

NEW

100% UNOFFICIAL

# THE STORY OF BOB DYLAN



## VISIONARY VAGABOND

From a complete unknown to  
the voice of a generation

## ELECTRIC OUTLAW

How Dylan challenged convention and caused  
controversy within the contemporary folk scene

## RENAISSANCE MAN

Discover Dylan's creative ventures  
into visual art and beyond

Digital  
Edition



FIRST  
EDITION

PROTEST POET | FOLK-ROCK FORERUNNER | RELUCTANT REVOLUTIONARY



# The Life and Music of Bob Dylan

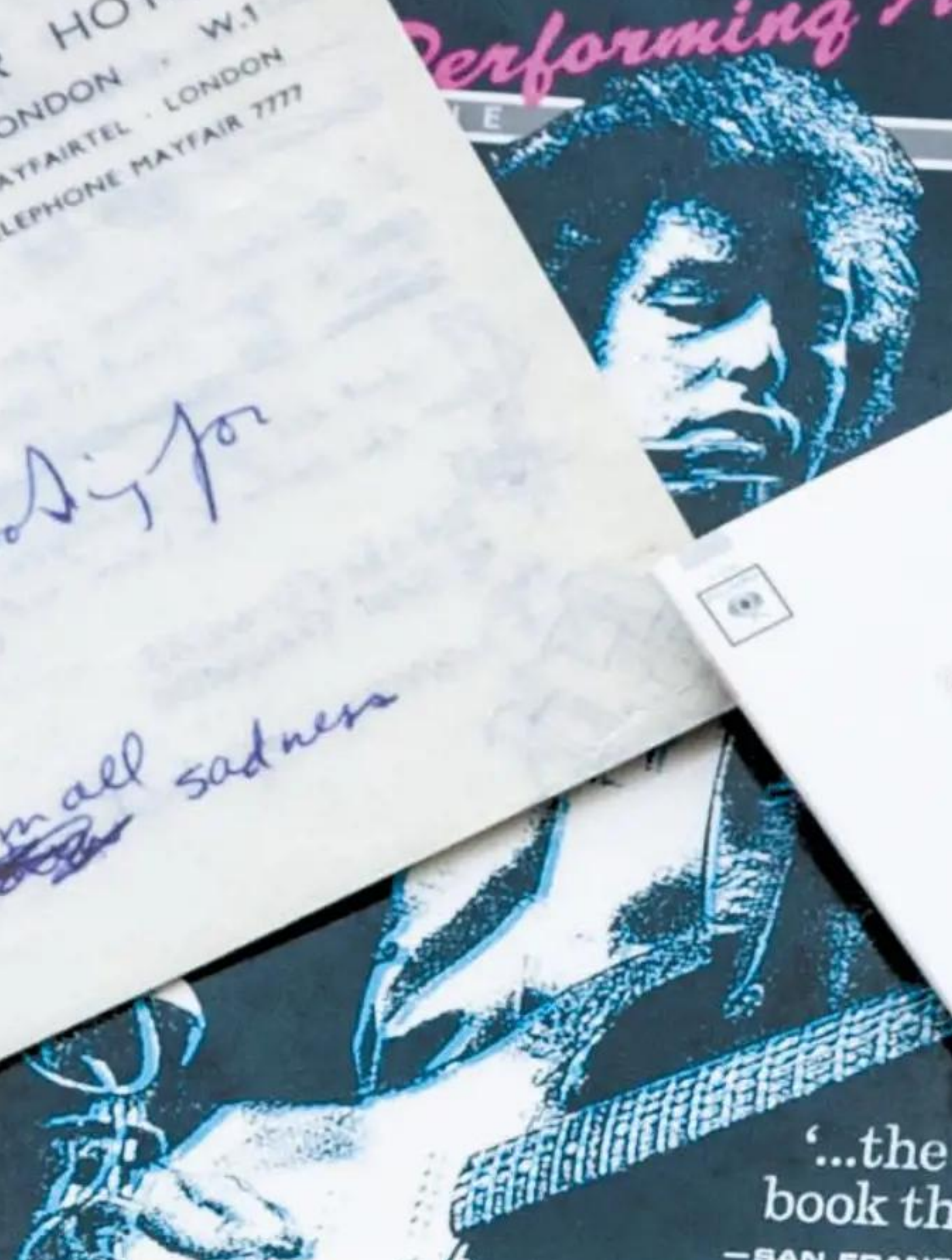


THE MAY FAIR HOTEL  
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It ain't me babe it ain't me you're looking for  
oh you say that you are looking  
for someone who is strong  
+ ~~just~~ test you ~~from~~ sadness  
in defense of not being wrong

# BOB DYLAN

Performing Artist  
1960-1973



'...the only book that ma  
- SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

## Bob Dylan Bringing It All Back Home



MARCH ON WASHINGTON  
FOR  
JOBS & FREEDOM  
AUGUST 28, 1963

March on Washington  
For Jobs and Freedom  
Wednesday, August 28, 1963

PLATFORM  
GUEST

No. 1905  
BOB DYLAN  
Admission \$2.00  
DECEMBER 4, 1964 — 8:00 P.M.  
Peterson Gymnasium  
San Diego State College  
S.D.S. Faculty  
Alumni and  
Non S.D.S. Students  
Admission \$2.00  
No. 1905

