrifice a lot of things that you might not be prepared for. Like it or not, you are in this alone and have to follow your own star."**

# March 2017, Bill Flanagan

Source: published on-line on the website bobdylan.com, 22 March 2017.

The interview took place at an unknown location.

**Q&A with Bill Flanagan**

Flanagan: This is your third album of standards in a row – *Shadows in the Night* was a big surprise and a really nice one. *Fallen Angels* was a sweet encore. Now you really upped the ante. Did you feel after the first two, you had unfinished business?

**Dylan: I did when I realized there was more to it than I thought, that both of those records together only were part of the picture, so we went ahead and did these.**

Flanagan: Why did you decide to release three discs of music at once?

**Dylan: It's better that they come out at the same time because thematically they are interconnected, one is the sequel to the other and each one resolves the previous one.**

Flanagan: Each disc is 32 minutes long – you could have put it all on 2 CDs. Is there something about the 10 song, 32 minute length that appeals to you?

**Dylan: Sure, it's the number of completion. It's a lucky number, and it's symbolic of light. As far as the 32 minutes, that's about the limit to the number of minutes on a long playing record where the sound is most powerful, 15 minutes to a side. My records were always overloaded on both sides. Too many minutes to be recorded or mastered properly. My songs were too long and didn't fit the audio format of an LP. The sound was thin and you would have to turn your record player up to nine or ten to hear it well. So these CDs to me represent the LPs that I should have been making.**

Flanagan: What's the challenge of singing with a live horn section?

**Dylan: No challenge, it's better than overdubbing them.**

Flanagan: You like to be spontaneous in the studio, but here you're working with tight arrangements and charts. Did that require a new way of thinking for you?

**Dylan: It did at first but then I got used to it. There's enough of my personality written into the lyrics so that I could just focus on the melodies within the arrangements. As a vocalist you're restricted within definite harmonic patterns. But you have more control within those patterns than you would if there were no boundaries whatsoever, it actually takes less thought, hardly any thinking. So I guess you could call that a new way of thinking.**

Flanagan: At any point in the recording did you say to the musicians, "Look, we have to change this on the fly – just follow me…?"

**Dylan: No, that never happened. If I did that the song would fall apart, nobody would be able to follow me. Improvising would disrupt the song. You can't go off track.**

Flanagan: Are you concerned about what Bob Dylan fans think about these standards?

**Dylan: These songs are meant for the man on the street, the common man, the everyday person. Maybe that is a Bob Dylan fan, maybe not, I don't know.**

Flanagan: Has performing these songs taught you anything you didn't know from listening to them?

**Dylan: I had some idea of where they stood, but I hadn't realized how much of the essence of life is in them – the human condition, how perfectly the lyrics and melodies are intertwined, how relevant to everyday life they are, how non-materialistic.**

Flanagan: Up to the sixties, these songs were everywhere – now they have almost faded away. Do they mean more to you when you hear them now?

**Dylan: They do mean a lot more. These songs are some of the most heartbreaking stuff ever put on record and I wanted to do them justice. Now that I have lived them and lived through them I understand them better. They take you out of that mainstream grind where you're trapped between differences which might seem different but are essentially the same. Modern music and songs are so institutionalized that you don't realize it. These songs are cold and clear-sighted, there is a direct realism in them, faith in ordinary life just like in early rock and roll.**

Flanagan: It's hard not to think of World War II when we hear some of these. You were born during the war – do you remember anything about it?

**Dylan: Not much. I was born in Duluth – industrial town, ship yards, ore docks, grain elevators, mainline train yards, switching yards. It's on the banks of Lake Superior, built on granite rock. Lot of fog horns, sailors, loggers, storms, blizzards. My mom says there were food shortages, food rationing, hardly any gas, electricity cutting off – everything metal in your house you gave to the war effort. It was a dark place, even in the light of day – curfews, gloomy, lonely, all that sort of stuff – we lived there till I was about five, till the end of the war.**

Flanagan: Between the Depression and the war, people had to swallow so much pain that songs that might sound overly sentimental to us had tremendous resonance. A line like "as a man who has never paused at wishing wells" – it might sound corny to people who haven't lived too much. Can you get inside these songs in your 70s in a way you might not have been able to in your 20s and 30s?

**Dylan: Sure, I can get way inside. In my 20s and 30s I hadn't been anywhere. Since then I've been all over the world, I've seen oracles and wishing wells. When I was young there were a lot of signs along the way that I couldn't interpret, they were there and I saw them, but they were mystifying. Now when I look back I can see them for what they were, what they meant. I didn't understand that then, but I do now. There is no way I could have known it at the time.**

Flanagan: When you see footage of yourself performing 40 or 50 years ago, does it seem like a different person? What do you see?

**Dylan: I see Nat King Cole, Nature Boy – a very strange enchanted boy, a terribly sophisticated performer, got a cross section of music in him, already postmodern. That's a different person than who I am now.**

Flanagan: It seems like 20 years after the war ended, all the entertainment was about it – movies, TV shows, novels, everything from *South Pacific* to *Hogan's Heroes*. We assume everyone shares this common vocabulary, but in fact, it's fading from popular memory. Did you feel an urgency to rescue these songs?

**Dylan: Not anymore than I would try to rescue Beethoven, Brahms, or Mozart. These songs are not hiding behind a wall or at the bottom of the sea, they're right there out in the open, anyone can find them. They're truthful. They're liberating.**

Flanagan: You do some great singing here – "When the World Was Young," "These Foolish Things" – which begs the question, if you can sing like that, why don't you always sing like that?

**Dylan: Depends what kind of song it is. "When the World Was Young," "These Foolish Things," are conversational songs. You don't want to be spitting the words out in a crude way. That would be unthinkable. The emphasis is different and there is no reason to force the vernacular. "An airline ticket to romantic places" is a contrasting type of phraseology, than, say, "bury my body by the highway side." The intonation is different, more circumspectual, more internal.**

Flanagan: Do you pick vocal approaches like an actor playing a role?

**Dylan: No, it's more like hypnosis, you instill it in your mind and you keep repeating it over and over until you got it. An actor playing a role? Like who? Scatman Crothers? George C. Scott? Steve McQueen? It would probably be more like a method actor, whatever a method actor is. Remembrance of things past, I do that all the time.**

Flanagan: One song you don't sing perfectly is "September of My Years." Your voice cracks on that, but fits the lyric. Did you consider fixing that or did you realize it works?

**Dylan: My voice cracking here and there wouldn't bother me, bum notes or wrong chords would bother me more. On "September of My Years," I didn't fix anything. That would be impossible to pull off anyway because we were all in the same room playing together at the same time and there was a lot of leakage into other mics. You only fix things if you overdub the vocals separately and we didn't do that here. If you mangle a lyric on records like this, you have to go back and start over. It's a live recording. My voice cracking here or there just might mean it was recorded too early in the day, but it doesn't hurt the overall effect, it wouldn't bother me.**

Flanagan: People called *Shadows in the Night* a tribute to Frank Sinatra. Did you know Sinatra had recorded all those songs when you put that record out?

**Dylan: Yeah, I knew he did, but a lot of other people recorded them as well, it just so happened that he had the best versions of them. When I recorded these songs I had to make believe that I never heard of Sinatra, that he didn't exist. He's a guide. He'll point the way and lead you to the entrance but from there you're on your own.**

Flanagan: There is a famous story that you and Springsteen were invited to a dinner party at Sinatra's house around the time you did that TV tribute to him. Had you met him before? Did you feel like he knew your stuff?

**Dylan: Not really. I think he knew "The Times They Are a-Changin'" and "Blowin' In the Wind." I know he liked "Forever Young," he told me that. He was funny, we were standing out on his patio at night and he said to me, "You and me, pal, we got blue eyes, we're from up there," and he pointed to the stars. "These other bums are from down here." I remember thinking that he might be right.**

Flanagan: Everybody on that show did a Sinatra song except you. You sang "Restless Farewell." How come?

**Dylan: Frank himself requested that I do it. One of the producers had played it for him and showed him the lyrics.**

Flanagan: Was that the last time you saw Sinatra?

**Dylan: Maybe once after that.**

Flanagan: What was the first time you saw him?

**Dylan: Pittsburgh, maybe '67 or '68 at the Civic Arena. He sang "Summer Wind," "Day In, Day Out," "Moonlight in Vermont."**

Flanagan: Sinatra did a lot of songs about growing old, but "The Best Is Yet to Come" is about defying age. It was the last song he ever sang on stage. How did you get inside that song? What do you think you bring to it that makes it worth your cutting?

**Dylan: It wasn't difficult. I didn't bring anything unusual to it. There are a lot of key shifts and modulations in that song and you have to slide your way in and out of them. It's a bit of a challenge, but once you figure it out, it's pretty easy. It's just a straight-ahead blues-based ballad, unique in its own way. It's like "Mack the Knife," but nothing like "Mack the Knife." It's such an old-fashioned phrase, you wouldn't think anybody could do anything with it. "The best is yet to come" could be both a threat and a promise; the lyrics sort of insinuate that even though the world is falling down, a better one is already in its place. The song kind of levitates itself, you don't have to do much to get it off the ground. I like all of Carolyn Leigh's lyrics too; she wrote the lyrics to "Stay with Me."**

Flanagan: No one can hear "As Time Goes By" and not think of *Casablanca*. What are some movies that have inspired your own songs?

**Dylan: *The Robe*, *King of Kings*, *Samson and Delilah*, some others too. Maybe, like, *Picnic* and *A Face in the Crowd*.**

Flanagan: A song like "Imagination" calls for an entirely different kind of drumming than rock and roll demands. It's not as solid in the groove, it flies around the beat. Did it take you a minute to sing to that sort of rhythm?

**Dylan: Yeah, but only a minute. Tommy Dorsey plays this kind of rhythm all the time. The drumming does fly around the beat because it has to, the drummer is observant to the bass line and there is a walking bass line that is ticking like a clock, like a heart palpitation. There's a stomp to it too, that's buried in there, almost like a Son House thing, but it's buried so deep you hardly notice it. On the top it sounds all dreamy-like, like a pure ballad, but that can be deceiving. The melody makes this song what it is, not necessarily the drumming.**

Flanagan: What does a drummer coming into your band need to know? What should he avoid?

**Dylan: No one comes into my band. I like the drummer I have now, he is one of the best around, but if he ever left me for some reason, like to join The Rolling Stones or something, I'd have to replace him. What should the guy avoid? Probably trying to get to know anybody too quick – no big cymbal crashes on the word "kick" in the song "I Get a Kick Out of You." The drummer is not the leader, he follows the steady pulse of the song and the rhythmic phrasing. If he does that and keeps it simple, he doesn't have to avoid anything.**

Flanagan: What drummers do you like?

**Dylan: Lots of them, Krupa, Elvin Jones, Fred Below, Jimmy Van Eaton, Charlie Watts. I like Casey Dickens, the drummer who played with Bob Wills. There are a lot of great drummers.**

Flanagan: You had a lot to do with songwriters singing and singers writing – ever think it would have been better for people to keep their jobs separate?

