



BOB DYLAN

★ Enigmatic, prolific, contrary – but never dull – Robert Allen Zimmerman has spent 50 years shaping and shaking music. From a life-altering motorcycle crash to his most confusing moves, Q celebrates an unpredictable genius. ★

“YOU CAN’T IMAGINE THE HISTORY OF ROCK WITHOUT HIM. HE INVENTED HALF OF IT.”

★ Dorian Lynskey introduces our Bob Dylan special... ★


Bob Dylan is both an inspiration and a problem. For the songwriters and music fans that have grown up in the half-century since he emerged, he is so vast and impressive that it sometimes feels like staring into the sun: you’re too dazzled to see straight. Like anyone who is constantly acclaimed as a genius and living legend beyond parallel, he can be an oppressive presence. You start to think that maybe he’s not so great after all and then you play those records and concede that yes, dammit, he probably is. Either way, you can’t imagine the history of rock without him. He invented half of it.

Dylan was lucky enough to be born at exactly the right time, hitting his stride just as the role of the modern singer-songwriter was there to be invented and a whole generation’s questing discontent was coming to the boil, and his evolution is one of rock’s great, mythic narratives: the man who arrives in the New York folk scene in 1961 out of nowhere (well, Minnesota) and becomes the protest-singing hero everyone’s been waiting for through uncanny amounts of talent, charisma and ruthless calculation. The man who is crowned “the voice of a generation” for making rock’n’roll an intellectual rebellion as well as a physical and emotional one, only to run like hell from politics, expectation and his heartbroken former supporters and find his true voice making densely poetic, bottomlessly enigmatic folk-rock. The man who plugs on for decades, through peaks and troughs, refusing ever to apologise or explain, and hits a fresh seam of creativity in middle age. Every musician who worries that he or she might be boxed in by early success can look at Dylan and know that if you make unpredictability your defining quality and hold your nerve, then you can do anything. Like the song says, don’t look back.

It was the words, of course, that made him so different. Nobody else was thinking of the pop lyric in such a fluid, ambitious way when he took

off, but plenty began to once they’d heard Dylan. His best lyrics are pleasurable the first time you hear them and still mysterious the 100th time around. Countless pages, from fan websites to academic tracts, have been devoted to “explaining” them but they’re all only theories and yours is as valid as that of the most dedicated scholar. His taunt in *Ballad Of A Thin Man*, “Something is happening here/ But you don’t know what it is/Do you, Mr Jones?” could apply to every listener. You suspect that some of his classic lines, written in furious bursts of creativity, don’t mean anything in particular but burst out of a love of language, imagery and codes that can’t be cracked.

But the idea of Dylan as Sphinx-like poet-prophet is only part of the story. He’s a writer of great pop melodies, and one of the most widely covered artists of the ’60s. He’s a fanboy and historian, in both his music and his eccentric radio shows, combing the undergrowth of folk, blues and pre-’60s pop to illustrate that originality is overrated, history is deep and wide, and even the greats are in debt to someone. He’s funny: sometimes goofy, sometimes waspish, always treating his alleged importance as some amusing phenomenon that he has no control over. And he’s more emotional than he lets on, concerned with love and hate and life and death – the big stuff, basically – in songs as clear and true as *New Morning* or *Most Of The Time*, songs that don’t need to duck behind riddles. His voice, especially in old age, is not a thing of beauty but it bites deep.

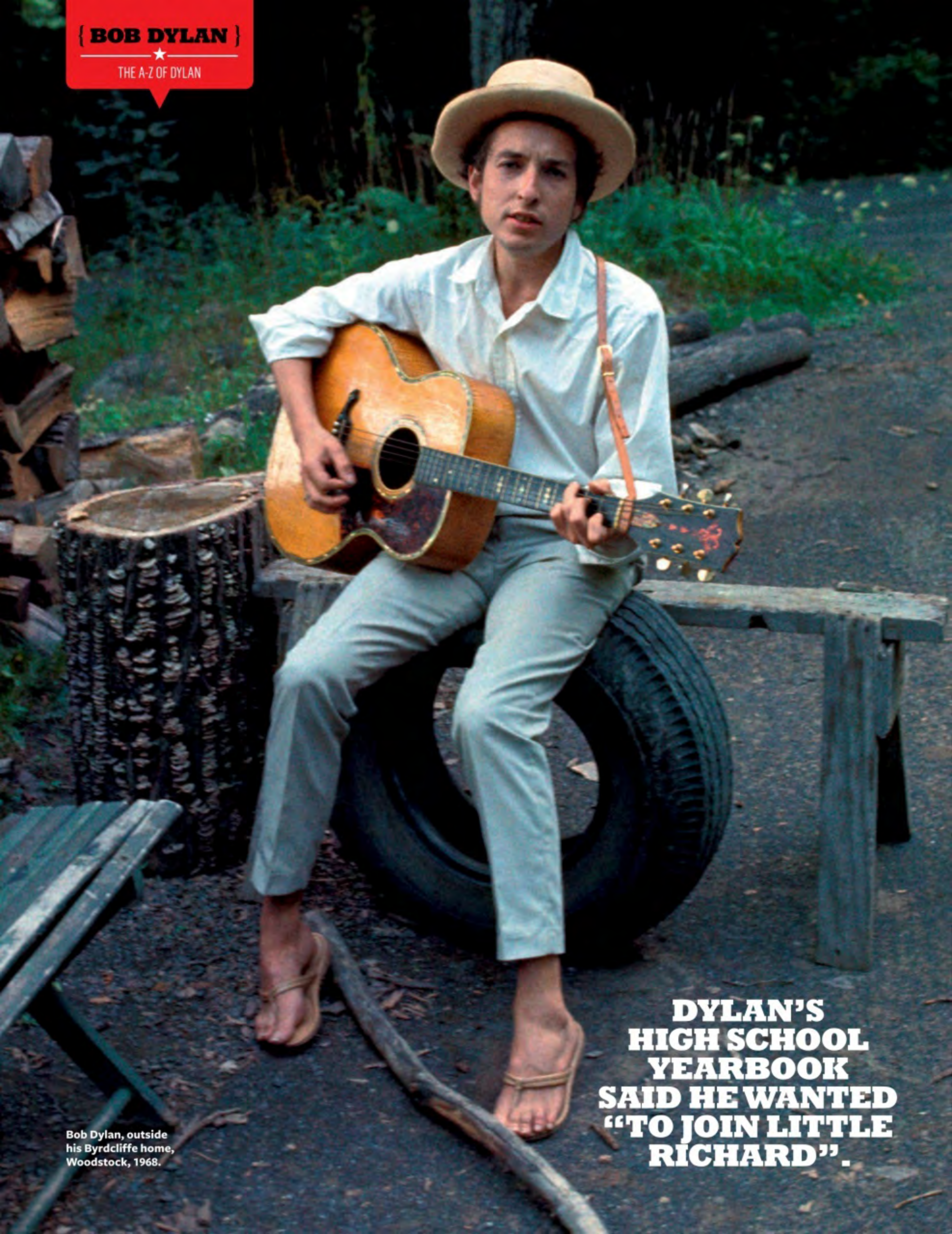
It can get boring hearing how unimpeachably great Dylan is, especially from true believers who disparage pop’s simpler, more visceral pleasures, but Dylan himself is not boring. Sometimes smug, vindictive, erratic and disappointing, but not boring. He’s not a monolithic figure to be worshipped but a complicated man whose work can be investigated and challenged by every new listener. Never mind the legend or following the canonically prescribed path. The fun part is that you get to discover your own version of Bob Dylan. There are so many to choose from. 