## SONG & DANCE The Art of

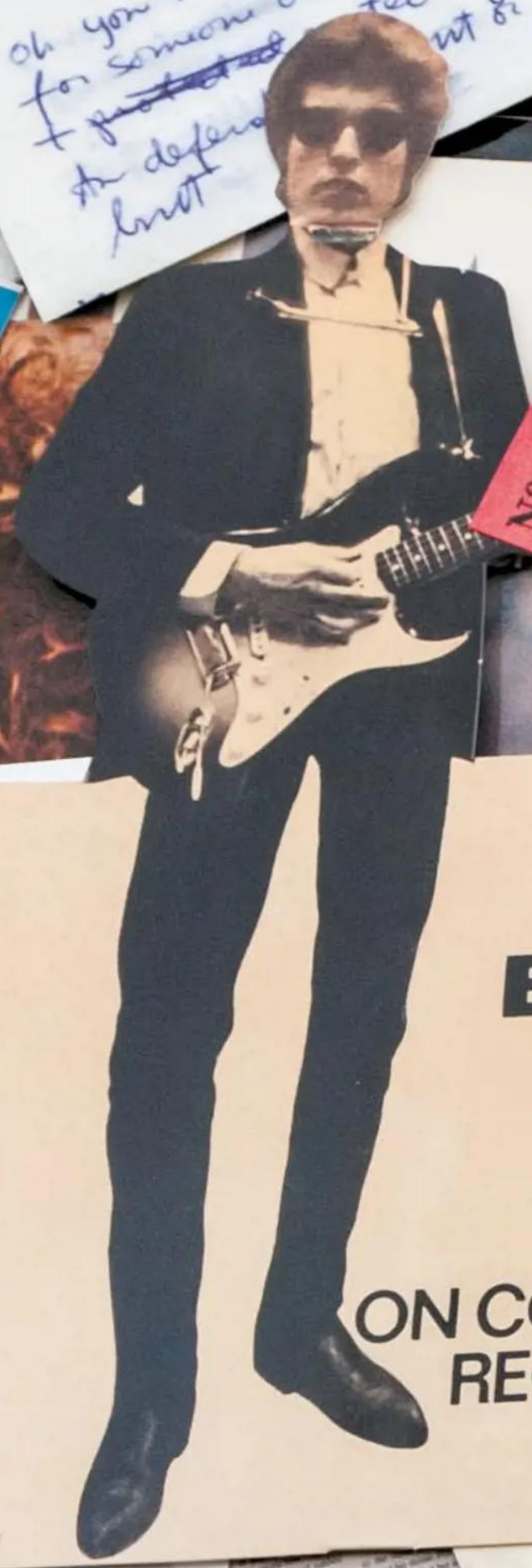


(CHO) The answer my friend  
Is blowing in the wind  
The answer is blowing in

2. How many times must a  
Before he can see the  
How many ears must  
Before he can hear  
How many deaths  
Too many people have

## BOB DYLAN BRINGS IT ALL BACK HOME

ON COLUMBIA  
RECORDS



Handwritten text on a piece of paper:  
I can't see for home  
like a complete unknown  
A complete unknown  
like a complete unknown  
Oct. 1965

## HOW MANY ROADS JUST A MAN WALK DO

Bob Dylan has walked down man  
at up for laughs, out grass for  
dimes." And his songs to  
pped up all those years  
l and the train whi  
it run gals, the  
o does what  
g about  
he

## DO LOOK BACK

A Film By D.A. Pennebaker



Forging a formidable career that has spanned almost seven decades, Bob Dylan is one of the greatest songwriters and best-selling musicians of all time. The trail-blazing troubadour used his sophisticated songwriting, blending philosophical and political lyrics with catchy melodies, to reshape folk music for the counterculture youth of the 1960s and provide the revolutionary soundtrack to a generation. Delve into Dylan's journey through fame, marriage, fatherhood and religion. Explore the musician's enduring appeal, from the poetic depth of his early albums to his 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature, and discover how his incredible ability to constantly reinvent himself paired with the powerful resonance of his lyrics have made him one of the most influential figures of our time.

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With Joan Baez • Alan Price  
Produced and Released By  
**Learock Pennbaker** <sup>INC.</sup>  
Albert Grossman • John Court



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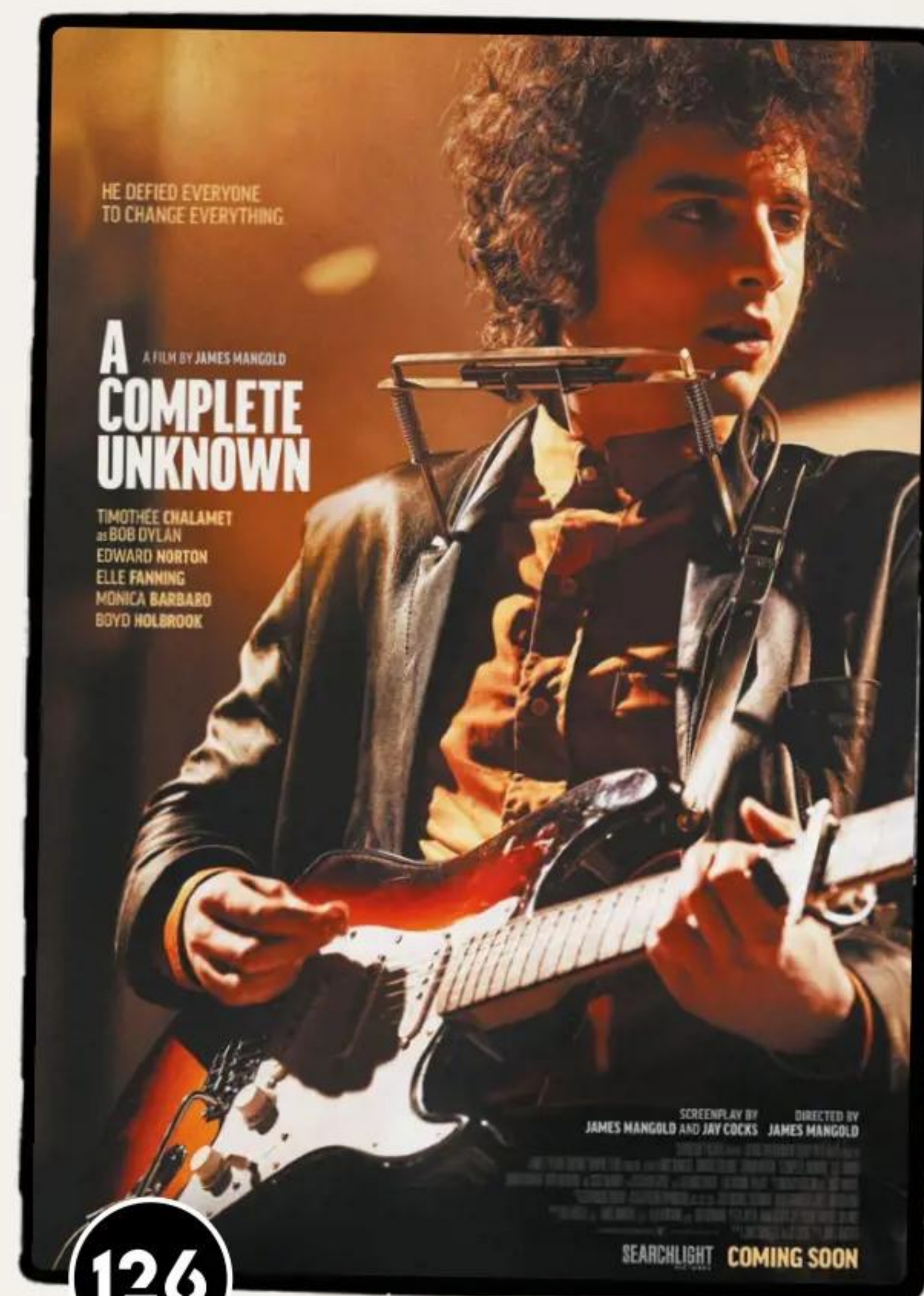
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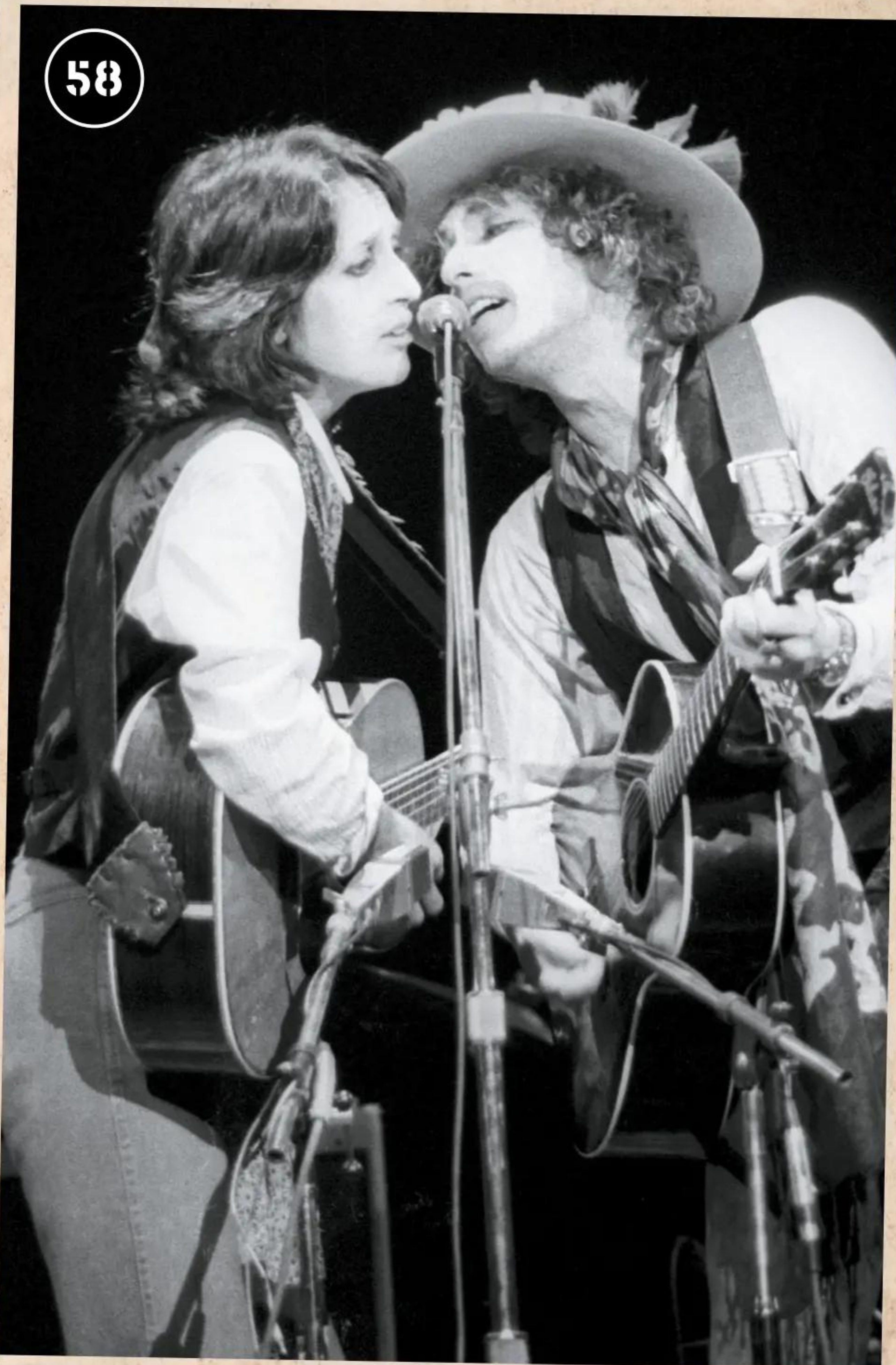
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# THE MAKING OF BOB DYLAN