**Dylan: Maybe some, but I can't say who offhand. There's a lot of great singers who write weak songs and a lot of great songwriters who don't sing. Trouble for them is they don't have the outlets we used to have – nowhere to place these songs, no movies, no radio shows, TV variety shows, recording sessions, programs that were always calling for songs. So they have to sing them themselves. Songwriters have to have a reason to write songs, there has to be some purpose to performing it too. And sometimes it doesn't connect. There is no magic formula to make that happen. All the standards on *Triplicate* have been written by more than one person, different combinations of people, and none of the singers who originally recorded them wrote them. If you can write your own songs, that's ideal, but nobody will fault you if you don't. Barbara Streisand and Tom Jones don't.**

Flanagan: "Make You Feel my Love" has become a new standard – it's been covered by Adele, Garth Brooks, Billy Joel. Any version that knocked you out?

**Dylan: Yeah, one after the other, they all did.**

Flanagan: "Braggin'" was done by Duke Ellington in 1938 – it's the sort of big band swinging blues that led directly to rock and roll. As a kid, did rock and roll feel like a new thing to you or an extension of what was already going on?

**Dylan: Rock and roll was indeed an extension of what was going on – the big swinging bands – Ray Noble, Will Bradley, Glenn Miller, I listened to that music before I heard Elvis Presley. But rock and roll was high energy, explosive and cut down. It was skeleton music, came out of the darkness and rode in on the atom bomb and the artists were star headed like mystical Gods. Rhythm and blues, country and western, bluegrass and gospel were always there – but it was compartmentalized – it was great but it wasn't dangerous. Rock and roll was a dangerous weapon, chrome plated, it exploded like the speed of light, it reflected the times, especially the presence of the atomic bomb which had preceded it by several years. Back then people feared the end of time. The big showdown between capitalism and communism was on the horizon. Rock and roll made you oblivious to the fear, busted down the barriers that race and religion, ideologies put up. We lived under a death cloud; the air was radioactive. There was no tomorrow, any day it could all be over, life was cheap. That was the feeling at the time and I'm not exaggerating. Doo-wop was the counterpart to rock and roll. Songs like "In the Still of the Night," "Earth Angel," "Thousand Miles Away," those songs balanced things out, they were heartfelt and melancholy for a world that didn't seem to have a heart. The doo-wop groups might have been an extension, too, of the Ink Spots and gospel music, but it didn't matter; that was brand new too. Groups like the Five Satins and the Meadowlarks seemed to be singing from some imaginary street corner down the block. Jerry Lee Lewis came in like a streaking comet from some far away galaxy. Rock and roll was atomic powered, all zoom and doom. It didn't seem like an extension of anything but it probably was.**

Flanagan: On songs like "Bye and Bye" and "Moonlight," you were working with pop styles from the early days of movies and recording. "Duquesne Whistle" was a swing number that Duke Ellington could have done. Do you think those songs laid the groundwork for these recent albums?

**Dylan: Yeah, I think so, those two songs and "Sugar Baby," too. "Duquesne Whistle" actually started out at as a Fats Waller song, "Jitterbug Waltz." I altered it somewhat but that was the blueprint. But yeah, those earlier tunes did lay the groundwork for songs like "But Beautiful" and "It Gets Lonely Early," which are both on *Triplicate*. I didn't want to tamper with them so I sang them the way they were.**

Flanagan: Some records are social, good for parties and dancing. Some records are great in the car. This is an album made for late nights, solitude and reflection. When you find yourself in that place, what records do you reach for?

**Dylan: Sarah Vaughan's *My Kinda Love*. Also the one she did with Clifford Brown.**

Flanagan: The first two discs are fun, but it's on the third disc that you really get into the heart-bearing stuff, and your best singing. Why save the best for last?

**Dylan: It seems that way because it's a human story that builds to a climax and it's personal from end to end. You start out wondering why you bought those blue pajamas and later you're wondering why you were born. You go from the foolishly absurd to the deadly serious and you've passed through the gaudy and the nasty along the way. You get to the edge and you're played out and you wonder where's the good news? Isn't there supposed to be good news? It's a journey like the song "Skylark," where your heart goes a-journeying over the shadows and the rain. And that's pretty much it. It's a journey of the heart. The best had to be saved for last.**

Flanagan: I noticed that if you had an odd song that didn't seem to fit with the rest of the album, you put it first – "Rainy Day Women," "John Wesley Harding," the Johnny Cash duet of "Girl from the North Country," "All the Tired Horses," "Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum." It's like, "here's a strange song" – and then the album begins. Why do you do that?

**Dylan: I don't think "Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum" is a strange song at all, by any measure. I think it was pretty standard then and I think the same now, so that particular song could go anywhere. But the rest of them, most likely I did wonder what can I do with this, it doesn't seem to fit anywhere. I probably did put these songs first and got them out of the way. Not sure about "Rainy Day Women," though, I think it was like a bell tower announcement of what was to come. "All the Tired Horses" was only a mood piece, like a prelude, but the others would have broken up the flow of the rest of the songs on the record.**

Flanagan: "There's a Flaw in My Flue," it's a very weird song – it feels like a parody of a certain kind of torch song, especially the line "smoke gets in my nose." Do you think Sammy Kahn was goofing when he wrote it?

**Dylan: No, I don't think so. I think it's a sincere romantic ballad. Smoke getting in my nose could be metaphorical, but it's also very real at face value. There are a lot of lines like that in blues and folk music, "My bucket's got a hole in it," "there are stones in my passway," "my motor don't turn," "there's a ring in my tub," "there's smoke in my nose." It's not unlike a Blind Lemon line, "it's been a meatless and wheatless day." Sure, it's a romantic ballad, but I don't think it can be dismissed that easily. A fire in the fireplace could burn your place down.**

**What gives this song life and what all those other songs lack, is an exquisite melody which intertwines with the words, perfectly. I've seen images in my fireplace too. I've always thought that the line in "My Funny Valentine," "are you smart," is a goofy line. I kind of look at it this way – the melody in this song is kind of like the background in the Mona Lisa painting, a mystical, phantasmagorical fantasy land. To me that's the real painting, like a science fiction world. The person looking at me is just a face, I can't tell if she's smiling or sneering, she has no particular spiritual nature. I'm not even convinced she's a woman, but I'm captivated by the background, the melody. It's kind of like this song, where you might see that "there's a flaw in my flue" and not look past it or hear past it. I think it's a great song, not goofy at all.**

Flanagan: You've been spending a lot of time in all these old songs. Do you think the next song you write will be influenced by them?

**Dylan: I doubt it. These melodies are so structured in musical theory, they're so tricky with time signatures and shifting melodies, that it's beyond me. It's hard to be influenced by any of it if you're not familiar with that world. I could be influenced by a part of a melody or a phrase, but that would be about it. I don't think I'd be influenced by anything lyrically.**

Flanagan: Would you ever want to write songs specifically for someone who works in this style? Diana Krall or Harry Connick? Ever thought of writing a song for Tony Bennett?

**Dylan: No, I've never thought about writing a song for Tony. He's never asked me and I don't think I could even if he did.**

Flanagan: A lot of singers leave off the intros when they record these songs, but you did them – "September of My Years," "P.S. I Love You," "When the World Was Young." The Beatles occasionally wrote an intro to a song ("to lead a better life, I need my love to be here…") but hardly any other composers of your generation or after did. Have you ever done it?

**Dylan: I've never done it. I think you have to put those in last after you write the song. I've always liked the one from "Mr. Blue," the one where our guardian star lost all his glow. That's one of the most beautiful intros. There's an intro to "Stardust," too, that nobody ever does. We call it an intro, but back then they called it the verse. What we call the song, they called the refrain. "Stardust" doesn't need it, but "September of My Years" does. The song doesn't make sense without it.**

Flanagan: The Beatles also wrote a song called "P.S. I Love You." "Tossin' and Turnin'" by Bobby Lewis repurposed "I Couldn't Sleep a Wink Last Night." The first ten years of rock songwriters were students of the music that came before – but from about 1970 on, all the new rockers knew was rock, maybe a little blues. What was lost?

**Dylan: From 1970 till now there's been about 50 years, seems more like 50 million. That was a wall of time that separates the old from the new and a lot can get lost in this kind of time. Entire industries go, lifestyles change, corporations kill towns, new laws replace old ones, group interests triumph over individual ones, poor people themselves have become a commodity. Musical influences too – they get swallowed up, get absorbed into newer things or they fall by the wayside. I don't think you need to feel bummed out though, or that it's out of your clutches – you can still find what you're looking for if you follow the trail back. It could be right there where you left it – anything is possible. Trouble is, you can't bring it back with you, you have to stay right there with it. I think that is what nostalgia is all about.**

Flanagan: Some people would call *Triplicate* nostalgic.

**Dylan: Nostalgic? No I wouldn't say that. It's not taking a trip down memory lane or longing and yearning for the good old days or fond memories of what's no more. A song like "Sentimental Journey" is not a way back when song, it doesn't emulate the past, it's attainable and down to earth, it's in the here and now.**

Flanagan: The way you do "Sentimental Journey" reminds me a little of Roger Miller – it's kind of a folk song, isn't it?

**Dylan: Yeah, kind of, it's in that realm, it's like a song Lead Belly might have written. There are a lot of songs like that – "Moanin' Low," "He's Gone Away," "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good." The writers of those songs were folk and blues influenced.**

Flanagan: Some of these songs are very sentimental, a lot deal with heartbreak. I won't ask you who, but tell me – is there a real woman you picture when you sing some of these? More than one?

**Dylan: Real? Of course they're real. I hope so.**

Flanagan: Tell me about working with the arranger, James Harper. What direction did you give him? "Stormy Weather" gets a really elaborate arrangement – a dramatic drone, like a submarine resolving into Hawaiian guitar. Did he bring in anything that made you say, "It's too much, dial it back?"

**Dylan: Maybe a couple of times the trumpet was too shrill, and had to be dialed back. But outside of that, he didn't need much direction. I can't arrange horn parts anyway. In a situation like that, you don't want to direct anybody. You have to have confidence in their ability, you have to know they're capable. I didn't want to have to get in James's way. I wouldn't have hired him if I did. He orchestrated "Stormy Weather" flawlessly and that's a hard song to do because so many people have done it.**

Flanagan: "My One and Only Love" is a rewrite of a song called, "Music from Beyond the Moon." The original version was a flop, so a new lyricist came in and put in a whole new set of words to the melody and the second time it was a hit. When that happens with folk or blues songs, it's called the folk tradition; when it happens with rock songs, people yell about plagiarism; in hip hop, it's sampling. But it has always gone on in every form of music, hasn't it?

**Dylan: I'm sure it has, there's always some precedent – most everything is a knockoff of something else. You could have some monstrous vision, or a perplexing idea that you can't quite get down, can't handle the theme. But then you'll see a newspaper clipping or a billboard sign, or a paragraph from an old Dickens novel, or you'll hear some line from another song, or something you might overhear somebody say just might be something in your mind that you didn't know you remembered. That will give you the point of approach and specific details. It's like you're sleepwalking, not searching or seeking; things are transmitted to you. It's as if you were looking at something far off and now you're standing in the middle of it. Once you get the idea, everything you see, read, taste or smell becomes an allusion to it. It's the art of transforming things. You don't really serve art, art serves you and it's only an expression of life anyway; it's not real life. It's tricky, you have to have the right touch and integrity or you could end up with something stupid. Michelangelo's statue of David is not the real David. Some people never get this and they're left outside in the dark. Try to create something original, you're in for a surprise.**

Flanagan: Jazz musicians have always played standards, no matter what else they were up to. "Why Was I Born" and "My One and Only Love" were recorded by John Coltrane. Coltrane was playing in the Village at the same time you were. Did your paths ever cross?