Bob Dylan, Newport Folk Festival, 1963: "so vast and impressive that it feels like staring into the sun."



{ **BOB DYLAN** }

★
THE A-Z OF DYLAN



**DYLAN'S
HIGH SCHOOL
YEARBOOK
SAID HE WANTED
"TO JOIN LITTLE
RICHARD".**

Bob Dylan, outside
his Byrdcliffe home,
Woodstock, 1968.

THE

TAZ

TO

OF BOB DYLAN

★ His essential historical outposts, chronicled by Andrew Perry. ★

AJ WEBERMAN

A journalist for the underground press, AJ Weberman turned obsessive Dylanologist and his search for “a Rosetta stone to understand Dylan” extended to rummaging through Bob’s dustbins. Prior to this, he had interviewed Dylan and even hung out with him socially. Once his studies progressed into “garbology” (his term), he rang Dylan and had the ensuing argument pressed up as a bootleg LP – Dylan understandably accused him of

“sneaky shit”. In 1972, he actually caught Weberman outside his apartment in New York’s East Village and gave him a proper thumping.

BAND, THE

The rootsy Canadian-American band were the backing combo for Dylan’s confrontational first electric tours in 1965-’66. Drummer Levon Helm was so wounded by the heckling from folk purists each night that he quit the tour after three months to work on an oil rig in the Mexican Gulf. The Band only made fragmentary contributions to 1966’s *Blonde On Blonde*, but were fully in the saddle for ’67’s *Basement Tapes* and returned to duty for a tour around the *Tapes*’ eventual release in ’75.

CAFÉ WHA?

It was at this club in Greenwich Village where the Woody Guthrie-obsessed Dylan played his first proper gig on a Tuesday mid-afternoon in January 1961. Manny Roth, the club owner who gave Dylan his break, was the uncle of Van Halen’s David Lee Roth.

DULUTH

Dylan was born in this port city in the state of Minnesota on 24 May 1941. He stayed there until he was six, when his father contracted polio and moved the family to nearby Hibbing so he could have access to the best treatment. Dylan’s picture in his high school yearbook carried a caption stating that he wanted: “To join Little Richard”.

EDIE

Edie Sedgwick was an “It Girl” of the ’60s and regular attendee at Andy Warhol’s Factory studio. Her brother alleged in 2006 that she’d had an abortion during a brief liaison with Dylan in the mid-’60s. Dylan’s crushing portrait of a fashion victim, *Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat*, was reputedly about her, as was, debatably, *Just Like A Woman*. Hooked on barbiturates, Sedgwick died in mysterious circumstances in November ’71 aged 28.

FAITHFULL, MARIANNE

In 1964, Marianne Faithfull was 17, expecting her first baby and about to marry >>



The Band: Dylan’s backing group for his first “electric” tours.



Edie Sedgwick: ’60s It Girl and Dylan ex.

artist John Dunbar. It was at this time that Dylan tried to lure her to bed at London's Savoy Hotel. He reputedly wrote her a poem, read it to her in the corridor and on her refusal to capitulate, angrily tore it up in front of her. Three years later, Faithfull played an acetate of Dylan's Basement Tapes to Mick Jagger, and thus influenced the Stones' evolution from misfiring psychedelia to Jumpin' Jack Flash.

G**OD** Raised in Minnesota's Jewish community, Dylan soon found his purpose in protest music and then in rock'n'roll. But in 1978, after years of touring debauchery, he went on a three-month course at the Vineyard School of Discipleship, and emerged a born-again Christian. Unveiling his all-new "God" repertoire at San Francisco's Warfield Theatre, he was harangued. He gave plenty of evangelical verbal back, but it didn't stop his 1980 album, *Saved*, being afforded a particularly savage reception. Subsequent records included less religious tunes, as Dylan lost faith, and direction.

H**IGHWAY 61** This spinal American thoroughfare runs from the Canadian border, through Dylan's birthplace in Duluth, down to Memphis and New Orleans - where the blues, R'n'B and rock'n'roll that inspired him was born. "It always felt like it was in my blood," he once said. In the '40s and '50s, travelling in the other direction up 61, a vast migration of black workers escaped the South's cotton-pickin' poverty trap to work in the burgeoning industries of Chicago and Detroit. They brought with them the blues, which often glamorised that very route. By calling his 1965 album *Highway 61 Revisited*, Dylan was announcing its roots in that lurid psychogeography.

I**SLE OF WIGHT** It was at the 1969 Isle Of Wight festival that Dylan made his live comeback from being a post-motorbike crash recluse. When The Beatles didn't perform with him, as rumoured, the gig was slated as tepid. The Fab Four were actually in attendance, and afterwards escorted Dylan off to a farmhouse to hear a test pressing of *Abbey Road*.

J**UDAS** During a show at Manchester's Free Trade Hall as part of Dylan's UK tour in '66, a voice is heard to call Dylan "Judas!", a comment on his desertion of folk for electric rock'n'roll. In the late '90s, two different men took the blame: one, John Cordwell, claimed he was merely complaining about the execrable PA system; the other, Keith Butler, condemned his 21-year-old self as a "silly young bugger".



Highway 61 "felt like it was in my blood," says Dylan.



"WE WERE BOTH IN SHADES AND BOTH ON F*ING JUNK."**
JOHN LENNON ON HIS CAB RIDE WITH DYLAN

K**NOCKED OUT LOADED** Bob's 24th album is often touted as his absolute career low-point. As per title, it was trashed off during a bender with, among others, Ronnie Wood. The only decent track, *Brownsville Girl*, a co-composition with playwright Sam Shepard, was bolted on from sessions for previous LP, *Empire Burlesque*.

L**ENNON** An unbelievable piece of film from Dylan's 1966 UK visit, this captures him in the back of a London cab with John Lennon. Both are out of their minds. "We were both in shades and both on fucking junk," the chief Beatle later recalled. Dylan groans and appears about to puke, while a buoyant Lennon gleefully talks of a sensation he terms "groovy forehead". Though mutually respectful, the two icons were never the best of friends.