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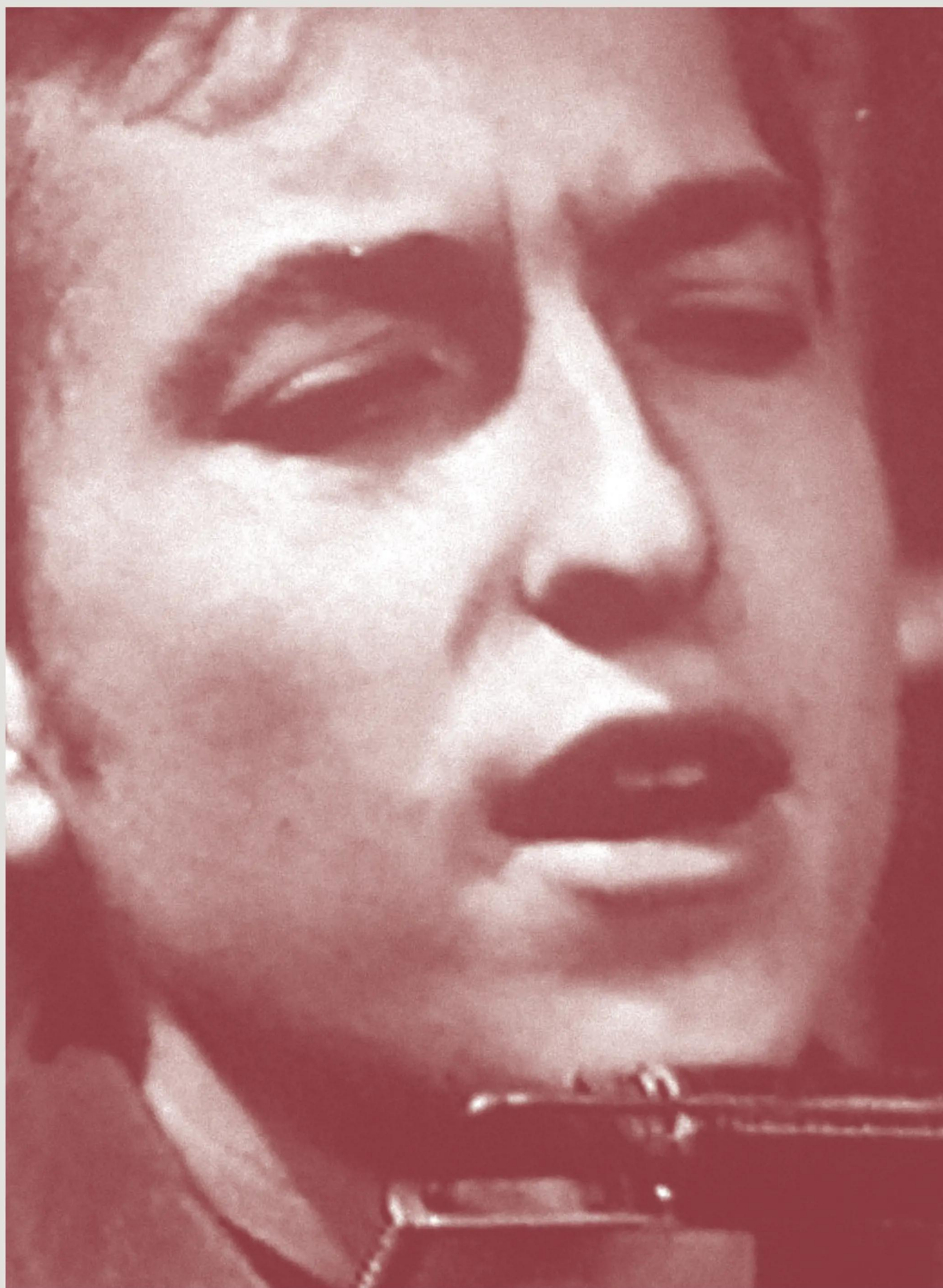
**16. The Minnesota Minstrel**















# Minnesota INSTREL

THE BOY BORN ROBERT ALLEN ZIMMERMAN  
COULDN'T GET OUT OF HIBBING, MINNESOTA  
FAST ENOUGH, BUT GROWING UP IN THE  
SMALL MIDWESTERN TOWN WOULD FORGE  
HIS PERSONA AND FUEL HIS IMAGINATION

WORDS Neil Crossley



**M**uch has been written over the last seven decades about the shy young singer-songwriter from

Hibbing, Minnesota who reinvented himself as Bob Dylan and arrived in New York's Greenwich Village in 1961, fuelled by his prodigious talent, drawn by a vibrant music community and inspired by the socially-charged songs of Woody Guthrie, who he promptly sought out, bedridden and dying in a New Jersey hospital.