**Dylan: I saw him at The Village Gate on Bleecker Street a couple of times with Jimmy Garrison and McCoy Tyner.**

Flanagan: A few years ago I went to one of your concerts and found myself sitting next to Ornette Coleman. After the show I went backstage and there were some very famous rock musicians and actors waiting around, but the only person you invited into your dressing room was Ornette. Do you feel a connection with those jazz guys?

**Dylan: Yeah, I always have. I knew Ornette a little bit and we did have a few things in common. He faced a lot of adversity, the critics were against him, other jazz players that were jealous. He was doing something so new, so groundbreaking, they didn't understand it. It wasn't unlike the abuse that was thrown at me for doing some of the same kind of things, although with different forms of music.**

Flanagan: I can't imagine you writing a song as vulnerable and sentimental as "Where Is the One." Do some of these songs allow you to go to a place you can't go in your own writing?

**Dylan: Sure they do. I would never write "Where Is the One," but it's as if it was written for me, so I didn't have to write it. It's a tough place to get to, it's vulnerable and protected. You'd have to be like the invisible man to get through, or you'd have to batter down walls, strip yourself naked, and then even if you did get in you'd have to wonder what's the point. Someone else has been here and gone and took everything. Someone else had to write this song for me. Its nerves are too raw. You leave yourself too open. I'd rather not go there, especially to write songs.**

Flanagan: Do you ever sit at the piano and come up with a great melody that is out of your range as a singer? Ever write songs with another singer in mind?

**Dylan: I play variations of contrasting themes on piano and if I extend that into higher or lower octaves, the melody does get sometimes out of my range. But I'm not trying to sing anything, I'm just playing a melody. As far as other singers go, I never write a song with another singer in mind.**

Flanagan: For the last few years you've mostly been playing piano on stage, very little guitar. How come?

**Dylan: I play at sound checks and at home, but the chemistry is better when I'm at the piano. It changes the dynamics of the band if I play the guitar. Maybe it's just too tedious to go back and forth from one to the other. I'm strictly a rhythm player anyway. I'm not a solo player and when the piano gets locked in with the steel guitar, it's like big band orchestrated riffs. That doesn't happen when I'm playing guitar. When I play guitar it's a different band.**

Flanagan: Tough to take on "Stardust" after Willie. Did you think about his version?

**Dylan: "Stardust" is a dance ballad and I played it like that. I was thinking about Artie Shaw.**

Flanagan: An awful lot of greats have died in the last year, Muhammad Ali, Merle Haggard, Leonard Cohen, Leon Russell. Any of them hit you especially hard?

**Dylan: Sure, they all did – we were like brothers, we lived on the same street and they all left empty spaces where they used to stand. It's lonesome without them.**

Flanagan: You've known so many legendary musicians, actors, writers – was there anyone you look back on and say, "Man, I wish I had appreciated how great he was when he was still around?"

**Dylan: I can't say who's great or who isn't. If somebody does achieve greatness it's only for a minute and anyone is capable of that. Greatness is beyond your control – I think you get it by chance, but it's only for a short time.**

Flanagan: Some of your opening acts and co-bills, even very big names, have expressed disappointment that you don't hang out or socialize on the road. Why is that?

**Dylan: Beats me – why would they want to hang out with me anyway? I hang out with my band on the road.**

Flanagan: For *The New Basement Tapes*, T Bone Burnett put together a group with Elvis Costello, Rhiannon Giddens, Jim James, Marcus Mumford and Taylor Goldsmith, to finish songs based on old lyrics of yours. Did you hear any of those songs and say, "I don't remember writing that?"

**Dylan: Did you say Taylor Swift?**

Flanagan: Taylor Goldsmith.

**Dylan: Yeah, OK. No, I don't remember writing any of those songs. They were found in an old trunk which came out of what people called the Big Pink house in Woodstock, mostly lyrics left over when we were recording all those Basement Tapes songs. T Bone said he could do something with them, said he could finish them. I didn't remember anything about them. For years I thought we'd used them all.**

Flanagan: You've had all sorts of celebrated people in your audience – presidents, kings, a pope, movie stars, the Beatles, Muhammad Ali. Anyone make you nervous?

**Dylan: All of them.**

Flanagan: I heard you and George Harrison were once supposed to do a recording session with Elvis, but he never showed up. What's the real story?

**Dylan: He did show up, it was us that didn't.**

Flanagan: Warren Beatty says he wanted you to play Clyde Barrow in *Bonnie and Clyde*. Did that offer get to you?

**Dylan: No, the offer was sent to my manager's office and we weren't speaking; we had had a falling out. I didn't get any mail or offers that were sent there.**

Flanagan: You could have had some love scenes with Faye Dunaway – any regrets?

**Dylan: Nope.**

Flanagan: Let's talk about singer songwriters. Are there qualities that make English songwriters different from American, or Southern songwriters different from, say, Canadian?

**Dylan: You got me. If I was an anthropologist maybe I could tell you, but I really have no idea. Everybody crosses cultures and time zones and nations now anyway. You know who could probably tell you? Alan Lomax, or maybe Cecil Sharp, one of those guys.**

Flanagan: When you write a song about a contemporary person, Hurricane Carter, or Joey Gallo, or George Jackson, or Catfish Hunter – do you then have to deal with their relatives calling you up and asking for favors?

**Dylan: Not often. Willie McTell's niece came to see me once and showed me some old photographs. She didn't want anything, she was just a nice person.**

Flanagan: Which one of your songs do you think did not get the attention it deserved?

**Dylan: "Brownsville Girl," or maybe "In the Garden."**

Flanagan: You've traveled a lot for a long while. Is there still something that makes Minnesota different from other places? Is there any quality people have there that you don't find elsewhere?

**Dylan: Not necessarily. Minnesota has its own Mason Dixon line. I come from the north and that's different from southern Minnesota; if you're there you could be in Iowa or Georgia. Up north the weather is more extreme – frostbite in the winter, mosquito-ridden in the summer, no air conditioning when I grew up, steam heat in the winter and you had to wear a lot of clothes when you went outdoors. Your blood gets thick. It's the land of 10,000 lakes – lot of hunting and fishing. Indian country, Ojibwe, Chippewa, Lakota, birch trees, open pit mines, bears and wolves – the air is raw. Southern Minnesota is farming country, wheat fields and hay stacks, lots of corn fields, horses and milk cows. In the north it's more hardscrabble. It's a rugged environment – people lead simple lives, but they lead simple lives in other parts of the country too. People are pretty much the same wherever you go. There is good and bad in most people, doesn't matter what state you live in. Some people are more self-sufficient than other places – some more secure, some less secure – some people mind their own business, some don't.**

Flanagan: Did you grow up around a lot of Indians?

**Dylan: No, they lived on the reservation, hardly ever came to town, had their own schools and whatnot.**

Flanagan: Were you into hunting or fishing?

**Dylan: I went into the woods with my uncle, my mother's brother – he was an expert hunter and tried to teach me. But it wasn't for me, I hated it.**

Flanagan: How about fishing?

**Dylan: Oh sure, everybody did that, bass, sturgeon, flatheads, lake trout, we caught and cleaned them too.**

Flanagan: Were you into guns?

**Dylan: Single shot revolvers, nothing automatic. Shooting pellet guns through 2x4s, that was fun. A pellet gun is as lethal as a .22.**

Flanagan: Hubert Humphrey was a big figure in Minnesota when you were growing up. Did you ever see him in person or meet him?

**Dylan: I never did, never saw him.**

Flanagan: When you first fell in love with rock and roll, did you have a pal who shared your enthusiasm? Anyone you tried to write songs with as a teenager?

**Dylan: Only my girlfriend. I strummed my guitar and we'd make up new lyrics to other songs. I was playing in rock and roll bands around town too, but somewhere along the way I had had an epiphany. I had heard Lead Belly and Josh White and that changed everything.**

Flanagan: What was Minneapolis like when you first came there?

**Dylan: Minneapolis and St. Paul – the Twin Cities, they were rock and roll towns. I didn't know that. I thought the only rock and roll towns were Memphis and Shreveport. In Minneapolis they played northwest rock and roll, Dick Dale and the Ventures, The Kingsmen played there a lot, The Easy Beats, The Castaways, all surf bands, high voltage groups. A lot of Link Wray stuff like "Black Widow" and "Jack the Ripper," all those northwest instrumentals like "Tall Cool One." "Flyin' High" by the Shadows was a big hit. The Twin Cities was surfing rockabilly – all of it cranked up to ten with a lot of reverb; tremolo switches, everything Fender – Esquires, Broadcasters, Jaguars, amps on folding chairs – the chairs even looked Fender. Sandy Nelson drumming. "Surfing Bird" came out of there a little while later, it didn't surprise me.**

Flanagan: Did it make you want to consider changing your direction?

**Dylan: I was traveling down a different path and already my consciousness had been recast. I had heard Lenny Bruce and Lord Buckley and had read Ginsberg and Kerouac, so I had a heightened sense of being. I was hanging out with a different crowd too, more stimulating and free-spirited – real live poets, rebel girls, folk singers – it was a self-ruling world, aloof and detached from the mainstream. I had been bailed out of the past and had broke free, I wasn't going to go back to that other place with button down shirts and crew cuts for anyone or anything. What I was listening to on my little portable record player was Gus Cannon, Memphis Minnie, Sleepy John Estes, players like that. Charlie Poole, too, and even Joan Baez. I was looking for my identity and I knew it was in there somewhere.**

Flanagan: What do you think of Joan Baez?

**Dylan: She was something else, almost too much to take. Her voice was like that of a siren from off some Greek island. Just the sound of it could put you into a spell. She was an enchantress. You'd**

**have to get yourself strapped to the mast like Odysseus and plug up your ears so you wouldn't hear her. She'd make you forget who you were.**

Flanagan: Back in the beginning of your career, you walked off *The Ed Sullivan Show*. It was a live show; were all your friends and family back in Minnesota sitting around the TV waiting for you to appear?

**Dylan: I doubt it, they wouldn't have known me by name anyway. I don't even think they would have known my face. If they saw my name in the TV listings, they wouldn't know it was me. Wouldn't know it was the boy who used to live there.**

Flanagan: A lot of other songwriters have mentioned you in their songs – John Lennon in "Yer Blues," Ricky Nelson in "Garden Party," David Bowie in "Song for Bob Dylan." It's quite a list. Do you have a favorite?

**Dylan: "Garden Party."**

Flanagan: In Don McLean's "American Pie," you're supposed to be the jester.

**Dylan: Yeah, Don McLean, "American Pie," what a song that is. A jester? Sure, the jester writes songs like "Masters of War," "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall," "It's Alright, Ma" – some jester. I have to think he's talking about somebody else. Ask him.**

Flanagan: Tom Wilson is kind of a mysterious figure, not much is known about him. What did he bring to the party as a producer?