M**MARTIN SCORSESE** The *Goodfellas* and *Taxi Driver* director captured Dylan's most

candid conversations ever in 2005's *No Direction Home*. The 10-hours' worth of interviews were actually conducted by Dylan's manager, Jeff Rosen, who'd worked on funding/archiving the project for 10 years. He eventually hired Scorsese to pull it all together.

N**EVER-ENDING TOUR** Journalist Adrian Deevoy first muttered this phrase to Dylan while interviewing him for *Q* in 1989. Dylan himself hasn't espoused the term for 20-odd years. His tours now have no name but they continue relentlessly: he might now be in his 70s but he still plays 100-plus gigs every year.

O**H MERCY** The agonising genesis of 1989's return-to-form album was perhaps the greatest revelation in Dylan's 2004 autobiography, *Chronicles: Volume One*. Amazing to hear of him wrangling so heatedly with producer Daniel Lanois - it was always thought that Dylan didn't care much about making records.

P**ENNEBAKER** Film-maker DA Pennebaker was the man behind the 1965 UK tour



“Er, Bob, can you please take the butt out of your mouth and say ‘Cheese?’” “No.”: a scene from DA Pennebaker’s *Dont Look Back*, which documented the singer’s 1965 UK tour.

documentary *Dont Look Back*. It captured the newly electric, amphetamine-crazed Dylan causing ethical confusion among folkies with his new “pop” direction. Pennebaker also made a movie on another UK trip the following year, *Eat The Document*, which Dylan himself edited. Planned for TV screening in America, it was shelved by ABC for being too out-there for mainstream viewers.

QUEEN JANE

The protagonist of Dylan’s *Queen Jane Approximately* from 1965 is believed to be Joan Baez. The year before, when Dylan and Baez were an item, they were often described as “the king and queen of folk” but now their relationship was on the skids. Certain lines from *Just Like A Woman* – “Please don’t let on that you knew me when/I was hungry and it was your world” – may also be inspired by Baez, whose fame preceded Dylan’s.

ROTOLO, SUZE

On the cover of *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, he’s pictured ambling down a side street in New York’s Greenwich Village with his flame of the hour, Suze Rotolo. The daughter of leftie parents, she’s credited with radicalising Dylan between 1961-’64. During their relationship, she aborted a child by him. *It Ain’t Me, Babe* was about their affair’s end. In *Chronicles, Volume One*, Dylan describes her on the night they met as “the most erotic thing I’d ever seen”. She died of lung cancer in 2011.



The Traveling Wilburys (from left, Dylan, Jeff Lynne, Tom Petty, George Harrison, Roy Orbison), 1989.

SARA

Dylan’s first wife (née Nozinsky), between 1965-’77. A divorcée and erstwhile Playboy bunny, she was the original Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands, and went on to have four children with Dylan. Their crumbling marriage was the fuel for 1975’s torrid *Blood On The Tracks*. Dylan only married once more, to Carolyn Dennis, between 1986-’92.

TRAVELING WILBURYS

This deceptively non-knockabout supergroup was formed after Tom Petty, Roy Orbison, George Harrison and Jeff Lynne convened at Dylan’s house in Malibu in ’87 to cut a Harrison B-side, which turned into Wilburys classic *Handle With Care*. After Orbison’s untimely passing, they made a seldom-heard second album, “comically” misnumbered *Traveling Wilburys Vol 3*, which featured a high proportion of Dylan vocals.

UNIVERSITY DOCTORATES

Dylan has received two honorary doctorates, from Princeton (1970) and St Andrews (2004). He has allegedly been offered numerous others, but for reasons undisclosed, he turned those down.

VIETNAM

In 1966, rock became the focus for protest against America’s involvement in Vietnam, and the emerging counter-culture looked to Dylan for a lead – even though he had



We are not amused: Dylan receives his doctorate from St Andrews, 2004.



James Arthur and Nicole Scherzinger “do” Dylan on *The X Factor*, 2012.

since abandoned protest for electric rock’n’roll. With anti-American feeling at an all-time high, he launched his tour of Europe that spring, using a giant US flag every night as his stage backdrop. King of the activists? No, thanks!

WOODSTOCK

Dylan’s idyllic, leafy town of refuge in upstate New York – and location of his motorcycle accident on 29 July 1966, after which The Band, who’d hitherto been backing him, found gainful employment touring with Tiny Tim. In ’67, they rejoined Dylan for the casual, rootsy *Basement Tapes* sessions, in nearby Saugerties, NY.

X FACTOR

The 2012 final of ITV’s music contest was the scene for surely the most grotesque act of butchery on a Dylan composition: a duet of *Make Me Feel Your Love*, which featured off-the-scale vocal acrobatics by James Arthur with help from mentor Nicole Scherzinger, ridiculously dolled up in leather mini and suspenders. Other atrocities include William Shatner’s *Mr Tambourine Man*, James Blunt doing *I Want You* and the entire Dylanesque album by Bryan Ferry.

YAKUZA

Confessions Of A Yakuza was a 1991 fictional gangster’s memoir by Junichi Saga. Even in Japan, it was far from a bestseller but it entered Dylan lore in 2003 when *The Wall Street Journal* claimed Dylan had nicked various lines from it for lyrics on his 2001 album *Love And Theft*. One lyric from *Floater* about being “cool and forgiving” was particularly incriminating. Responding to this, among other allegations of plagiarism, Dylan told *Rolling Stone* last year, “Only wussies and pussies complain about that stuff.”

ZIMMERMAN

Dylan’s original surname. His grandparents were Jewish refugees from Ukraine and Lithuania. As an aspiring folkie, he briefly adopted the handle Elston Gunn before settling on Bob Dylan after boozy Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. In 2004, he told CBS News, “You call yourself what you want to call yourself. This is the land of the free.”

{ **BOB DYLAN** }

★
1966-1970: THE CHANGING MAN


THE CHAN

By 1966, Bob Dylan was close to the edge, having abandoned protest folk, gone electric and released three albums in 14 months.

- ★ A motorcycle accident that year offered him an escape route though. **John Harris** tells the story of how Dylan turned recluse, then reinvented himself and created Americana. ★

It was the autumn of 1967, and no one seemed to know where Bob Dylan had gone. In Britain, there were theories that the CIA had got to him, either arranging for him to be horribly injured or forcing him to retire under pain of death. One Elaine Batten of Leeds was so worried by his disappearance that she wrote a desperate letter to the music weekly *Disc And Music Echo*. "For the sake of my sanity, tell me what is happening in the world of Bob Dylan," she begged. "Is he ill, well, or in jail?"