By then, the midwestern boy born Robert Allen Zimmerman was already consigned to the past, displaced by a whole new persona that would soon shake the American folk revival to its core and become elevated into a music icon of the age.

Cynics across the decades have questioned Dylan's seeming desire to stifle or dramatically embellish his midwestern backstory, to concoct a far more dramatic and romantic narrative for himself in a bid for credibility and kudos. But looking back from the context of the 21st century, it really doesn't matter because in the end it's all about the music.

As is often the case when charting the ascent of music icons, delving into Dylan's early years is arguably one of the most compelling parts of his story, a chance to glimpse the early hopes, experiences and inspirations that would go on to fuel his profound and peerless talent.

### CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY

Bob Dylan was born Robert Allen Zimmerman on 24 May, 1941, in Duluth, Minnesota. His father Abram Zimmerman and his mother Beatrice 'Beatty' Stone were part of a small, close-knit Jewish community.

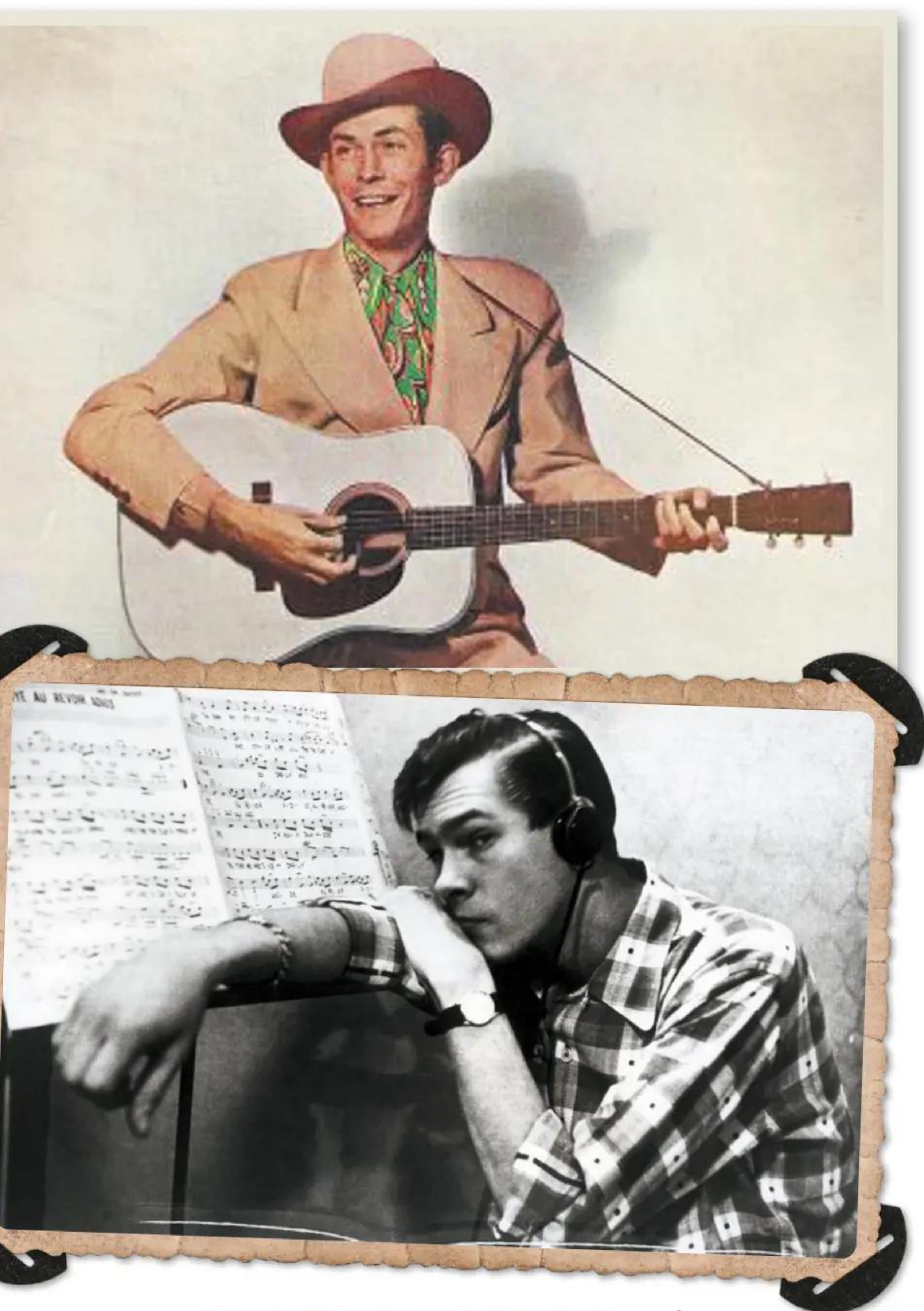


Dylan's paternal grandparents, Anna Kirghiz and Zigman Zimmerman had emigrated from Odessa in the former Russian Empire to the United States, following the 1905 pogroms against the Jews. Dylan's maternal grandparents, Florence and Ben Stone, were Lithuanian Jews, who had emigrated to the US in 1902.

In 1946, Dylan's younger brother and sole sibling, David, was born. One year later, Dylan's father contracted polio and the family moved to Hibbing, an iron-mining town in northeastern Minnesota where Dylan's mother grew up. Dylan's father co-owned the Zimmerman Furniture and Appliance Co with Dylan's paternal uncle, and Hibbing was where the young Bob grew up and stayed until eventually leaving his small town midwestern existence for the University of Minnesota at the age of 18.







## REINVENTING THE PAST

Part of Dylan's reinvention in later years involved the story that he was a troubled, rebellious child who frequently ran away from home to escape conformity and normalcy, and who joined a circus at the age of 13 in a bid for adventure and excitement.

"I was with the carnival off and on for six years," Dylan told Cynthia Gooding in one of his earliest recorded interviews in March, 1962, which was broadcast on WBIA radio in New York. "[I was doing] just about everything. I was a clean-up boy. I used to be on the main line on the Ferris Wheel, just run rides."