**Dylan: Tom was a jazz guy, produced a lot of jazz records, mostly Sun Ra. I just turned around one day and he was there. Nowadays they'd call him a producer, but back then they didn't call him that; he was a typical A&R man, responsible for your repertoire. I didn't exactly need a repertoire because I had songs of my own, so I didn't know what an A&R man did. Somebody had to be there from the record company to communicate with the engineer. Back then I don't think I was ever allowed to talk to an engineer. The board was simple – two, at the most four, tracks. In those early years you went into the studio and recorded live, take after take. If someone made a mistake you had to start over, or you just had to work your way through a song until you got the right version. Nobody at the major recording studios was doing Brian Wilson and Phil Spector type records, bouncing tracks around, freeing up other tracks.**

**Tom was Harvard-educated but he was street-wise too. When I met him he was mostly into offbeat jazz, but he had a sincere enthusiasm for anything I wanted to do, and he brought in musicians like Bobby Gregg and Paul Griffin to play with me. Those guys were first class, they had insight into what I was about. Most studio musicians had no idea, they hadn't listened to folk music or blues or anything like that. I think working with me opened up Tom's world too, because after working with me he started recording groups like The Velvet Underground and The Mothers of Invention. Tom was a genuinely good guy and he was very supportive.**

Flanagan: What format do you listen to music on? Do you stream music?

**Dylan: I listen on CDs mostly.**

Flanagan: Heard any good records lately?

**Dylan: Iggy Pop's *Après*, that's a good record. Imelda May, I like her. Valerie June, The Stereophonics. I like Willie Nelson and Norah Jones' album with Wynton Marsalis, the Ray Charles tribute record. I liked Amy Winehouse's last record.**

Flanagan: Were you a fan of hers?

**Dylan: Yeah, absolutely. She was the last real individualist around.**

Flanagan: How old were you when your family got their first TV? What shows made an impression on you?

**Dylan: I was about 14 or 15 when we got one, my dad put it in the basement. It came on at 3:00 and went off at 9, most of the other time it showed a test pattern, some kind of weird circular symbol. The reception wasn't that good, there was a lot of snow on the screen and you always had to adjust the antenna to get anything to come in. I liked everything I saw – Milton Berle, Sid Caesar, *Highway Patrol*, *Father Knows Best*. There were theater dramas, too, like *Studio One*, *Fireside Theatre*. Quiz shows, too – *Beat the Clock*, *To Tell the Truth*, *Queen for a Day*, they were all good. There was one called *You Are There* with Walter Cronkite, *The Twilight Zone*, there were a bunch of them.**

Flanagan: When you're on your bus, what shows do you watch on TV?

**Dylan: *I Love Lucy*, all the time, non-stop.**

Flanagan: Every time I turn on PBS, they're running another documentary about folk music in the 60s and all sorts of people from that scene are talking about you like you were best friends. Does that bug you?

**Dylan: I don't know, maybe we were best friends. I don't remember.**

Flanagan: In 1966 you had the wildest hair anybody had ever seen. Could you slick it down and go out and no one would recognize you?

**Dylan: Yeah, but I wouldn't have wanted to do that. I was trying to look like Little Richard, my version of Little Richard. I wanted wild hair, I wanted to be recognized.**

Flanagan: You met John Wayne in 1966 – how did you two hit it off?

**Dylan: Pretty good actually – the Duke, I met him on a battleship in Hawaii where he was filming a movie, he and Burgess Meredith. One of my former girlfriends was in the movie too, and she told me to come over there; she introduced me to him and he asked me to play some folk songs. I played him "Buffalo Skinners," "Raggle Taggle Gypsy," and I think "I'm a Rambler, I'm a Gambler." He told me if I wanted to I could stick around and be in the movie. He was friendly to me.**

Flanagan: "Wagon Wheel" was an old unfinished song of yours that got picked up and completed by Old Crow Medicine Show, who had a hit with it. Since then it's been covered by Mumford and Sons. Darius Rucker's version won a Grammy. Are you ever going to record it?

**Dylan: I did record it, it's on one of my old bootleg records. I recorded it with Roger McGuinn and Rita Coolidge and Booker T, at a movie studio in Hollywood. That's where they got it, it just had a different title.**

Flanagan: Speaking of Hollywood, that's where you made *Triplicate*.

**Dylan: That's right. At the Capitol Studios.**

Flanagan: The title *Triplicate* brings to mind Sinatra's trilogy. Did that album have any influence on this one?

**Dylan: Yeah, in some ways, the idea of it. I was thinking in triads anyway, like Aeschylus, The Oresteia, the three linked Greek plays. I envisioned something like that.**

Flanagan: Each of the three discs tells a different story. Did you set out knowing it was going to be that way or did the themes reveal themselves as you went along?

**Dylan: The themes were decided beforehand in a theatrical sense – grand themes, each of them incidental to survivors and lovers or better yet, wisdom and vengeance, or maybe even exile – one disc foreshadowing the next and I didn't want to give any one song preeminence over any other. No old wives' tales and memoirs, but just hard plain earthly life, the hidden realities of it. That's my perception.**

Flanagan: Did you think about it all in that exact way?

**Dylan: No, not in so many words, but I think subconsciously I did.**

Flanagan: Were there songs you considered but left off because they didn't fit any of the three stories?

**Dylan: Yeah there were; "I Cover the Waterfront," "Moonlight in Vermont," "Let's Face the Music and Dance."**

Flanagan: Any tracks here where you came in with one approach and ended up with something completely different?

**Dylan: No, that happens more with my songs. A couple of times I picked the wrong approach to a song I wanted to do; "Deep in a Dream," I recorded that but it didn't resonate so I didn't use it. It was the wrong approach to begin with.**

Flanagan: What's a line or lyric here that you would never write, but you're glad someone else did?

**Dylan: Lots of them… "The thrill of the thought that you might give a thought to my plea," "the stumbling words that told you what my heart meant," "when you're all alone, all the children grown, and, like starlings, flown away." I'm glad someone else wrote these lines. I never would.**

Flanagan: From the 20s into the early 50s, the line between blues and pop and country and jazz was very flexible. Robert Johnson, Jimmie Rodgers, Bing Crosby, Ray Charles, all tried their hand at everything. Why do fences come up between different styles of American music?

**Dylan: Because of the pressure to conform.**

# Before October 2017, Joe Hagan

Source: Published in *Sticky Fingers: The Life and Times of Jann Wenner and Rolling Stone Magazine*, Joe Hagen, 24 October 2017, Clays Ltd, St Ives plc, pages 60, 160, 369.

Three quotes, possibly from more than one interview, are included in the text. There are no details of dates or venues of the interview(s).

Page 60, on Ralph Gleason:-

**"I had heard that he** [Gleason] **had interviewed Hank Williams, which was impressive,"** said Dylan. **"So there was a bit of a mystery to him. He wore a trench coat and horn-rimmed glasses and was the type of reporter you'd see around the Broadway area in New York. He wrote about jazz and folk music in the mainstream newspaper, so he was responsible for introducing me to a wider crowd, and his approval meant a lot."**

Page 160, on *Self Portrait*:-

Dylan […] said no *Rolling Stone* critic **"would have any idea of my motives for releasing a record like that, so they really wouldn't have been able to make an honest interpretation of what they were hearing."**

Page 369, on *Slow Train Coming*:-

Bob Dylan said *Rolling Stone* reviews – including Wenner's defense – meant little to him. **"*Slow Train Coming* was one of my strongest records, one of the best-selling ones right from the start," he said. "So if it wasn't for the reviewers that wrote for *Rolling Stone*, it connected with an entirely different group of people. Maybe Jann did go on record saying it was one of my finest records, and although I appreciated him doing that, it was more like a good cop/bad cop type of thing. That's all it meant to me."**

# 2018, Unknown Interviewer (Mondo Scripto)

Source: Published in *Bob Dylan on Mondo Scripto*, in: *Mondo Scripto*, exhibition catalogue, Halcyon Gallery, 2018, pages 9-11.

The interview took place at an unknown location.

**Bob Dylan on *Mondo Scripto***

Q: When did you find the time to write out all those songs?

**A: Mostly after hours. Summer evenings, winter evenings. Usually one a week, sometimes three or four.**

Q: Was writing out the songs difficult?

**A: In the beginning it was, because I tended to race ahead of myself. I'd skip verses, that kind of thing.**

Q: Did it take some time to figure out how they'd be organised on paper?

**A: It did, because the songs vary in length.**

Q: Did writing the songs out cause you to reflect on the process of songwriting?

**A: Yeah in a way, but then again there is no one certain process that works for everything. Once you've recorded the song, you forget the steps it took to get there.**

Q: What makes a good song? What makes a bad song?

**A: A good song connects with people on a personal level. A bad song doesn't reach anybody.**

Q: Some of these songs are 50 years old. Did you remember all of them? Were there songs here that you didn't remember writing?

**A: 50 years old isn't that old. Maybe to someone who's in their twenties, but not to someone who is in their eighties. The song 'Barbara Allen' is three or four hundred years old and we are still singing it. But sure, there are a lot I don't recall writing. I mean I know I wrote them, but I can't say where or when.**

Q: Did you see any of these songs and think, 'Hey, I should start performing that one again live'?

**A: 'Song To Woody' – I haven't done that in ages. I think maybe that one. There may be one or two others as well.**

Q: Did you look at any of these songs and think, 'I should STOP performing that one?

**A: There are some songs with verses here and there that could be dropped or changed, but not entire songs.**

Q: Most of the illustrations seem to be very literal. Was this something you did consciously?

**A: Yeah, totally consciously. In Mary Jo Bang's translation of Dante's *Inferno*, there are corresponding drawings by Henrik Drescher and they are very realistic and literal, and I took that as a guide. There's others as well. The Reginald Marsh drawings for John Dos Passos' *USA Trilogy* were a big influence.**

Q: Do you think that an illustration can get in the way of someone's interperetation of a song?

**A: It probably could. But videos have already done that.**

Q: Do some songs lend themselves more easily to illustration than others?

**A: The ones that are more visual do.**

Q: Some of the illustrations are quite graphic, almost troubling – like the man with his tongue bleeding in 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall' and the man drowning in 'The Times They Are A-Changin' '. Why those songs for such graphic images?

**A: Those images come straight from the songs. They fit the songs. Did you ever see Otto Dix's drawings of the scenes from World War I? They're beyond graphic. Mine are tame compared to those.**

Q: Was it difficult to come up with concepts for illustration?

**A: At first it was a bit of a dilemma, but then I started experimenting with other people's songs. The Tom Petty song 'Love is a Long Road' – I drew a picture of a dirt road. For the Billy Joel song 'Moving**

**Out' I drew a picture of a moving van. The Prince song 'Darling Nikki' - I drew a picture of a young girl masturbating in a hotel lobby. I saw that, okay, it can be done, so then I did it with my songs.**

**A few were a bit of a puzzle. 'Tangled Up In Blue' – I remember when I wrote that there were a lot of albums with blue in the title Joni Mitchell's 'Blue', Coltrane's 'Blue Train', Miles Davis' 'Kind of Blue', 'Blue Hawaii', 'Blue Bayou', 'Blue Mood of Kentucky', 'Call Me Mr. Blue' – the colour blue seemed to be everywhere. I felt I was being swamped in it… or tangled up in it, to be more precise. A concept like that was hard to get a fix on. At the end of the day, I went mainly with the song titles, and maybe the first line.**

Q: Did you ever find the illustrations changed the meaning of the song for you?

**A: The meaning of the song is in the hearing of it. Songs can change their meaning depending on who is singing. When the Grateful Dead do 'Big River' it means something different than when Johnny sings it.**

Q: Did you ever consider doing paintings for each of the songs instead of the drawings?