The previous summer – 29 July 1966, to be precise – Dylan had fallen off his Triumph



"Home, Jeeves..."
Bob Dylan makes a quick
getaway, London, 1966.

GING MAN

motorcycle, near his home on Camelot Road, in Woodstock in upstate New York. "It happened one morning after I'd been up for three days," he later said. Though he subsequently claimed to have broken several vertebrae in his neck, the extent of his injuries has never been clear – but after the brain-frying intensity of the period book-ended by *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Blonde On Blonde*, it was pretty obvious that something had had to give.

For instant proof, have a look at the final scenes of the Martin Scorsese documentary *No Direction Home*. Dylan is caught at the end of his 1966 world tour, so pale that he looks almost see-through, rocking back and forth as if

to suggest borderline psychosis, and pleading with a perplexed reporter. "You know where home is? I don't want to go to Italy... [pause] no more," he says. "I don't want to go nowhere no more... I just wanna go home."

At this point, manager Albert Grossman was arranging a run of American shows for the autumn – which, judging by the Scorsese film, would have quickly pushed Dylan over the edge. So, whatever else it resulted in ("severe face and back cuts", according to *Time* magazine; "mild concussion", according to other accounts), the motorcycle accident allowed him to drastically slow down, and take stock. In the mid-to-late '60s, musicians did not do this:

the expectation was of endless touring, a steady stream of music, and permanent visibility.

"I thought I was just going to go back to what I was doing before," said Dylan two years later. "But I just couldn't do it any more."

Rumours quickly spread, of assassination plots, deals struck with government spooks, and a Dylan who would never perform or make records again. In fact, he was doing two things: luxuriating in the life of being a new father, and creating some of the most brilliant and fascinating music of his oeuvre, which looked back into the mists of American history, and set his career on a new course. He would not go back on the road for another seven years, but >>

{ BOB DYLAN }

1966-1970: THE CHANGING MAN



(Clockwise from left) Dylan awaits the Aust ferry across the River Severn, 1966; getting airborne in Woodstock, 1970; astride his Triumph motorbike, 1964.



very quickly, what he did in the wake of the crash would push countless musicians in the same direction: away from the gaudiness of psychedelia and the so-called counterculture, and back to folk and country and early rock'n'roll. Nowadays, you'd probably call it "Americana"; back then, it suggested something both old, refreshingly new, and completely inspired.

Thirty-five years after the motorcycle accident, I had a long conversation with Robbie Robertson of The Band, who had played guitar alongside Dylan throughout 1965 and 1966, and was one of his first visitors after the crash. "How was he? He was OK, except he had a big cast around his neck - a brace," he told me, and went on to describe what had actually happened. First, the two of them had worked on the impenetrable tour film *Eat The Document* (long bootlegged, but never officially released), and then started to make music. They did so seven miles north of Woodstock, in the basement of a house known locally as Big Pink, the residence of three other musicians who had shared the stage with Robertson and Dylan in the period building up to the crash: Band bassist Rick Danko, pianist Richard Manuel and keyboardist Garth Hudson.

"We had never had anything like that before," said Robertson. "It was like a *clubhouse*. A workshop. And we would go, every day, to the clubhouse, the same way as guys in the Mafia would go to their clubhouse. Or a street gang: I remember in these old movies like *The Dead End Kids*, they always had a clubhouse. It resembled that to me - except that it was out in the woods.

"We just got in the habit of going there every day and doing some work. And after a while, Bob started coming: he really liked the vibe, and he couldn't hang around his house all day. It was a place to go. He came there, and heard some of the things we started recording there - just having some fun, it wasn't like we got real serious yet - and said, 'Well, I wanted to write some songs for other people to record.'"

There was added alcoholic and herbal refreshment, as can be clearly

DYLAN WROTE ABOUT BEING VISITED BY "ROGUE RADICALS LOOKING FOR THE PRINCE OF PROTEST."



heard in unofficial recordings that were bootlegged, full of red-eyed merriment and glorious stupidity ("Reefer run amok," as Robertson later put it). But the basement was the birthplace of such enduring songs as *This Wheel's On Fire*, *You Ain't Going Nowhere*, *Open The Door, Homer, Nothing Was Delivered*, *Quinn*

The Eskimo, and more - pressed up on to much-coveted acetate records, and covered by artists as diverse as the English folk-rock pioneers Fairport Convention, the Top 10 pop act Manfred Mann and The Byrds. But the musicians who would gather at Big Pink - eventually joined by Band drummer Levon Helm - also played cover versions, which allowed Dylan to tap back into his roots.

"We had come from very different musical backgrounds," Robertson told me. "We were messing around with covers of old rockabilly and R'n'B tunes or blues things - and Bob was playing a lot of folk songs that we'd never heard. A lot of times, he would play one of these songs, and we didn't know whether this was an old song or a song that he had written. And he would tell us."

The music quickly known as The Basement Tapes set the tone for The Band's slavered-over debut *Music For Big Pink* and its self-titled successor. It was also the starting-point for the rest of Dylan's career. But what was created in the basement also inspired droves of other people - not just those who covered the songs, but people who heard them and sensed that it was time for a change. Marianne Faithfull took a reel-to-reel tape of Dylan's new material with her when she and Mick Jagger holidayed in the Caribbean and Brazil - and it influenced the Stones' back-to-the-roots album *Beggars Banquet*. The Beatles heard The Basement Tapes, and they fed into the primal approach that would define *Let It Be*. For music that would not be officially released until 1975, all this was quite an achievement.

Dylan confirmed he was not dead, ill, or in jail at the end of 1967, when he released *John Wesley Harding* - but Dylan being Dylan, it did not directly draw on The Basement Tapes. Instead, it evoked the same sense of an America that had existed long before rock'n'roll via a set of completely new songs. Stripped down, and brimming with allusions to the Bible, it was a fantastically anomalous record: about as far from that year's rock lodestone, The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, as could be imagined.

Though 1968 saw the counterculture shift into a new mood of violence and revolt, for Dylan it was another quiet year. He and his wife Sara had




With The Band at the Isle of Wight Festival, 1969.

another child, their third. He often seemed to prefer painting to music. But in February 1969, he went back into the recording studio to create an album that, although barely over 25 minutes long, would number among the most influential he ever released. Nashville Skyline jumped off the example set by the more countrified aspects of The Basement Tapes and I'll Be Your Baby Tonight from John Wesley Harding, and blazed a trail for what would soon be known as country-rock: it featured a cameo from Johnny Cash and Dylan singing in a newly softened voice, far from the intense rasp he had acquired in the early '60s. It came out in April 1969; three months later, he and The Band played their headline set at the Isle of Wight festival, watched by three of The Beatles. Long viewed as an anticlimax, the show was actually peppered with moments of brilliance – and, thanks to the warmth of Dylan's voice, full of a sense of easy contentment.