**ABOVE** Clockwise from top left: A young Robert Allen Zimmerman, aged two; Country music icon and Dylan influence, Hank Williams; Johnnie Ray: "The first singer I fell in love with," said Dylan; 17-year-old Robert Zimmerman, as pictured in his high school yearbook; Dylan's childhood home at 2425 7th Ave in Hibbing, Minnesota

**"IN HANK'S SONGS  
WERE THE RULES OF  
POETIC SONGWRITING"**

There is no evidence to suggest this happened. The reality seems to be that the young Dylan lived a fairly normal and relatively comfortable life in a middle-class family and had a quiet and reserved nature.

## SMALL TOWN SOUNDS

While the young Dylan disliked the rural location of Hibbing, the long winters and big midwestern skies fuelled his imagination. So too did the sounds. "The heavy rumble of the foghorns (of the big lake freighters that) dragged you out of your senses by the neck," he wrote in his autobiography *Chronicles: Volume One*. "As a child, slight, introverted and asthma-stricken, the sound was so loud, so enveloping, I could feel it in my whole body and it made me feel hollow."

Like many of his generation, he grew up listening to the radio and became intoxicated by the country and blues strains that he heard as a child. He listened to the Grand Ole Opry radio show, hosted by WSM radio, broadcast from the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee, and beamed live via powerful transmitters across the length and breadth of much of the United States.

## RADIO DAYS

One artist who made a profound impression on the young Dylan in the early-1950s was Hank Williams. "The sound of his voice went through me like an electric rod," wrote Dylan in *Chronicles: Volume One*, "I became aware that in Hank's recorded songs were the archetype rules of poetic songwriting."

Another artist who made their mark was singer, songwriter and pianist, Johnnie Ray. "He was the first singer whose voice and style, I guess, I totally fell in love with... I loved his style, [and] wanted to dress like him, too."

In 1951, at the age of 10, Dylan took up the piano, after having one lesson and then teaching himself to play. He also mastered harmonica and by the age of 14 had taken up the guitar. By then, Dylan was attending Hibbing High School, a bold, new facility with a grand Jacobean facade that reflected the town's booming economy, fuelled by its burgeoning iron mining industry.

## SONIC EXPLOSION

Hank Williams and Johnnie Ray would remain enduring influences on Dylan, but it was the explosion of rock 'n' roll in the mid '50s that really sparked his own desire to get up on stage and perform.

Elvis Presley and Jerry Lewis had a profound impact, as did Little Richard, who the teenage Dylan would go on to imitate on the piano at high school dances.

Dylan's first performance was on 5 April, 1957 at Hibbing High School, where he performed with his band The Shadow Blasters at a student council-organised variety show. Dylan was 16 years old and his performance, inspired by Little Richard, was reportedly deemed unconventional and loud for the small town.

By the late-1950s, Dylan had formed numerous bands, including an outfit called the Golden Chords, a group he fronted under the pseudonym Elston Gunn, performing covers of songs by Presley and Little Richard. The Golden Chords' performance of Danny & The Juniors' *Rock and Roll is Here To Stay* at their high school talent show was reportedly so loud that the school principal cut the power on their microphones.

## FREE SPIRIT

Dylan had a number of girlfriends during high school, but one of the most enduring ➡



relationships was with Echo Helstrom. Dylan and Helstrom dated from 1957 to 1958 and went to the junior prom together. At one of his first public performances in the Hibbing High School auditorium, Dylan sat at the piano and sang, “I got a girl and her name is Echo”.

Unlike the middle-class Zimmermans, Helstrom was from a working-class family on the outskirts of town. Helstrom was a free spirit and she and Dylan reportedly listened to rhythm & blues songs beamed from long-distance radio stations in Chicago, Illinois, Little Rock, Arkansas and Shreveport, Louisiana.

In *Chronicles: Volume One*, Dylan recalled: “One of the reasons I’d go [to Helstrom’s house] ...was that they had old Jimmie Rogers records, old 78s in the house.”

In Toby Thompson’s 2008 book *Positively Main Street: Bob Dylan’s Minnesota*,



**ABOVE Left:** Bluegrass singer-songwriter Bill Monroe on stage at the Grand Ole Opry in 1951 – a broadcast that Dylan would often tune in to. **Right:** Zimmerman in 1958 as 17-year-old high schooler



Helstrom told the writer that Dylan “had my father’s huge collection of bound folk music to peruse. He’d sit for hours leafing through old manuscripts, sheet music and folk magazines”.

In *Chronicles: Volume One*, Dylan recalled that “Everyone said she looked like Brigitte Bardot, and she did.”

In an excerpt from Elstrom’s yearbook, Dylan wrote “20 below zero, and running down the road in the rain with yo’ ol’ man’s flashlight on my ass... when we sat and talked in the L&B ’til two o’clock at night... Let me tell you that your beauty is second to none, but I think I told you that before. Well, Echo, I better make it. Love to the most beautiful girl in school – Bob.”

### ELECTRIFYING INFLUENCE

Dylan continued to be drawn to rock ’n’ roll, and one of the artists that most impressed him was Buddy Holly, who he saw perform

at the Duluth Armory on 31 January, 1959, four days before Holly’s death in a plane crash.

Dylan found the performance electrifying, and in June 2007, in

his Nobel Prize lecture, he cited Holly as an inspiration.

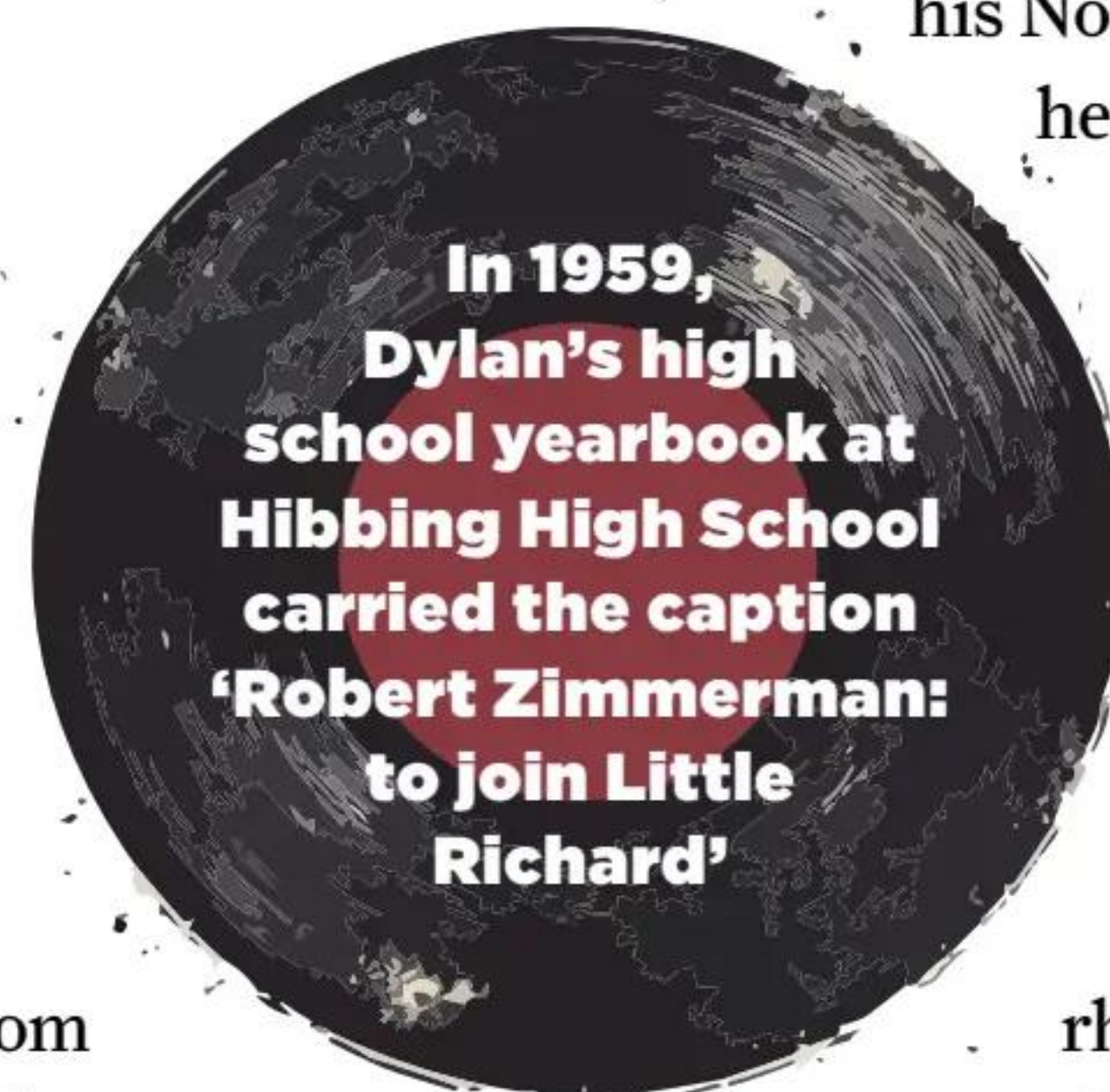
“Buddy played the music that I loved, the music I grew up on – country and western, rock ’n’ roll and rhythm & blues.