**A: There wasn't time for that really. Not only that, it's just not practical. A song is really a form of storytelling that changes from minute to minute, and adapts itself to different circumstances. A painting is a fixed scene, where something is nailed down and made permanent. You can't leave holes in the centre. With songs you can do that. I wouldn't mix the two or try to force them together, because they have nothing in common.**

Q: Who are some artists whose drawings you admire?

**A: Rembrandt, especially his drawings of St. Alban's Cathedral. Albrecht Dürer's *Knight, Death and the Devil*, Rubens, Charles Le Brun. I like van Gogh's drawings as well.**

Q: Who are some lyricists whose lyrics you admire?

**A: A lot of them. Hank Williams, Johnny Mercer, Merle Haggard.**

Q: What makes a good drawing?

**A: The right lines in the right places.**

Q: What make a good lyric?

**A: The right words inside of the right melody.**

# Prior to 2019, Martin Scorsese & David Tedeschi

Source: DVD: *Rolling Thunder Revue - A Bob Dylan Story By Martin Scorsese*, The Criterion Collection, 1062, 2019.

The interview took place at an unknown location. Parts of the interview, like the film itself, are invented; for example, the character 'van Dorp' is a fictional creation, played in the film by the actor Martin von Haselberg.

**Dylan: Saigon had fallen. People had seemed to… lost their sense of conviction for… for just about anything. A lot of arguments about why… America was chased out of Vietnam… in such a humiliating way. Two people tried to shoot the president in one month.**

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**Dylan: The idea was to put a tour up, combination of different acts on the same stage for a variety of musical styles. I wouldn't say it was a traditional revue, but it was the traditional form of… of a revue. That's all clumsy bullshit.**

Interviewer: Ok.

**D: Y'know.**

I: So what…

**D: I'm trying to get to the…**

I: To the core thing.

**D: To the core of what this Rolling Thunder thing is all about, and I don't have a clue, because it's not… it's about nothing. It's a… it's just something that happened forty years ago… and that's the truth of it.**

I: Why don't we go down that road?

**D: Ok, we can. Let's go.**

I: Alright, let's go.

**D: I don't remember a thing about Rolling Thunder.**

I: Ok.

**D: I mean, it… it happened so long ago, I wasn't even born, you know? I… so, what do you wanna know?**

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**D: Life isn't about finding yourself… or finding anything. Life is about creating yourself, and creating things.**

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**D: My idea was to have a kind of a jug band for the whole show, something along the lines of, maybe, Kweskin Jug Band… but that didn't happen.**

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**D: One thing I could tell you about Ramblin' Jack** [Elliott]**, he's more of a sailor than a singer. He can tie a bowline, a clove hitch, and he could tie a rolling hitch, all blindfold. If you're ever on a boat or sailing ship, you would rather have Ramblin' Jack there as a sailor than a singer.**

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**D: We didn't have enough masks on that tour. We should have had masks for everybody. When somebody's wearing a mask, he's gonna tell you the truth. When he's not wearing a mask, it's highly unlikely.**

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**D:** [Stefan] **van Dorp, I hadn't even heard of him before, but he seemed like an, ok guy. I liked his film history. He did some film work at Madame Tussauds Wax Museum. His idea was to make this film appear to be like old newsreels we use to see at movie theaters growing up, which I thought was a splendid idea.**

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**D: I thought Sam** [Shepard] **would be perfect for van Dorp to collaborate with, because Sam's got that special knowledge of the underworld that van Dorp didn't seem to have a clue about. I think I asked himm once, "Sam, how do you write all those plays?" And he said,… "Man," he said, "It's like I commune with the dead." I said, "Yeah, yeah,… you'd have to, to write plays like that." And I asked him if he wanted to write for this movie that this guy van Dorp was making. And he went to meet with van Dorp, and then he came back and he said he didn't know where the guy was coming from, but if I wanted him to do it, he would. So, that's how Sam got involved.**

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**D: Scarlet Rivera was some piece of work. Most people kind of stay away from Scarlet, but not me. Her boyfriend at the time was the leader of KISS. And she took me over to Queens to see them play. They were playing in a small club. They had face paint on, and I thought that was kind of interesting. I kind of filed that away somewhere.**

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**D: Well, Ronnie Hawkins, now he looked like a shitkicker, but he spoke with the wisdom of a sage. He was like a… gladiator or something that wrestled and raced in… in some nondescript Roman arena. You expected Ronnie to… to wear a toga… instead of that ratty cowboy hat.**

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**D: She** [Scarlet Rivera] **was unusual. I went to her room once, and there was a box of stuff. Like, chains and mirrors… candelabras and… She had swords. She had a snake. Just… many things in… in a trunk. And that told me more about her than anything she had to say. She didn't say much. But she didn't have to.**

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**D: I'd been at the high holy gypsy holiday at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, South of France. It happens to be on my birthday, so it was like going home. Manitas de Plata was there, and he played all night along the camp fire. I mean, he was fantastic. And, I stayed up 'till dawn just listening to him play. Some time after that, couldn't have been more than a week, that song** [One More Cup Of Coffee] **came to me in a dream.**

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**D: No, Allen Ginsberg was anything but a father figure. He was definitely not a father figure.**

**One thing people don't know about Ginsberg is that he was an incredible dancer… who… he would just do these steps** [that] **were so unusual and exciting, you know, and he'd always have a good dance partner, too. Usually from the tour, somebody we'd pick up along the way. He danced a lot, Ginsberg.**

**Seeing Ginsberg was like going to see the Oracle of Delphi. He didn't care about material wealth or political power. He was his own kind of king. But… he wanted to play music. He had already achieved what any national poet could hope to achieve. "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness." Very few poets have done that. Robert Frost, maybe. "Promises to keep, miles to go before I sleep."** [Walt] **Whitman said, "I am large, I contain multitudes." We still remember those lines today. Today's poets don't reach into the public consciousness that way. So it was remarkable that Allen had actually broken through. Nowadays, lines that people remember are lines from songs, lyrics from songs… "Your cheating heart will make you weep." "Don't change your hair for me, not if you care for me." "I'm in the mood for love." "What a difference a day makes." "Ain't misbehavin'." Allen wanted his lines to be remembered like that, but he was a poet. He wasn't a song writer.**

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**D: Kerouac, he honoured life. I had to read everything again, that Kerouac wrote. Not that I did, but I thought about it differently. All of a sudden, *On The Road*, he was talking about the road of life.**

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**D: Van Dorp was an unusual guy. He's one of those kind of people who's trying to… just needs an enemy. And… he was trying to make enemies where there weren't any, and he… he was… he was successful at that. He… He angered a lot… lots of people, especially in catering. He would eat two or three meals that really… really were for somebody else. So, he ate more than he was supposed to, and I think… and I think he… I think he stuck his nose in places it might've should not have been. He was also a very paranoid person. Complained to people that his room was bugged… which, you know,** [Roger] **McGuinn was on that tour, and McGuinn who at that point was into very sophisticated electronics. So I'm not saying it wasn't bugged but… but I'm not saying that it was bugged, because I don't know that for a fact.**

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**D: Joan Baez and me could sing anything. We could sing together in our sleep. As a matter of fact, lot of times when I was sleeping, I'd hear her voice.**

**Joan was so courageous. Self-disciplined. When I first met her, it seemed like she'd come down to Earth from a meteorite. And she's never changed. She's always seemed like she's just come down from a meteorite.**

**Maybe there wasn't enough for he to do and she'd begin to go a little stir crazy. Started doing… boogaloo and hanging out with people maybe she shouldn't be hanging out with, and… Ugh. I don't know what happened.**

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**D: David Mansfield wanted to sing a song with me… Ugh. God. That… a drummer did. I didn't see what the point of it all was.**

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**D: I think I met her** [Sharon Stone] **with her mother. She was a nice girl. She was so young, anyway, you know. But she seemed old for her age. She used to tell me someday she's going to be a famous actress. Uh, ok.**

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**D: This tour was named after Chief Rolling Thunder. So, it made sense that we go to the Tuscarora Indian Reservation and… and play.**

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**D: I'd written songs about boxers before, so that was nothing new, but… I hadn't really thought about Hurricane because I didn't know about Hurricane… It… It never really crossed my path.**

**He'd always say, "Hey, what are you searching for today?" I'd say, "What?" He'd say, "I know you're a searcher. What are you searching for?" I'd say, "Well Hurricane, I'm searching for the Holy Grail." And he'd say. "What?" I said. "I'm gonna search until I find it, like Sir Galahad." That's what I'm looking for.**

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**D: No, it** [the tour] **wasn't a success. Not if you measure success in terms of profit. But it was a sense of adventure. So, in many ways, yes it was very successful.**

**What remains of the tour to this day? Nothing. Not one single thing. Ashes.**

# April 2020 and 26 May 2020, Douglas Brinkley

Source: published on-line on: *New York Times* website: **https://www.nytimes.com**, as: *Bob Dylan Has a Lot on His Mind*: 12 June 2020, with minor correction published on 18 June 2020. Published in print form as: *Still Painting His Masterpieces* in: *New York Times*, US newspaper, 14 June 2020, Section AR, pages 8-9.

Two separate interviews in Malibu, California (by telephone).

## Bob Dylan Has a Lot on His Mind

In a rare interview, the Nobel Prize winner discusses mortality, drawing inspiration from the past, and his new album, “Rough and Rowdy Ways.”

A few years ago, sitting beneath shade trees in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., I had a two-hour discussion with Bob Dylan that touched on Malcolm X, the French Revolution, Franklin Roosevelt and World War II. At one juncture, he asked me what I knew about the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864. When I answered, “Not enough,” he got up from his folding chair, climbed into his tour bus, and came back five minutes later with photocopies describing how U.S. troops had butchered hundreds of peaceful Cheyenne and Arapahoe in southeastern Colorado.

Given the nature of our relationship, I felt comfortable reaching out to him in April after, in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, he unexpectedly released his epic, 17-minute song “Murder Most Foul,” about the Kennedy assassination. Even though he hadn’t done a major interview outside of his own website since winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016, he agreed to a phone chat from his Malibu home, which turned out to be his only interview before next Friday’s release of “Rough and Rowdy Ways,” his first album of original songs since “Tempest” in 2012.

Like most conversations with Dylan, “Rough and Rowdy Ways” covers complex territory: trances and hymns, defiant blues, love longings, comic juxtapositions, prankster wordplay, patriotic ardor, maverick steadfastness, lyrical Cubism, twilight-age reflections and spiritual contentment.

In the high-octane showstopper “Goodbye Jimmy Reed,” Dylan honors the Mississippi bluesman with dragon-fierce harmonica riffs and bawdy lyrics. In the slow blues “Crossing the Rubicon,” he feels “the bones beneath my skin” and considers his options before death: “Three miles north of purgatory — one step from the great beyond/I prayed to the cross and I kissed the girls and I crossed the Rubicon.”

“Mother of Muses” is a hymn to the natural world, gospel choirs and military men like William Tecumseh Sherman and George Patton, “who cleared the path for Presley to sing/who cleared the path for Martin Luther King.” And “Key West (Philosopher’s Pirate),” is an ethereal meditation on immortality set on a drive down Route 1 to the Florida Keys, with Donnie Herron’s accordion channeling the Band’s Garth Hudson. In it he pays homage to, “Ginsberg, Corso and Kerouac.”