Something, though, was still eating away at him. Though the motorcycle crash had served to put him at arm's length from both his audience and the music industry, Dylan's place as a supposed spokesman for the '60s counterculture remained and it was obviously driving him mad. Living in the supposed refuge of Woodstock no longer seemed to be helping: in *Chronicles*, the memoir he published in 2004, he wrote about being visited by "gangs of dropouts and druggies", "moochers", "goons" and "rogue radicals looking for the Prince of Protest". The huge festival titled Woodstock had been put on close by because of the area's Dylan associations: this seemed to be the last straw, and in early 1970, he moved back to New York City.

In the meantime, the exploration of his roots that had started at Big Pink had carried on. In Nashville, he recorded a clutch of country covers. And in early 1970, he began recording a whole swathe of British and American folk songs, in the company of the guitarist and multi-instrumentalist David Bromberg and Al Kooper, who had so memorably played organ on Like A Rolling Stone. Soon enough, some of these recordings were smothered in strings, combined with some of the low points of the Isle of Wight performance, and released as *Self Portrait*: a "joke", Dylan later claimed, intended to "get people off my back". But in 2013, the best of this material would be released as the 10th volume of Dylan's official bootleg series, and revealed as the beginnings of a masterpiece: more proof that the back-to-the-future approach he had adopted in 1967 had been the right road to take.

Zoom forward 43 years. Through the summer of 2013, Dylan headlines a 26-date tour under the banner of Americanarama, supported by Wilco and My Morning Jacket – both partial to the timeless, old-yet-new aesthetic Dylan and The Band invented. From time to time, he invites Wilco's Jeff Tweedy and My Morning Jacket's Jim Jones onstage to add their vocals to a version of Robbie Robertson's song The Weight – written in Woodstock in 1968, and so bound up with what happened there that it even references Dylan's daughter Anna Leigh, born in July 1967. Between them, they make a joyous, ragged noise: more proof that what was invented in that Woodstock basement lives on, and on. 

MAN OF HIS WORD

Bob Dylan is one of the greatest ever lyricists. Dorian Lynskey picks five of his best couplets.



"Like a spinning rock? Hmm..."

3 "Outside in the distance a wildcat did growl/ Two riders were approaching, the wind began to howl."

All Along The

Watchtower (1967)

It's back to the Bible for this ominous image of a watchman spying two horsemen. In Isaiah 21 they've come to declare that Babylon has fallen. In the hands of Jimi Hendrix it felt like a parable of the Vietnam War.

1 "And the first one now, will later be last/For the times they are a-changin'."

The Times They Are A-Changin'

(1963)

Dylan's last direct protest song for several years was also one of his most apocalyptically Biblical. This line paraphrases Jesus in Matthew 20:16: "So the last shall be first, and the first last."

2 "I wish that for just one time you could stand inside my shoes/You'd know what a drag it is to see you."

Positively 4th Street

(1965)

Probably written just after his divisive appearance at the 1965

Newport Folk Festival, this is a vicious break-up song addressed to the folk scene that nurtured him. 4th Street in Greenwich

Village was the address of Gerde's Folk City, where he played his first ever professional show.

4 "I lived with them on Montague Street, in a basement down the stairs/There was music in the cafés at night, and revolution in the air."

Tangled Up In Blue

(1974)

There's a Montague Street in Brooklyn but that's a typical red herring. The song is a fictionalised memoir and this fond reference to Dylan's Greenwich Village salad days is an antidote to Positively 4th Street's bridge-burning venom.



5 "See them big plantations burning, hear the cracking of the whips/Smell that sweet magnolia blooming, see the ghosts of slavery ships."

Blind Willie McTell

(1983/1991)

In this eerie, violent travelogue named after the great Georgia blues musician, Dylan has sensory hallucinations of the slavery era. The scent of magnolia recalls Billie Holiday's classic song about Deep South lynch mobs, Strange Fruit.



IN BED WITH BOB

★ **Adrian Deevoy** spent two weeks chasing Dylan up the East Coast waiting for his Q interview to happen. Eventually, he found him and ★ they cosied up on a bed in a seaside chalet. He recounts the tale...

In October 1989, I went to New York on a wing and a prayer and a Gypsy's promise. Bob Dylan had reluctantly agreed to an interview with Q magazine. I was the staff writer. Full of false hope and naive belief, I headed for Heathrow airport unaware that I was about to be drawn deep into a bewildering world.

Entering Dylan's orbit was a daunting prospect. He was surrounded by some serious people: lawyers, money men, music business mafia. They ran an organisation in which Dylan was known only as "the Commander". This wasn't going to be straightforward. Manhattan was hostile and Dylan was already proving elusive. As one door closed, another slammed shut.

Back in Britain, acid house was booming. Now was the winter of our discotheque. Dylan's *Oh Mercy* had been released in September to widespread acclaim. Assuming he would be pleased with the reaction, I had written to his record company wondering whether Dylan would like to talk to a young reporter from London, England. I suggested that we could discuss some of his more recent songs, three masterpieces in particular: *Changing Of The Guard*, *Blind Willie McTell* and *Most Of The Time*. I also wished to ask Dylan about meeting John Lennon in London in 1966, maybe mull over that bit in *[DA Pennebaker's tour film] Eat The Document* where they are in a black cab and Bob vomits.

Dylan famously doesn't suffer fools gladly. And it looked as if he wasn't going to suffer this one at all. Soon my stay at the Chelsea Hotel had become longer than the first draft of *Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands*. But still no word from the singer.

Dylan was playing a run of shows at the Beacon Theatre in New York City. On the last night I was once again on the wrong side of a locked dressing room door. The mysterious Victor Maymudes,

Dylan's confidante and chess partner, was shuffling around. My fellow pilgrim that evening was the deadpan US comedian Steven Wright. We checked incredulously that Dylan had just reappeared for the encores in a gold lamé suit and stage-dived into the audience. "Or am I having those dreams again?" wondered Wright. Upon being informed that Dylan didn't want to see either of us, the stand-up exhaled slowly. "You can't have everything," he shrugged. "Where would you put it?"

Your despondent correspondent went home but within an hour of landing in London, I received a message instructing me to return to America immediately as Dylan wanted to talk in Pittsburgh "or maybe Philly...". I took the next available flight and the game resumed. After days of waiting by my Rockford Files phone, Dylan's manager Jeff Kramer rang. "Ever been to a town called Poughkeepsie?"

Kramer was a dark-eyed, leather-jacketed hustler who lived on black coffee and snatched sleep. In his own way, he was as charismatic as his employer. He'd be played by Al Pacino in the movie. We travelled upstate to wherever Dylan was playing that night. The show was rotten. Dylan was in a foul mood. The interview was off. "Ever been to a town called Narragansett?" asked Kramer.