And Buddy wrote songs

– songs that had beautiful melodies and imaginative verses. And he sang great, sang in more than a few voices. He was the archetype. Everything I wasn’t and wanted to be... He was powerful and electrifying, and had a commanding presence. I was only six feet away. He was mesmerising.”

### A FUTURE IN FOLK

But for Dylan, rock and roll was about to become eclipsed by a whole new intoxicating sound. In the Nobel Prize lecture, Dylan recalled a few days after seeing



## KINDRED SPIRITS

### HOW DYLAN BECAME ENTRANCED BY BOHEMIAN FREE-SPIRITED HIGH SCHOOL GIRLFRIEND, ECHO HELSTROM

In a feature by Matt Steichen in the *Minnesota Star Tribune* in 2018, Dylan biographer Toby Thompson sheds light on Dylan and Echo Elstrom’s relationship. “She was an important figure in his life, there’s no question about that. I don’t know what he would have done if he didn’t find someone like himself. She had that spirit, that electricity that was comparable to his. She was wild in a way that he wanted to be wild. She would go off with her girlfriends in the summer and hitchhike all over the place, have adventures. She was kind of an outsider and from the wrong side of the tracks, and [Dylan] was certainly attracted to that. In Hibbing, she was as bohemian as anybody in Greenwich Village.”



Holly – possibly even the day of Holly’s fatal plane crash – that somebody handed him an album by Lead Belly with the song *Cotton Fields*. Dylan described listening to the song as like an explosion going off. This record led him to discover other artists on the same label such as Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee and the New Lost City Ramblers. This was the folk music that would propel Dylan in a whole new direction and become a cornerstone for his future work.

“That record changed my life right then and there. Transported me into a world I’d never known. It was like an explosion went off. Like I’d been walking in darkness and all of a sudden the darkness was illuminated. It was like somebody laid hands on me. I must have played that record 100 times.”

Dylan explained this conversion to folk in a 1985 interview with journalist Cameron Crowe. “The thing about rock ‘n’ roll is that for me anyway it wasn’t enough... There were great catchphrases and driving pulse rhythms... but the songs weren’t serious or didn’t reflect life in a realistic way. I knew that when I got into folk music, it was more of a serious type of thing. The songs are filled with more despair, more sadness, more triumph, more faith in the supernatural, much deeper feelings.”

### CHANGING HIS NAME

In 1959, Dylan graduated from Hibbing High and that same year, as Elston Gunn, he toured briefly as a pianist with pop star Bobby Vee. In September 1959, Dylan enrolled at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis to study art and liberal arts/science. Dylan began to perform at the Ten O’Clock Scholar, a coffee house near campus, and became involved in the folk music circuit

## “YOU CALL YOURSELF WHAT YOU WANT TO CALL YOURSELF. THIS IS THE LAND OF THE FREE”


in Dinkytown, a bohemian district that would become a counter culture epicentre.

It wasn’t until August 1962 that Robert Allen Zimmerman legally changed his name to Bob Dylan, but on campus at the University of Minnesota, he was already using his new name and assuming a new persona.

In *Chronicles: Volume One*, Dylan wrote that he considered taking the name ‘Dillon’ before unexpectedly seeing the poems of Dylan Thomas and adopting that spelling instead.

In May 1960, towards the end of his first year, Dylan dropped out of college. He had already mapped out his future and it didn’t involve any lectures.

By the end of January 1961, he was in New York’s Greenwich Village, empowered by a new persona and a new name. As he wrote in his autobiography:

“You’re born, you know, the wrong names, wrong parents. I mean, that happens. You call yourself what you want to call yourself. This is the land of the free.” 