Perhaps someday he’ll write a song or paint a picture to honor George Floyd. In the 1960s and 1970s, following the work of black leaders of the civil rights movement, Dylan also worked to expose the arrogance of white privilege and the viciousness of racial hatred in America through songs like “George Jackson,” “Only a Pawn in Their Game,” and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll.” One of his most fierce lines about policing and race came in his 1976 ballad “Hurricane”: “In Paterson that’s just the way things go/If you’re black you might as well not show up on the street/Unless you want to draw the heat.”

I had a brief follow-up with Dylan, 79, one day after Floyd was killed in Minneapolis. Clearly shaken by the horror that had occurred in his home state, he sounded depressed. **“It sickened me no end to see George tortured to death like that,”** he said. **“It was beyond ugly. Let’s hope that justice comes swift for the Floyd family and for the nation.”**

These are edited excerpts from the two conversations.

Q: Was “Murder Most Foul” written as a nostalgic eulogy for a long-lost time?

**A: To me it’s not nostalgic. I don’t think of “Murder Most Foul” as a glorification of the past or some kind of send-off to a lost age. It speaks to me in the moment. It always did, especially when I was writing the lyrics out.**

Q: Somebody auctioned off a sheaf of unpublished transcripts in the 1990s that you wrote about J.F.K.’s murder. Were those prose notes for an essay or were you hoping to write a song like “Murder Most Foul” for a long time?

**A: I'm not aware of ever wanting to write a song about J.F.K. A lot of those auctioned-off documents have been forged. The forgeries are easy to spot because somebody always signs my name on the bottom.**

Q: Were you surprised that this 17-minute-long song was your first No. 1 Billboard hit?

**A: I was, yeah.**

Q: "I Contain Multitudes" has a powerful line: "I sleep with life and death in the same bed." I suppose we all feel that way when we hit a certain age. Do you think about mortality often?

**A: I think about the death of the human race. The long strange trip of the naked ape. Not to be light on it, but everybody's life is so transient. Every human being, no matter how strong or mighty, is frail when it comes to death. I think about it in general terms, not in a personal way.**

Q: There is a lot of apocalyptic sentiment in "Murder Most Foul." Are you worried that in 2020 we're past the point of no return? That technology and hyper-industrialization are going to work against human life on Earth?

**A: Sure, there's a lot of reasons to be apprehensive about that. There's definitely a lot more anxiety and nervousness around now than there used to be. But that only applies to people of a certain age like me and you, Doug. We have a tendency to live in the past, but that's only us. Youngsters don't have that tendency. They have no past, so all they know is what they see and hear, and they'll believe anything. In 20 or 30 years from now, they'll be at the forefront. When you see somebody that is 10 years old, he's going to be in control in 20 or 30 years, and he won't have a clue about the world we knew. Young people who are in their teens now have no memory lane to remember. So it's probably best to get into that mind-set as soon as we can, because that's going to be the reality.**

**As far as technology goes, it makes everybody vulnerable. But young people don't think like that. They could care less. Telecommunications and advanced technology is the world they were born into. Our world is already obsolete.**

Q: A line in "False Prophet" — "I'm the last of the best — you can bury the rest" — reminded me of the recent deaths of John Prine and Little Richard. Did you listen to their music after they passed as a kind of tribute?

**A: Both of those guys were triumphant in their work. They don't need anybody doing tributes. Everybody knows what they did and who they were. And they deserve all the respect and acclaim that they received. No doubt about it. But Little Richard I grew up with. And he was there before me. Lit a match under me. Tuned me into things I never would have known on my own. So I think of him differently. John came after me. So it's not the same thing. I acknowledge them differently.**

Q: Why didn't more people pay attention to Little Richard's gospel music?

**A: Probably because gospel music is the music of good news and in these days there just isn't any. Good news in today's world is like a fugitive, treated like a hoodlum and put on the run. Castigated. All we see is good-for-nothing news. And we have to thank the media industry for that. It stirs people up. Gossip and dirty laundry. Dark news that depresses and horrifies you.**

**On the other hand, gospel news is exemplary. It can give you courage. You can pace your life accordingly, or try to, anyway. And you can do it with honor and principles. There are theories of truth in gospel but to most people it's unimportant. Their lives are lived out too fast. Too many bad influences. Sex and politics and murder is the way to go if you want to get people's attention. It excites us, that's our problem.**

**Little Richard was a great gospel singer. But I think he was looked at as an outsider or an interloper in the gospel world. They didn't accept him there. And of course the rock 'n' roll world wanted to keep him singing "Good Golly, Miss Molly." So his gospel music wasn't accepted in either world. I think the same thing happened to Sister Rosetta Tharpe. I can't imagine either of them being bothered too much about it. Both are what we used to call people of high character. Genuine, plenty talented and who knew themselves, weren't swayed by anything from the outside. Little Richard, I know was like that.**

**But so was Robert Johnson, even more so. Robert was one of the most inventive geniuses of all time. But he probably had no audience to speak of. He was so far ahead of his time that we still haven't caught up with him. His status today couldn't be any higher. Yet in his day, his songs must have confused people. It just goes to show you that great people follow their own path.**

Q: On the album "Tempest" you perform "Roll on John" as a tribute to John Lennon. Is there another person you'd like to write a ballad for?

**A: Those kinds of songs for me just come out of the blue, out of thin air. I never plan to write any of them. But in saying that, there are certain public figures that are just in your subconscious for one reason or another. None of those songs with designated names are intentionally written. They just fall down from space. I'm just as bewildered as anybody else as to why I write them. The folk tradition has**

**a long history of songs about people, though. John Henry, Mr. Garfield, Roosevelt. I guess I'm just locked into that tradition.**

Q: You honor many great recording artists in your songs. Your mention of Don Henley and Glenn Frey on "Murder Most Foul" came off as a bit of a surprise to me. What Eagles songs do you enjoy the most?

**A: "New Kid in Town," "Life in the Fast Lane," "Pretty Maids All in a Row." That could be one of the best songs ever.**

Q: You also refer to Art Pepper, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, Oscar Peterson and Stan Getz in "Murder Most Foul." How has jazz inspired you as a songwriter and poet over your long career? Are there jazz artists you've been listening to lately?

**A: Maybe Miles's early stuff on Capitol Records. But what's jazz? Dixieland, bebop, high-speed fusion? What do you call jazz? Is it Sonny Rollins? I like Sonny's calypso stuff but is that jazz? Jo Stafford, Joni James, Kay Starr — I think they were all jazz singers. King Pleasure, that's my idea of a jazz singer. I don't know, you can put anything into that category. Jazz goes back to the Roaring Twenties. Paul Whiteman was called the king of jazz. I'm sure if you asked Lester Young he wouldn't know what you're talking about.**

**Has any of it ever inspired me? Well yeah. Probably a lot. Ella Fitzgerald as a singer inspires me. Oscar Peterson as a piano player, absolutely. Has any of it inspired me as a songwriter? Yeah, "Ruby, My Dear" by Monk. That song set me off in some direction to do something along those lines. I remember listening to that over and over.**

Q: What role does improvisation play in your music?

**A: None at all. There's no way you can change the nature of a song once you've invented it. You can set different guitar or piano patterns upon the structural lines and go from there, but that's not improvisation. Improvisation leaves you open to good or bad performances and the idea is to stay consistent. You basically play the same thing time after time in the most perfect way you can.**

Q: "I Contain Multitudes" is surprisingly autobiographical in parts. The last two verses exude a take-no-prisoners stoicism while the rest of the song is a humorous confessional. Did you have fun grappling with contradictory impulses of yourself and human nature in general?

**A: I didn't really have to grapple much. It's the kind of thing where you pile up stream-of-consciousness verses and then leave it alone and come pull things out. In that particular song, the last few verses came first. So that's where the song was going all along. Obviously, the catalyst for the song is the title line. It's one of those where you write it on instinct. Kind of in a trance state. Most of my recent songs are like that. The lyrics are the real thing, tangible, they're not metaphors. The songs seem to know themselves and they know that I can sing them, vocally and rhythmically. They kind of write themselves and count on me to sing them.**

Q: Once again in this song you name a lot of people. What made you decide to mention Anne Frank next to Indiana Jones?

**A: Her story means a lot. It's profound. And hard to articulate or paraphrase, especially in modern culture. Everybody's got such a short attention span. But you're taking Anne's name out of context, she's part of a trilogy. You could just as well ask, "What made you decide to include Indiana Jones or the Rolling Stones?" The names themselves are not solitary. It's the combination of them that adds up to something more than their singular parts. To go too much into detail is irrelevant. The song is like a painting, you can't see it all at once if you're standing too close. The individual pieces are just part of a whole.**

**"I Contain Multitudes" is more like trance writing. Well, it's not more like trance writing, it is trance writing. It's the way I actually feel about things. It is my identity and I'm not going to question it, I am in no position to. Every line has a particular purpose. Somewhere in the universe those three names must have paid a price for what they represent and they're locked together. And I can hardly explain that. Why or where or how, but those are the facts.**

Q: But Indiana Jones was a fictional character?

**A: Yeah, but the John Williams score brought him to life. Without that music it wouldn't have been much of a movie. It's the music which makes Indy come alive. So that maybe is one of the reasons he is in the song. I don't know, all three names came at once.**

Q: A reference to the Rolling Stones makes it into "I Contain Multitudes." Just as a lark, which Stones songs do you wish you could've written?

**A: Oh, I don't know, maybe "Angie," "Ventilator Blues" and what else, let me see. Oh yeah, "Wild Horses."**

Q: Charlie Sexton began playing with you for a few years in 1999, and returned to the fold in 2009. What makes him such a special player? It's as if you can read each other's minds.

**A: As far as Charlie goes, he can read anybody's mind. Charlie, though, creates songs and sings them as well, and he can play guitar to beat the band. There aren't any of my songs that Charlie doesn't feel part of and he's always played great with me. "False Prophet" is only one of three 12-bar structural things on this record. Charlie is good on all the songs. He's not a show-off guitar player, although he can do that if he wants. He's very restrained in his playing but can be explosive when he wants to be. It's a classic style of playing. Very old school. He inhabits a song rather than attacking it. He's always done that with me.**

Q: How have you spent the last couple of months home-sheltered in Malibu? Have you been able to weld or paint?

**A: Yeah, a little bit.**

Q: Are you able to be musically creative while at home? Do you play piano and tool around in your private studio?

**A: I do that mostly in hotel rooms. A hotel room is the closest I get to a private studio.**

Q: Does having the Pacific Ocean in your backyard help you process the Covid-19 pandemic in a spiritual way? There is a theory called "blue mind" which believes that living near water is a health curative.

**A: Yeah, I can believe that. "Cool Water," "Many Rivers to Cross," "How Deep Is the Ocean." I hear any of those songs and it's like some kind of cure. I don't know what for, but a cure for something that I don't even know I have. A fix of some kind. It's like a spiritual thing. Water is a spiritual thing. I never heard of "blue mind" before. Sounds like it could be some kind of slow blues song. Something Van Morrison would write. Maybe he has, I don't know.**

Q: It's too bad that just when the play "Girl From the North Country," which features your music, was getting rave reviews, production had to shutter because of Covid-19. Have you seen the play or watched the video of it?