After weeks of crawling up the East Coast, I finally got to meet Bob Dylan in a small seaside chalet in Rhode Island. En route, Kramer had briefed me on "how to talk to Bob". For his own reasons, Kramer wanted the interview to happen. Perhaps, it'd get the business guys off his back.

"You are about to speak to an extremely intelligent man," Kramer warned. "Do not try to bullshit him. And no trivial stuff." His last instruction, seconds before he introduced us, was whispered. "Don't under any circumstances mention Elvis."

Dylan was perched on the end of the room's only bed. He stood wearily and extended an astonishingly soft hand. I sat down next to him and he lit a



Q's December 1989 issue: where Adrian Deevoy's Bob Dylan cover story first appeared.



Bob Dylan sizes up
another hapless
journalist in 1989.

**“YOU ARE ABOUT
TO SPEAK TO
AN EXTREMELY
INTELLIGENT
MAN. DO NOT
BULLSHIT HIM.”**

**JEFF KRAMER,
DYLAN'S MANAGER**



The Never-Ending Tour continues at the Santa Barbara Bowl, 1989.

HE ASKED IF I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE MY PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN WITH HIM. "YOUR MAMA MIGHT LIKE ONE," HE SMILED.

Marlboro. We must have looked like a nervous couple on their wedding night. There was a flaxen-haired woman in the corner and a large bull-mastiff asleep on the floor. The dog was called Comanche, the woman wasn't introduced. She poured plastic cups of cava, which I chinked against Dylan's, and opened boldly with, "So how the Devil are you?" Dylan just laughed shyly. There was only going to be one winner here.

You could safely say that he hadn't dressed for the occasion: anorak, a sweatshirt with a sauce stain, superannuated Levi's and Wellington boots. He'd just been for a stroll on the beach and in a stubby, windblown way appeared to be in good physical shape. I remember thinking that he looked shockingly like Bob Dylan. Those deep turquoise eyes, that magnificent hooter.

Looking back, Dylan didn't say anything too electrifying during the hour we spoke. He was happy enough to shoot the breeze but wasn't about to start any fires. Stand-out topics included crickets, dreamscapes, New Orleans, nostalgia, the road, the real world, Street-Legal, inspiration, misery, the wrong harmonica, non-conscious creation, Jimmie Rodgers, Pavarotti, fulfilment, top hats and tall tales. At one point, we somehow concocted "The Never Ending Tour". I blurted the phrase out, Dylan didn't seem to mind it, adding "well, you're always on a tour with no end". The name stuck and he's still on that tour.

Dylan didn't particularly want to revisit the past but I asked what he remembered of his 1965 tour of Britain, when he was the coolest man in the universe. "Not much," he chuckled. "It's pretty much blocked out of my mind. Blotted out." He was referring, of course, to the heroic amount of

Two weeks later, the interview appeared on the news-stands and despite Dylan glowering out from the cover, defying you to buy it, the issue sold well. Then we received a communication at the magazine offices. Purporting to be from Bob Dylan's press representative, it was my article reimagined from the subject's perspective. Reading it again now, I am convinced it was Dylan's own work. The essay was as long as it was lysergically strange, peopled with Highway 61 characters in Blonde On Blonde situations with a side of John Wesley Harding biblical weirdness. Quite a read.

I showed this extraordinary treatise to Bob Geldof with whom I was working at the time. A keen student of Dylan's, Geldof scoured the manuscript for clues. "Classic Dylan," he confirmed. "You can hear him laughing as he's writing it." The 10-page document described a reporter – yours truly – "whose reinforced canvas purse contained prescription drugs, a tube of lipstick, a bible, clothes pins and picture postcards, bottles of airplane whiskey, a hairbrush, prophylactics, cassettes and a small puppet with a mustache".

It went on to state that my mission was "to salute narcissism and commemorate egomania" and that Dylan was of the understanding that any questions would concern "the similarities in Jewish and Muslim food, Hebrew as a number system, the Seven Noahide Laws, the hereafter and why it exists, plundering another man's soul, shadows as angels, the Roman Empire or what's left of it and diabolical materialism." He also claimed that the only question of any real interest that I had asked was: "Do you write songs before or after you record them?"

It was brilliantly barmy. The one serious note its author struck was in recalling our final exchange. "You must spend so much time alone, don't you ever feel lonely?" "Not at all, look at Elvis. He had people surrounding him all the time. It didn't do him any good."

I haven't encountered Bob Dylan since we shared a chalet in '89. There have been opportunities to say hello but I have always preferred to keep the memory of meeting him intact.

Years later, I recounted the episode to Dylan's son Jakob who was amused yet unsurprised by the old man's beguiling game plan. "You were cooler than most people who meet him," he offered reassuringly. "Joe Strummer and Tom Waits couldn't even speak. Come on, he's Bob Dylan, for God's sake!"



HOW TO BUY BOB DYLAN

Finding your way through Bob Dylan's 50-plus album back catalogue is a daunting task. Tom Doyle picks out some of the best.



Dylan in 2009, flashing the 'tache.

Bob Dylan records often match his wild disregard for production values to a determination to capture lightning in a bottle and often he would nail the finished take while the band were still trying to *learn* their parts. As Robbie Robertson, guitarist on many of his classic '60s and '70s albums told Q, "Sometimes it was like, when he got all the words right, the record was done. It was about everybody galloping along behind."

This flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants approach often produced

thrilling results, which crackle with energy and excitement, even decades on. Post 1967, however, his output is a minefield that has to be carefully negotiated – the peg-on-the-nose singing of '69's Nashville Skyline, the born-again religious wonder of '79's Slow Train Coming.

Piece by piece, it makes for one of the most incredible and occasionally baffling catalogues in modern music. It's endlessly fascinating stuff. No wonder, then, that we're still trying to decipher the work of Bob Dylan, master songwriter, unrivalled head-game-player.

ESSENTIAL

THE FREEWHEELIN' ... 1963



The record that announced Dylan as a singular talent. There had been protest folk singers before, but none blessed with quite such poetic wonder (Blowin' In The Wind, A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall) or capable of such a precision attack as the lambasting of nuclear age world leaders in Masters Of War.

HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED 1965



Having gone semi-electric with Bringing It All Back Home earlier in '65, Dylan hammered the point with this second album released in the same year. Opening with the howling Like A Rolling Stone, Highway 61 Revisited was a messy, proto-punk-ish masterwork of game-changing rock and roll.

BLONDE ON BLONDE 1966



Wired on speed, Dylan escaped to Nashville and recorded with slightly bewildered country musicians, producing the first double album in rock. The singer's racing thoughts were filled with women – his mind torn between two girls in Visions Of Johanna and focused on new wife Sara in the 11-minute Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands.