**BELOW** A young Zimmerman at the tender age of 15



IMAGES Alamy, Getty





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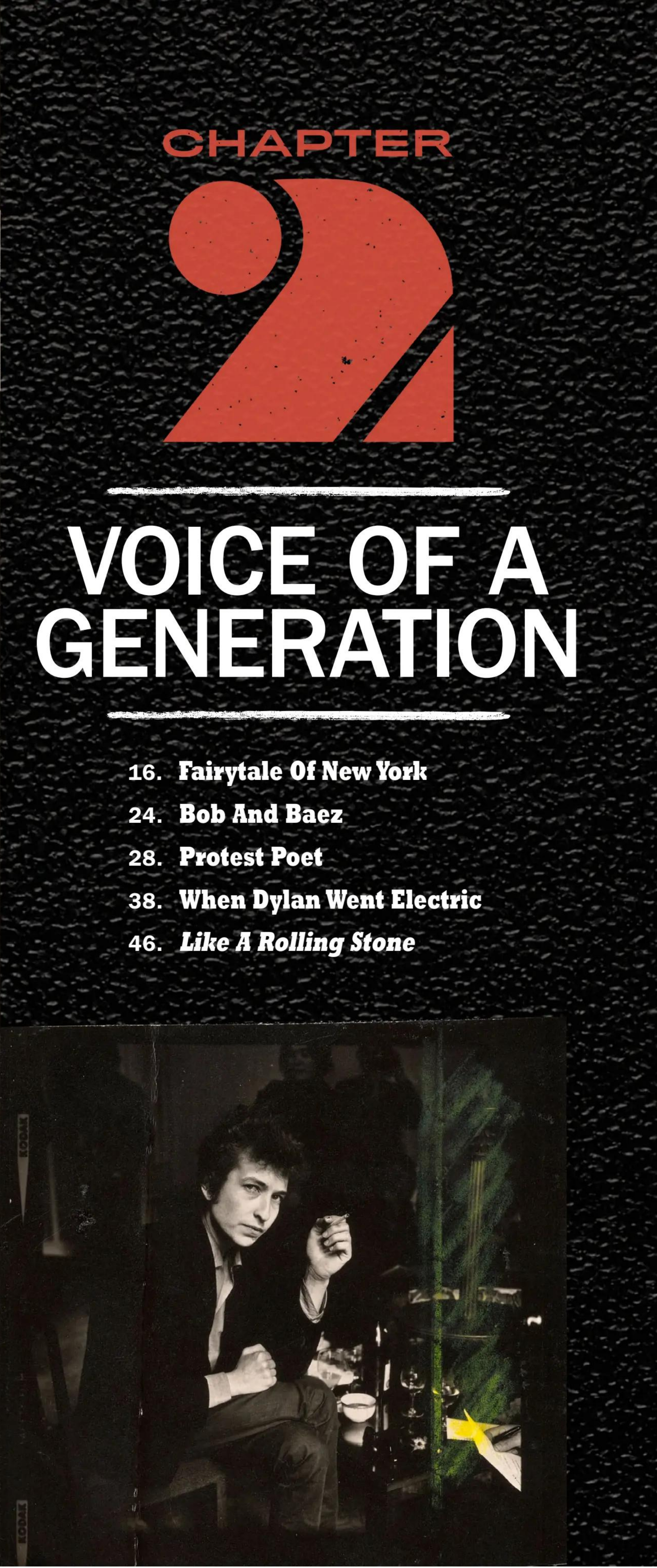


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CHAPTER

2

# VOICE OF A GENERATION

- 16. **Fairytale Of New York**
- 24. **Bob And Baez**
- 28. **Protest Poet**
- 38. **When Dylan Went Electric**
- 46. ***Like A Rolling Stone***









# FAIRYTALE OF NEW YORK

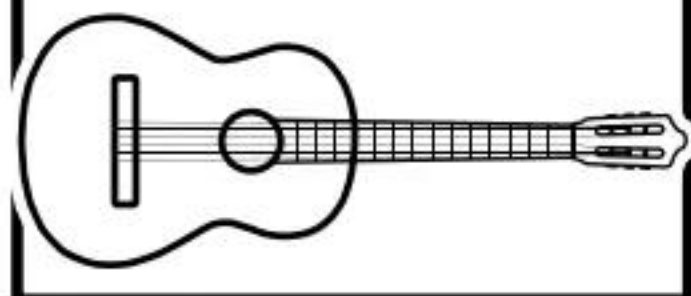
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THE GREENWICH VILLAGE FOLK SCENE WAS A  
CREATIVE AND COMMERCIAL SPRINGBOARD  
FOR BOB DYLAN, WHO WAS SOON BEING  
ACCLAIMED AS A UNIQUELY GIFTED ARTIST

**WORDS** Neil Crossley







**W**eather forecasters were calling it one of the most severe winters in living memory, and throughout Thursday 3 and Friday 4 February, 1961, a powerful blizzard left the entire Eastern third of the United States under a heavy blanket of snow. Over 17 inches fell on New York City, with drifts reaching 20 feet in some places. 100 people died and all transport juddered to a halt.

As someone who had grown up in the American midwest, Bob Dylan was accustomed to harsh weather. But even for him, this was extreme. Dylan had arrived in New York City on 24 January 1961, armed with his guitar and a set of songs, drawn by the vibrant Greenwich Village folk scene and committed to making his mark as a singer-songwriter.

"The cold was brutal, and every artery of the city was snow-packed," he wrote in his 2004 autobiography *Chronicles: Volume One*. "It wasn't money or love that I was looking for. I had a heightened sense of awareness, was set in my ways, impractical and a visionary to boot. My mind was strong like a trap, and I didn't need any guarantee of validity. I didn't know a single soul in this dark, freezing metropolis, but that was all about to change."

### SPIRITUAL HOME

Dylan made his debut performance in Greenwich Village on the day of his arrival in New York City, after driving from Minneapolis with fellow folk singer Fred Underhill and a young couple, a journey that took them 24 hours. Within hours of slamming the car door shut, Dylan was on stage playing harmonica at an open-mic session alongside Fred Neil and Karen Dalton at

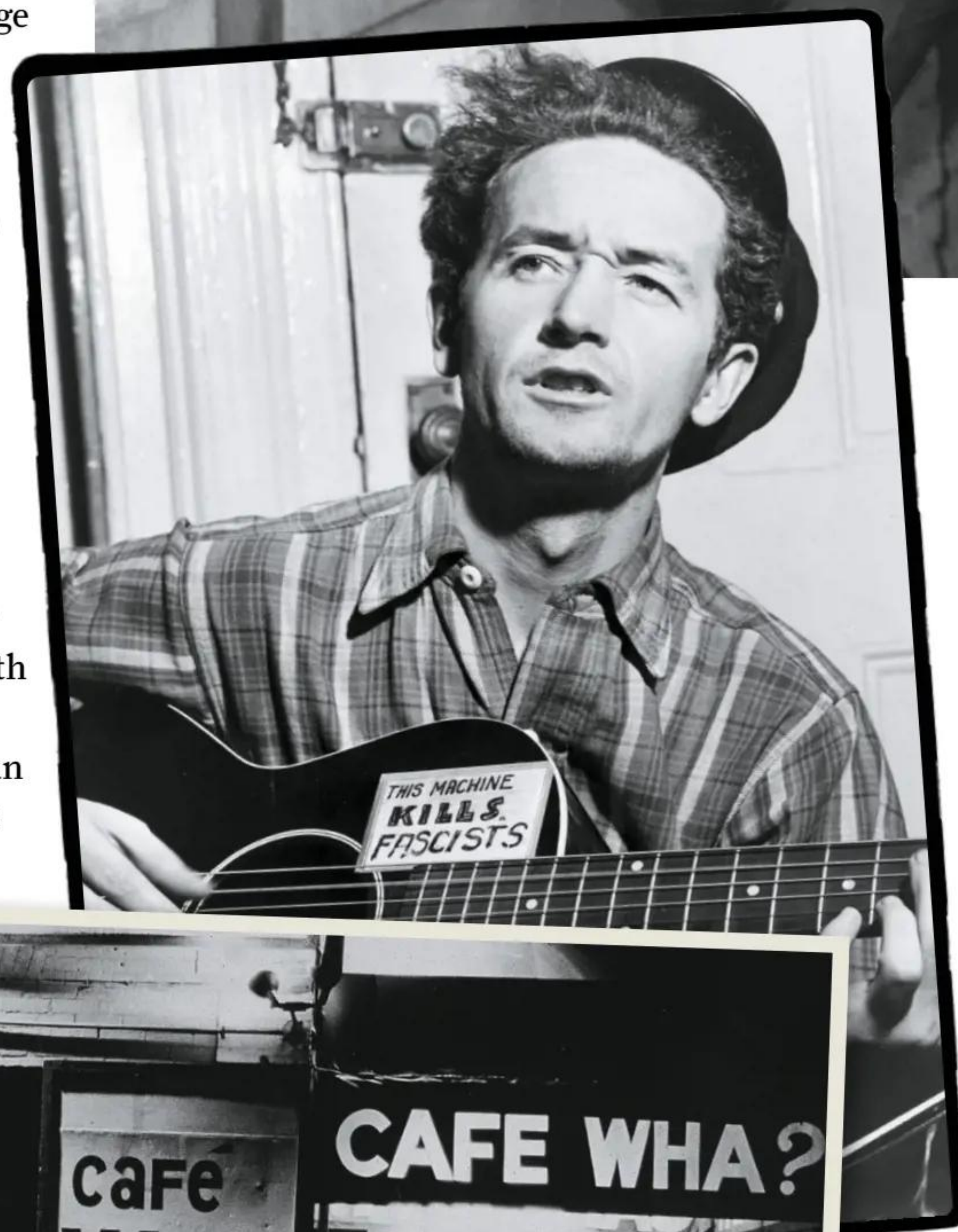
the Cafe Wha?, a small club at 115 MacDougal Street. Neil, the MC at the club, found out Dylan was a musician and invited him to come up and play something.