**A: Sure, I've seen it and it affected me. I saw it as an anonymous spectator, not as someone who had anything to do with it. I just let it happen. The play had me crying at the end. I can't even say why. When the curtain came down, I was stunned. I really was. Too bad Broadway shut down because I wanted to see it again.**

Q: Do you think of this pandemic in almost biblical terms? A plague that has swept the land?

**A: I think it's a forerunner of something else to come. It's an invasion for sure, and it's widespread, but biblical? You mean like some kind of warning sign for people to repent of their wrongdoings? That would imply that the world is in line for some sort of divine punishment. Extreme arrogance can have some disastrous penalties. Maybe we are on the eve of destruction. There are numerous ways you can think about this virus. I think you just have to let it run its course.**

Q: Out of all your compositions, "When I Paint My Masterpiece" has grown on me over the years. What made you bring it back to the forefront of recent concerts?

**A: It's grown on me as well. I think this song has something to do with the classical world, something that's out of reach. Someplace you'd like to be beyond your experience. Something that is so supreme and first rate that you could never come back down from the mountain. That you've achieved the unthinkable. That's what the song tries to say, and you'd have to put it in that context. In saying that though, even if you do paint your masterpiece, what will you do then? Well, obviously you have to paint another masterpiece. So it could become some kind of never ending cycle, a trap of some kind. The song doesn't say that though.**

Q: A few years ago I saw you play a bluegrass-sounding version of "Summer Days." Have you ever thought about recording a bluegrass album?

**A: I've never thought about that. Bluegrass music is mysterious and deep rooted and you almost have to be born playing it. Just because you are a great singer, or a great this or that doesn't mean you can be in a bluegrass band. It's almost like classical music. It's harmonic and meditative, but it's out for blood. If you ever heard the Osborne Brothers, then you know what I mean. It's an unforgiving music and you can only it stretch so far. Beatles songs played in a bluegrass style don't make any sense. It's the wrong repertoire, and that's been done. There are elements of bluegrass music for sure in what I play, especially the intensity and similar themes. But I don't have the high tenor voice and we don't have three-part harmony or consistent banjo. I listen to Bill Monroe a lot, but I more or less stick to what I can do best.**

Q: How is your health holding up? You seem to be fit as a fiddle. How do you keep mind and body working together in unison?

**A: Oh, that's the big question, isn't it? How does anybody do it? Your mind and body go hand in hand. There has to be some kind of agreement. I like to think of the mind as spirit and the body as substance. How you integrate those two things, I have no idea. I just try to go on a straight line and stay on it, stay on the level.**

# Before September 2020, Bill Flanagan

Source: *Jimmy Carter: Rock & Roll President*, documentary film released in the USA, 9 September 2020, subsequently released on DVD: Greenwich Entertainment, K25111, 3 November 2020. Partial transcript taken from *The Bridge*, UK fanzine, Number 69, Spring 2021 (published April 2021), page 96. The remainder (highlighted in red text) was transcribed by Alan Hoaksey, October 2024.

The interview took place at an unknown location. Dylan's responses only.

**When I first met Jimmy, the first thing he did was quote my songs back to me.**

**It was the first time that I realized that my songs had reached into the establishment world. And I had no experience in that realm; I had never seen that side, so it made me a little uneasy. He put my mind at ease by not talking down to me and showing me that he had a sincere appreciation for the songs I had written.**

* * *

**He was a kindred spirit to me of a rare kind. The kind of man you don't meet every day and you're lucky if you ever do.**

* * *

**He resolved the** [Iran hostage] **crisis in a peaceful way with humility. Took a lot of courage to do that.**

* * *

**Oh, it's impossible to define Jimmy** [Carter]. **Think of him as a simple kind of man like in the line in the Lynyrd Skynyrd song:**

**It takes its time, doesn't live too fast,**
**Troubles come but they will pass,**
**Find a woman and find love,**
**And don't forget there's always someone above.**

[Simple Man – Lynyrd Skynyrd]

**There's many sides to him. He's a nuclear engineer, woodworking carpenter. He's also a poet. He's a dirt farmer. If you told me he was a race car driver, I wouldn't even be surprised.**

# November to December 2022, Jeff Slate

Source: *Bob Dylan Q&A about "The Philosophy of Modern Song"*, on the website: www.bobdylan.com, 20 December 2022.

The interview took place at an unknown location.

Q: While the book covers a lot of ground, many of the songs were written and released in the 1950s. Was that a significant time in shaping the modern popular song? And did the post war technology boom – the evolution of the recording process, the ubiquity of the radio and television, electric instrumentation – play a part in that, do you think?

**A: I think they all played a part, and they still do play a part. But yes, the book does cover a lot of ground, and the 50s was a significant time in music history. Without postwar technology these songs may have dissipated and been overlooked. The recording process brought the right people to the top, the most innovative, the ones with the greatest talent.**

Q: How did you first hear most of those songs? And do you think the way you first heard them – I'm assuming on the radio, as well as television and in films – play a part in your relationship to them?

**A: I first heard them on the radio, portable record players, jukeboxes. We didn't have a TV, and I never heard them in films, but I was hearing them in my head. They were straightforward, and my relationship to them at first was external, then became personal and intense. The songs were simple, easy to understand, and they'd come to you in a direct way, let you see into the future.**

Q: How do you listen to music these days? On vinyl, CD, streaming? And is there a way you prefer to hear music?

**A: I listen to CD's, satellite radio and streaming. I do love the sound of old vinyl though, especially on a tube record player from back in the day. I bought three of those in an antique store in Oregon about 30 years ago. They're just little, but the tone quality is so powerful and miraculous, has so much depth, it always takes me back to the days when life was different and unpredictable. You had no idea what was coming down the road, and it didn't matter. The laws of time didn't apply to you.**

Q: How do you discover new music these days?

**A: Mostly by accident, by chance. If I go looking for something I usually don't find it. In fact, I never find it. I walk into things intuitively when I'm most likely not looking for anything. Tiny Hill, Teddy Edwards, people like that. Obscure artists, obscure songs. There's a song by Jimmy Webb that Frank Sinatra recorded called, "Whatever Happened to Christmas," I think he recorded it in the 60s, but I just discovered it. Ella Fitzgerald's "A-Tiskit, A-Tasket." Janis Martin, the female Elvis. Have you heard her? Joe Turner is always surprising me with little nuances and things. I listen to Brenda Lee a lot. No matter how many times I hear her, it's like I just discovered her. She's such an old soul. Lately, I discovered a fantastic guitar player, Teddy Bunn. I heard him on a Meade Lux Lewis – Sid Catlett record.**

**Performers and songwriters recommend things to me. Others I just wake up and they're there. Some I've seen live. The Oasis Brothers, I like them both, Julian Casablancas, the Klaxons, Grace Potter. I've seen Metallica twice. I've made special efforts to see Jack White and Alex Turner. Zac Deputy, I've discovered him lately. He's a one man show like Ed Sheeran, but he sits down when he plays. I'm a fan of Royal Blood, Celeste, Rag and Bone Man, Wu-Tang, Eminem, Nick Cave, Leonard Cohen, anybody with a feeling for words and language, anybody whose vision parallels mine.**

**Waterloo Sunset is on my playlist and that was recorded in the 60s. "Stealer," The Free song, that's been there a while too, along with Leadbelly and the Carter Family. There's a Duff McKagan song called "Chip Away," that has profound meaning for me. It's a graphic song. Chip away, chip away, like Michelangelo, breaking up solid marble stone to discover the form of King David inside. He didn't build him from the ground up, he chipped away the stone until he discovered the king. It's like my own songwriting, I overwrite something, then I chip away lines and phrases until I get to the real thing. Shooter Jennings produced that record. It's a great song. Dvorak, "Moravian Duets." I just discovered that, but it's over 100 years old.**

Q: Music is made very differently now, and your grandchildren are hearing songs for the first time in whole new ways, like via Spotify. Does the way you first hear a song matter? Do you think that has changed the relationship of the listener to the song?

**A: The relationship you have to a song can change over time. You can outgrow it, or it could come back to haunt you, come back stronger in a different way. A song could be like a nephew or a sister, or a mother-in-law. There actually is a song called "Mother-in-Law."**

**When you first hear a song, it might be related to what time of day you hear it. Maybe at daybreak – at dawn with the sun in your face – it would probably stay with you longer than if you heard it at dusk. Or maybe, if you first hear it at sunset, it would probably mean something different, than if you heard it first at 2 in the afternoon. Or maybe you hear something in the dead of night, in the darkness, with night eyes. Maybe it'll be "Eleanor Rigby," and it puts you in touch with your ancient ancestors. You're liable to remember that for a while. "Star Gazer," the Ronnie James Dio song would probably mean a lot more to you if you first heard it at midnight under a full moon beneath an expanding universe, than if you first heard it in the middle of a dreary day with rain pouring down.**

**One of my granddaughters, some years back, who was about 8 at the time, asked me if I'd ever met the Andrew Sisters, and if I'd ever heard the song "Rum and Coca Cola." Where she heard it, I have no idea. When I said I'd never met them, she wanted to know why. I said because I just didn't, they weren't here. She asked, "Where did they go?" I didn't know what to say, so I said Cincinnati. She asked me if I would take her there to meet them. Another time, one of the others asked me if I wrote the song "Oh, Susanna." I don't know how she heard the song, or when, or what her relationship to it is, but she knows it and can sing it. She probably heard it on Spotify.**

Q: And since everything is at our fingertips, has streaming democratized music? Are we back to the days when "Strangers in The Night" can top "Paperback Writer" and "Paint It Black" on the pop charts?

**A: We could very well be. There's a sameness to everything nowadays. We seem to be in a vacuum. Everything's become too smooth and painless. We jumped into the mainstream, the big river, with all the industrial waste, chemical debris, rocks, and mudflow, along with Brian Wilson and his brothers, Soupy Sales, and Tennessee Ernie Ford. The earth could vomit up its dead, and it could be raining blood, and we'd shrug it off, cool as cucumbers. Everything's too easy. Just one stroke of the ring finger, middle finger, one little click, that's all it takes, and we're there. We've dropped the coin right into the slot. We're pill poppers, cube heads and day trippers, hanging in, hanging out, gobbling blue devils, black mollies, anything we can get our hands on. Not to mention the nose candy and ganga grass. It's all too easy, too democratic. You need a solar X-ray detector just to find somebody's heart, see if they still have one.**

**What's the gold standard for a song these days? What song will walk off with the trophy? "Paint it Black" is black as black can be, black as a crow's head, a galvanizing song. "Paperback Writer" sounds good, too. The biographer, the ghost writer, doing it long hand. I can visualize that song; see it in my mind's eye. "Strangers in the Night," that, too. A couple of people who don't know each other on the dark side of things. I don't know which one I'd vote for. I have sympathies for them all.**

Q: There are already dozens of playlists on Spotify of the songs listed in your book, made by fans. Virtually the entire history of recorded music is available to anyone with the few touches of their finger. Try to imagine if you'd had that available to you in the 50s. How does a young creative person navigate that?

**A: You'd just have to cruise through it the best you can, try to unravel it, feel your way in until you get somewhere. There's a lot of outstanding music in the past. Works of genius, and much, if not all of it, has been documented. It would take more than a few lifetimes to hear it all. Musically, it would be too much to comprehend. You'd have to limit yourself and create a framework.**

Q: Do you think there is anything about the technology used today to record music that would have changed the impact or value you place on the songs you've included in the book, and especially the performances, or is a great song a great song?