RECOMMENDED

LIVE 1966 1998



Dylan's British tour of '66 was a chaotic circus: audiences furious about his electric sound, bomb threats, deranged knife and scissor-wielding fans. This recording of his Manchester Free Trade Hall show is full of fire. The "Judas!" cry comes at the end, just before Dylan and The Hawks slam into a defiant Like A Rolling Stone.

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS 1975



His great return to top form, Blood On The Tracks was confessional, guts-spilling stuff. Tangled Up In Blue unfolded a gripping narrative of thwarted love, while the post-Sara-split spewing of Idiot Wind ("Blowing every time you move your teeth") was vicious and the lamenting You're A Big Girl Now simply heartbreaking.

DESIRE 1976



Dylan invents Gypsy folk-rock – loose and flowing and spotlighting the fiddle-playing of Scarlet Rivera. The eight-minute Hurricane told the story of black American boxer Rubin Carter, convicted for murder in 1967 on flimsy evidence. Elsewhere, Desire was more exotic, from the breezy Mozambique to the aching One More Cup Of Coffee.

GO DEEPER

NEW MORNING 1970



Released when most Dylan followers were scratching their heads over his output, New Morning was quietly brilliant. If Not For You was a gentle love song that painted its narrator as a hopeless fool, while Went To See The Gypsy imagined a fictional summit with Elvis Presley.

TIME OUT OF MIND 1997



His first album of new material in seven years, Time Out Of Mind was a revelation, finding the 50-something singer musing on mortality, both playfully and poignantly. The voice was timeworn, as were the sentiments, from Love Sick to the moving Tryin' To Get To Heaven.

TREAT WITH CARE

SELF PORTRAIT 1970



Rightly regarded as his worst record, Self Portrait was as dashed-off and sloppy as the primary school-level cover daub that gave it its title. A bored-sounding Dylan snoozes his way through old standards such as Blue Moon and murders Simon & Garfunkel's The Boxer.

{ **BOB DYLAN** }



THE LATE-CAREER RENAISSANCE



NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

By the mid-'90s, Dylan looked and sounded washed up. But his 1997 ★ album *Time Out Of Mind* changed all that. It reinvigorated him and ★ set him back on a path that he remains on today, says **John Harris**.

It was May 1997, and Dylan had contracted a fungal infection called histoplasmosis. It came, he reckoned, “from accidentally inhaling a bunch of stuff that was out of one of the rivers where I live.” In retrospect, it was probably not life threatening, but the infection put pressure on his heart, which was enough for a flurry of scare stories. The *New York Post* certainly excelled itself: DYLAN COULD BE IN FIGHT FOR LIFE was its bet-hedging headline, above a story which began with the news that the “Legendary folk and rock singer” had been hospitalised “after suffering chest pains the day after his 56th birthday.”

Outwardly, ill-health was not his only problem. He had not released an album of original songs since 1990's *Under The Red Sky*, an undistinguished work whose most head-turning feature was a song called *Wiggle Wiggle* (“Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle like a swarm of bees/Wiggle on your hands and knees”). His perfunctory go at MTV *Unplugged* in 1995 suggested that he was not just coasting, but in danger of a creative fade-out as he dispensed workmanlike versions of the old hits while dressed in a polka-dot shirt à la 1966.

“I didn’t care to record no more,” he later reflected. “I’d rather play on the road. Recording was too mental. Also, I didn’t feel I was writing any of the songs that I really wanted to write. I wasn’t getting the help I needed to record right, I didn’t like the sound of the records... I reckoned I was done with it.” But then something happened. In January 1997, he began work on new recordings with Daniel Lanois, the producer who had worked on 1989's inspired *Oh Mercy*. The sessions were somewhat chaotic; at first, Dylan wasn’t even sure he had a complete set of songs in him. “I didn’t go into it with the idea that this was going to be a finished album,” he said. “It got off the tracks more than a few times, and people got frustrated.”

As it turned out, though, *Time Out Of Mind* would be full of great songs, and a sense that he had once again found himself. It was finished by the time of his health scare, but the fact that it appeared five months after those lurid headlines fixed it as his death album, full of glimpses of his own mortality and sung – as *The Sunday Times* put it – in a voice that was “a holy ruin of sound, shredded, broken, grated, lost.”

Dylan, bemoaning the lack of second-hand dishwashers for sale, Los Angeles, 1999.

{ BOB DYLAN }

THE LATE-CAREER RENAISSANCE

As a subsequent piece in Q pointed out, when it came to the supposed carking-it theme, “the premise may not have been accurate, but it wasn’t at all bad for business.” Neither was the quality of the music, which led some people to get a little bit carried away. “I actually think it’s the best record he’s made,” said Elvis Costello. “He had the guts to think about it for however long it took instead of just making records.”

Even if it wasn’t quite as career-topping as Costello seemed to think, *Time Out Of Mind* was a truly great record. Its opening words served notice that something incredible was afoot: “I’m walkin through streets that are dead,” went the opening line of *Love Sick*, and from then on, the sense of revelation rarely let up. Not *Dark Yet* and *Tryin’ To Get To Heaven* were tender, beautifully intimate evocations of getting older, wiser and more fragile; *Make You Feel My Love* would eventually be converted into a global hit by Adele. And at the end of it all there was *Highlands*, a 16-minute shaggy-dog story set to a murky blues backing, in which Dylan’s splendidly silly lyrics – “She got a pretty face, with long white shiny legs/I said, ‘Tell me what I want’/She says, ‘You probably want hard-boiled eggs’” – were all part of the fun.

By now, most of Dylan’s notable musical contemporaries were living off their past glories, and putting out records that got nowhere near the music they had made in their prime (witness the Stones’ *Bridges To Babylon*, released the same week as *Time Out Of Mind*, and swiftly forgotten). Our man, by contrast, was on a winning streak: *Time Out Of Mind* won three Grammys, topped many end-of-year lists and endured. Better still, it was followed by another great album, and another one after that.

Histoplasmosis only stalled Dylan for a few months, before he resumed the open-ended global trek that became known as “the never-ending tour”. In the second half of 1997, with the plaudits for *Time Out Of Mind* still ringing in his ears, he toured the States three times, and also came to the UK. The same year, for a rumoured fee of \$350,000, he did three songs on a stage he shared with Pope John Paul II, as part of something called the World Eucharistic Congress. In 1998, as well as dutifully playing in his home country, he went to South America with The



Bob’s full house: meeting Pope John Paul II in 1997; (left) winning the Album Of The Year Grammy in 1998.

Rolling Stones, as well as performing in Australia and New Zealand. In 1999, he toured Europe on his own, and

the US with Paul Simon. And on the gigs went, through 2000, 2001 and beyond.

Exactly what happened when he wasn’t onstage remained as drenched in myth as ever: according to various accounts, he occasionally liked to commence spontaneous night-time hikes in the fields behind service stations, had an Irish minder whose surname was Callaghan, and when in London in 2000, made an attempt to contact Elastica’s Justine Frischmann (she was away on tour, unfortunately – there was speculation he had seen her picture in the States and been intrigued, something never confirmed by either party).

That year, he released a single titled *Things Have Changed*, written for the US movie *Wonder Boys*. Another meld of greying wisdom and absurdist humour with a brilliant acoustic-led arrangement, it won Dylan an Oscar for Best Original Song, which he then took on tour, proudly placing it on top of his guitar amp. Then, the same day that planes crashed into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, he released an album titled *Love And Theft*: self-produced, made in the company of his touring band, and arguably even better than *Time Out Of Mind*: not an achievement anyone had been expecting, and all the sweeter for it.

Whereas that record was soaked in echo, smattered with twinkling soundscapes, and full of a sense of quiet introspection, this one was loud,

Dylan in the 2003 film *Masked And Anonymous*.




often raucous, whip-smart and very funny. One minute, he was playing the role of a randy old goat: "Jump into the wagon, love, throw your panties overboard," went High Water (For Charley Patton). The next, he was sending up Shakespeare, in Po' Boy: "Othello told Desdemona, 'I'm cold, cover me with a blanket/By the way, what happened to that poison wine?'" She says, "I gave it to you, you drank it." There were lyrical borrowings from Groucho Marx, Mark Twain, The Great Gatsby and more. "Basically, the songs deal with what many of my songs deal with – which is business, politics and war, and maybe love interest on the side," he said, which was one way of looking at it. One thing was clear: Dylan was back at the centre of popular culture, newly revered, and for a man now into his seventh decade, remarkably active. The Never-Ending Tour sprawled on. In 2003, he co-wrote and starred in a music-smattered – and, it should be noted, somewhat baffling – movie titled *Masked And Anonymous*, alongside such stars as Jeff Bridges, John Goodman and Penélope Cruz. A year later came *Chronicles: Volume One*, the beautifully written memoir whose three sections zeroed in on 1961, 1970 and 1989. And in 2006, he put out *Modern Times*, which had enough in common with *Time Out Of Mind*

IN 2005, DYLAN DID A SPIRITED RENDITION OF THE CLASH'S LONDON CALLING AT BRIXTON.

Academy included a ramshackle but spirited rendition of The Clash's London Calling. During the same shows, he also had a crack at Link Wray's seminal rock'n'roll instrumental Rumble. You would, wouldn't you?

Since *Modern Times*, as well as the gloriously barmy seasonal album *Christmas In The Heart*, there have been two more self-written records, *Together Through Life* (2009) and *Tempest* (2012) – neither as consistent or revelatory as *Time Out Of Mind* and *Love And Theft*, but still full of moments of magic and wonder, which only points up Dylan's singularity. Even the most successful musicians, after all, tend to have it, and then mysteriously lose it. Certainly, they rarely get more fascinating with age.

But at the age of 72, Dylan is a more compelling figure than he was for most of the '80s and the first few years of the '70s. Among the rock musicians of the '60s generation, arguably only he and Neil Young have found a way to convey the experience of ageing, and a reliable way of avoiding the impression that musicians are duty-bound to constantly relive their youth. In that sense, the fact that Dylan's voice now sounds so weatherbeaten is not nearly as problematic as you might think: unlike many whose living involves guitars and recording studios, he these days sings and speaks with a rare kind of authenticity, and a sense of hard-won wisdom.

In other words, he is an *old guy*, and it suits him. Meanwhile, as the years tick by, he feels inescapably compelled to carry on performing and making music, something which brings to mind two of his lyrics. The first is from *Tangled Up In Blue*: "The only thing I knew how to do was keep on keepin' on". The second crops up in *Ain't Talkin'*, the closing track of *Modern Times*, and is as perfect a statement of his modus operandi as you could wish for. "Ain't talkin', just walking/Up the road, around the bend," he sings. "Heart burning, still yearning/In the last outback at the world's end." 

and *Love And Theft* to suggest an unbroken run of brilliant form, just as he had managed in the mid-'60s.

Theme Time Radio Hour, the gnomically voiced satellite radio series in which he collected wildly eclectic selections of music according to subject matter ("Guns", "Death and taxes", and perhaps best of all, "spring cleaning"), began the same year. And, as ever, there were gigs, often peppered with surprises: in November 2005, for example, two of his five performances at Brixton

"WHAT IS THIS SHIT?"

Not everything Dylan touches turns to gold...

The generally positive reaction to the latest Bob Dylan

bootleg series set, *Another Self Portrait*, makes it easy to forget that the first line of Greil Marcus's infamous review of the original album was, "What is this shit?" Dylan's 1970 *Self Portrait* LP was a collection of live tracks, weak originals and country covers drenched in syrupy arrangements and overdubbed strings. And though die-hard Dylan fans might throw around words like "challenging" or "difficult," the plain truth is that it's just not very good.

Dylan's mistakes aren't often recollected. But they are there if you look for them. Some represented a failed attempt to change direction, a new vision he couldn't quite realise. Others are just plain weird. What, exactly, was Dylan thinking when he allowed will.i.am to rap a verse over *Forever Young* for a Pepsi Super Bowl commercial, for example?

Oddly, that may not even be the strangest ad Dylan has ever licensed a song for. He let Victoria's Secret use *Love Sick* in a lingerie commercial he appeared in with model Adriana Lima that ended up sounding more spooky than sexy. He's mumbled through major TV gigs, including *Live Aid* and the 1991 Grammy Awards. And he's done some pretty silly collaborations, too: only the most dedicated Dylan aficionado can remember



Dylan (with Rupert Everett, left) in 1987's "lousy" *Hearts Of Fire* film.

that he's co-written songs with both Michael Bolton (*Steel Bars*) and Kiss's Gene Simmons (*Waiting For The Morning Light*).

Dylan has always been an elusive artist, unafraid to shift musical genres or songwriting styles. But during the '80s he seemed lost. Both 1985's *Empire Burlesque* and '86's *Knocked Out Loaded* were among his weakest albums, but Dylan's career-low probably came in 1987, when he joined The Grateful Dead for some uninspired summer shows and appeared with Rupert Everett in *Hearts Of Fire*, a film so lousy it's not even available on DVD.

Dylan started reclaiming his reputation in 1991 with *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3 (Rare & Unreleased 1961-1991)*, and beginning with 1997's *Time Out Of Mind*, he released three albums as strong as any he'd put out since the '70s. By 2009's *Together Through Life*, it seemed as though he'd settled into late-career consistency. Then, a year later, he released a set of Christmas songs. If there's been one constant in Dylan's 50-year career, it's that he will not be second-guessed. **ROB LEVINE**