**A: I think a great song has the sentiments of the people in mind. When you hear it, you get a gut reaction, and an emotional one at the same time. A great song follows the logic of the heart and stays in your head long after you've heard it, like "Taxman," it can be played with a full orchestra score or by a strolling minstrel, and you don't have to be a great singer to sing it. It's bell, book, and candle. Otherworldly. It transports you and you feel like you're levitating. It's close to an out of body experience.**

**A great song mutates, makes quantum leaps, turns up again like the prodigal son. It crosses genres. Could be punk rock, ragtime, folk-rock, or zydeco, and can be played in a lot of different styles, multiple styles. Bobby Bland could do it, Gene and Eunice, so could Rod Stewart, even Gene Autrey. Coltrane could do it wordless.**

**A great song is the sum of all things. It could be the turning point in your life. Louis Armstrong does it like a scat singer, Jimmie Rodgers can yodel it. It's timeless and ageless. It's a field holler, it's blood and thunder, it's on easy street and in the land of milk and honey. It's everywhere. It can be sung by a lead singer or a backup vocalist; it's non-discriminating. A great song touches you in secret places,**

**strikes your innermost being, and sinks in. Hoagy Carmichael wrote great songs, so did Irving Berlin and Johnny Mercer. Some people you wish had written songs: J.Frank Dobie, Teddy Roosevelt, Arthur Conan Doyle, people like that. They probably could have written great songs but didn't.**

Q: You write in the book that "everything is too full now; we are spoon-fed everything." Do you think that technology aids or hinders everyday life, and especially creativity?

**A: I think it does both. It can hamper creativity, or it can lend a helping hand and be an assistant. Creative power can be dammed up or forestalled by everyday life, ordinary life, life in the squirrel cage. A data processing machine or a software program might help you break out of that, get you over the hump, but you have to get up early.**

**Technology is like sorcery, it's a magic show, conjures up spirits, it's an extension of our body, like the wheel is an extension of our foot. But it might be the final nail driven into the coffin of civilization; we just don't know.**

**Creative ability is about pulling old elements together and making something new, and I don't believe silicon chips and passwords know anything about those elements, or where they are. You have to have a vivid imagination.**

**Let's not forget, science and technology built the Parthenon, the Egyptian pyramids, the Roman coliseum, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Eiffel Tower, rockets, jets, planes, automobiles, atom bombs, weapons of mass destruction. Tesla, the great inventor, said that he could take down the Brooklyn Bridge with a small vibrator. Today, we can probably do the same thing with a pocket computer. Log in, log out, load and download; we're all wired up.**

**Technology can nurture us, or it can shut us out. Creation is a funny thing. When we're creating or inventing something, we're more vulnerable than we'll ever will be, eating and sleeping mean nothing. We're in "Splendid Isolation," like in the (Warren) Zevon song; the world of self, like Georgia O'Keefe alone in the desert. To be creative you've got to be unsociable and tight-assed. Not necessarily violent and ugly, just unfriendly and distracted. You're self-sufficient and you stay focused.**

**Keypads and joysticks can be like millstones around your neck, or they can be supporting players; either one, you're the judge. Creativity is a mysterious thing. It visits who it wants to visit, when it wants to, and I think that that, and that alone, gets to the heart of the matter.**

Q: You write about how so few songs of the video age went on to become standards. Do you think music videos – which are still prevalent – ultimately hurt songwriting and songwriters?

**A: Who is going to write standards today? A rap artist? A hip hop or rock star? A raver, a sampling expert, a pop singer? That's music for the establishment. It's easy listening. It just parodies real life, goes through the motions puts on an act. It's a computer model.**

**A standard is something else. It's on another level. It's a song to look up to, a role model for other songs, maybe one in a thousand.**

**As far as videos go, they can hurt an artist if there's no justification for them. For some artists, videos are necessary, they can recreate an emotional state of a song. Death songs would make great videos, like "Tell Laura I love Her." Car songs too, like the one about the sky-blue Jaguar and the Thunderbird. There's a Creedence song, "It Came Out of the Sky," that would make a great science fiction movie. If you think about it, films have become the new pop music videos. Hans Zimmer, John Williams, they're a new kind of superstar.**

Q: It doesn't seem to me that many of the songs included in the book were written "for hire." Do you think that them coming from a place of inspiration, rather than on deadline, helps elevate them?

**A: Having a deadline can be terrifying. You got to pay back a loan by 12 o'clock on Thursday, have a song ready to record by 9 in the morning. Things can get completely out of hand if you don't think it out ahead. Sometimes, you have to play for time, be cool, and believe you can do anything, then do it on your own terms.**

Q: Still, many of the writers here did work in a goal-oriented manner, or scheduled time to write / create. Do you think that's conducive to great songwriting?

**A: Most of the time you do it when the mood strikes you, although some writers might have a set routine. I heard Tom Paxton has one. I've wondered sometimes about going to visit Don McLean, see how he does it. My own method is transportable. I can write songs anywhere at any time, although some of them are completed and redefined at recording sessions, some even at live shows.**

Q: What inspired this book? Do you read books about songwriting and/or music history (and what are some standouts, in your mind)? Also, how did you choose the songs and how did you narrow your choices? Did you learn anything about the songs / artists – or even the art of songwriting – while writing the book?

**A: I've read Honkers and Shouters, Nick Tosches' Dino, Guralnick's Elvis books, some others. But The Philosophy of Modern Song is more of a state of mind than any of those.**

Q: Some of the artists here had pretty colorful – and sometimes checkered – histories. What do you think about the current debate separating the art from the artist? Do you think a "weakness of character" can hold a songwriter back?

**A: People of weak character are usually con artists and troublemakers; they aren't sincere, and I don't think they would make good songwriters. They're selfish, always got to have the last word on everything, and I don't know any songwriter like that. I'm unaware of the current debate about separating the art from the artist. It's news to me. Maybe it's an academic thing.**

Q: Is there a technology that helps you relax? For instance, do you binge on movies via Netflix, because you mention streaming films in the chapter about "My Generation"; or do you use a meditation app or workout app, especially while you're on the road?

**A: My problem is that I'm too relaxed, too laidback. Most of the time I feel like a flat tire; totally unmotivated, positively lifeless. I can fall asleep at any time during the day. It takes a lot to get me stimulated, and I'm an excessively sensitive person, which complicates things. I can be totally at ease one minute, and then, for no reason whatsoever, I get restless and fidgety; doesn't seem to be any middle ground.**

**Two or three hours in front of the tube is a lot of binge watching for me. Too much time to be involved with the screen. Or maybe I'm too old for it.**

**I've binge watched Coronation Street, Father Brown, and some early Twilight Zones. I know they're old-fashioned shows, but they make me feel at home. I'm not a fan of packaged programs, or news shows, so I don't watch them. I never watch anything foul smelling or evil. Nothing disgusting; nothing dog ass. I'm a religious person. I read the scriptures a lot, meditate and pray, light candles in church. I believe in damnation and salvation, as well as predestination. The Five Books of Moses, Pauline Epistles, Invocation of the Saints, all of it.**

**As far as being physically active, boxing and sparing are what I've been doing for a while. It's part of my life. It's functional and detached from trends. It's a limitless playground, and you don't need an App.**

Q: You mention how important Ricky Nelson being on TV every week was important to his career and to rock and roll. That has been replaced by a whole new set of technologies. But, as you write, it "turns out, the best way to shut people up isn't to take away their forum – it's to give them all their own separate pulpits." Do you use social media, and what do you think of Twitter and Facebook and Instagram and TikTok, which you also mention a few times?

**A: I'm only name dropping those names. I've everything to learn when it comes to that. I only know the basic elements.**

**I think these sites bring happiness to a lot of people. Some people even discover love there. I think it's a wonderful thing. These sites can bring pleasure and infinite joy to millions. It's like opening a window that's been shut forever, and letting the light in. It's fantastic if you're a sociable person; the communication lines are wide open. A lot of incredible things you can do on these forums. You can refashion anything, blot out memories and change history. It's boundless. But they can divide and separate us, as well. Turn people against each other.**

Q: What was your lockdown like? You made a highly acclaimed album and released a streaming special that was quite elegant and elaborate, plus, you wrote this book, but I have to imagine a lot of it was spent at home trying to find outlets for your creativity. Did technology play a role in that?

**A: It was a very surrealistic time, like being visited by another planet or by some mythical monster. But it was beneficial in a lot of ways, too. It eliminated a lot of hassles and personal needs; it was good having no clock. A good time to put some things to an end. I changed the door panels on an old 56 Chevy, and replaced some old floor tiles, made some landscape paintings, wrote a song called "You Don't Say." I listened to Peggy Lee records. Things like that. I reread "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" a few times over. What a story that is. What a poem. If there'd been any opium laying around, I probably would have been down for a while.**

**I listened to The Mothers of Invention record Freak Out!, that I hadn't heard in a long, long time. What an eloquent record. "Hungry Freaks, Daddy," and the other one, "Who Are the Brain Police," perfect songs for the pandemic. No doubt about it, Zappa was light years ahead of his time. I've always thought that.**

Q: The book makes it clear that you're a true fan of most of the artists included. But are you able to listen to music passively, or do you think maybe you are always assessing what's special – or not – about a song and looking for potential inspiration?

**A: That's exactly what I do. I listen for fragments, riffs, chords, even lyrics. Anything that sounds promising.**

Q: You write about how lyrics are not necessarily poetry; that they are "meant for the ear and not for the eye." But how important is the first line of a song?

**A: Very important. It might not sound like something you know, but if you trust it, it will get you closer to what you do know.**

Q: Ringo Starr told me that he believes being a good musician – and songwriter – makes you good at other things – in his case cooking – because you're in tune with your senses. What are your thoughts on that idea?

**A: I love Ringo. He's not a bad singer, and he's a great musician. If I'd had him as a drummer, I would've been the Beatles, too. Maybe. Didn't know he was a cook, though. That's encouraging.**

Q: You write that, "the thing about being on the road is that you're not bogged down by anything. Not even bad news. You give pleasure to other people, and you keep your grief to yourself." Is that why you keep doing it?

**A: No, it's not the reason you do it. The reason you do it is because it's a perfect way to stay anonymous, and still be a member of the social order. You're the master of your fate. You manipulate reality and move through time and space with the proper attitude. It's not an easy path to take, not fun and games, it's no Disney World. It's an open space, with concrete pillars and an iron floor, with obligations and sacrifices. It's a path, and destiny put some of us on that path, in that position. It's not for everybody.**

Q: What style of music do you think of as your first love?

**A: Sacred music, church music, ensemble singing.**

Q: What's your favorite genre of music these days?

**A: It's a combination of genres; an abundance of them. Slow ballads, fast ballads, anything that moves. Western Swing, Hillbilly, Jump Blues, Country Blues, everything. Doo-wop, the Ink Spots, the Mills Brothers, Lowland ballads, Bill Monroe, Bluegrass, Boogie-Woogie. Music historians would say when you mix it all up it's called Rock and Roll. I guess that would be my favorite genre.**

Q: Would you like to discuss the significance of any of the artwork used in the book?

**A: They're running mates to the text, involved in the same way, share the same outcome. They portray ideas and associations that you might not notice otherwise, visual interaction.**

Q: Why is the "crew from Dunkin' Donuts" thanked?

**A: Because they were compassionate, supportive and they went the extra mile.**