In his autobiography, Dylan recalls the Cafe Wha? as "a subterranean cavern, liquorless, ill-lit, low ceiling; like a wide dining hall with chairs and tables". By the dawn of the '60s, Greenwich Village had emerged as a spiritual home for the American folk revival, a haven of coffee houses and clubs where people could express their creativity, fuelled by social and political activism.

Dylan played at numerous venues around Greenwich Village such as the Gaslight Cafe and the Bitter End, befriending folk heavyweights from the scene such as Dave Van Ronk, Odetta, the New Lost City Ramblers and Irish musicians the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem.

### MEETING WOODY

A few days after arriving in New York City, Dylan went to visit his idol, folk legend Woody Guthrie, who was bedridden with Huntington's disease in a New Jersey psychiatric hospital. Dylan had been obsessed with Guthrie







## “I DIDN’T KNOW A SINGLE SOUL IN THIS DARK, FREEZING METROPOLIS, BUT THAT WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE”

ever since September 1960, when he borrowed a copy of Guthrie’s autobiography *Bound For Glory* from a classmate at the University of Minnesota.

“The songs themselves had the infinite sweep of humanity in them,” Dylan wrote in *Chronicles: Volume One*. “[He] was the true voice of the American spirit. I said to myself I was going to be Guthrie’s greatest disciple.”

By the time he arrived in New York, Dylan was mimicking Guthrie’s speech patterns, and told the audience at an early Cafe Wha? performance: “I been travellin’ around the country, followin’ in Woody Guthrie’s footsteps...”

**ABOVE** Counter-clockwise, from top: the Gaslight Coffee Shop in New York’s Greenwich Village; Woody Guthrie, one of Dylan’s early heroes; the Cafe Wha? nightclub, also of Greenwich Village

When they met that first time, Guthrie reportedly handed Dylan a card that said ‘I ain’t dead yet’. Dylan also played Guthrie a new song called *Song to Woody*, one of only two original compositions that made it onto his 1962 self-titled debut album.

### DEFINING MOMENT

Dylan’s first official solo show took place on 12 April 1961 at Gerde’s Folk City, at 11 West 4th St, supporting blues great John Lee Hooker. It was at Gerde’s where he debuted *Blowin’ in the Wind* and where he met Joan Baez, a rising star known as the ‘Queen of Folk’. Dylan was allegedly keen to impress

her. Baez would help launch his career, inviting him to appear on stage with her and even admonishing any fans who found his voice unpalatable.

On 29 September 1961, Dylan returned to Gerdes for a performance that was reviewed by Robert Shelton of *The New York Times*. It was a defining moment that would cement Dylan’s reputation.

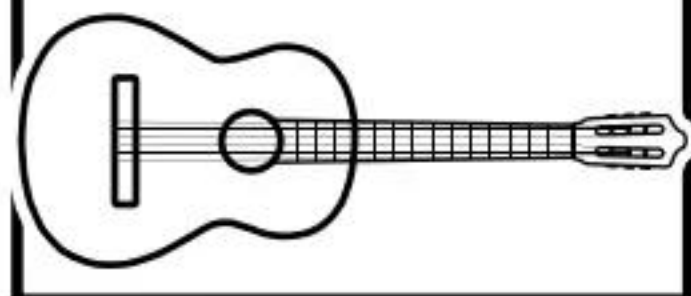
“Mr. Dylan’s highly personalised approach toward folk song is still evolving,” wrote Shelton. “He has been sopping up influences like a sponge. At times, the drama he aims at is off-target melodrama and his stylisation threatens to topple over as a mannered excess. But if not for every taste, his music-making has the mark of originality and inspiration, all the more noteworthy for his youth. Mr. Dylan is vague about his antecedents and birthplace, but it matters less where he has been than where he is going, and that would seem to be straight up.”

### MAJOR INFLUENCE AND MUSE

In the summer of 1961, Dylan met artist, activist, future girlfriend and muse, Suze Rotolo, at an all-day folk concert in a New York church. Rotolo was the 19-year-old woman on the cover of the 1963 album *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, walking down a snow-covered Greenwich Village street on the arm of the 21-year-old Dylan. Rotolo would inspire some of his greatest early songs such as *Boots of Spanish Leather*, *One Too Many Mornings*, *Tomorrow Is a Long Time* and *Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right*.

In December 1961, Dylan moved into Rotolo’s apartment at 161 West 4th Street in the West Village. Their relationship would last for three years and end with a protracted and ➡





painful break-up. “Right from the start I couldn’t take my eyes off her,” Dylan wrote of their first encounter. “She was fair skinned and golden haired... We started talking and my heart started to spin.”

Rotolo had a profound influence on Dylan, introducing him to the work of artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Cézanne, and poets such as Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud. For four decades after their breakup, Rotolo chose not to speak of their relationship, but after agreeing to be interviewed for Martin Scorsese’s 2005 documentary *No Direction Home*, Rotolo – who died in 2011 – wrote her own acclaimed memoir *A Freewheelin’ Time*, published in 2008.

### DEBUT RELEASE

In September 1961, the same month as Shelton’s glowing

**RIGHT** Bob and girlfriend Suze Rotolo in September 1961



New York Times review, revered producer John Hammond Jr. signed Dylan to Columbia Records and the pair began work on his self-titled debut album.

Columbia’s 7th Avenue studio was the setting for the recording, which took place over three afternoons in November 1961. The album consists of traditional folk, blues and gospel covers with just two original compositions *Talkin’ New York* and *Song to Woody*.

There’s a real grit and attack to Dylan’s delivery on the album, with his aggressive raspy vocal delivery and guitar style both strongly emulating Woody Guthrie’s landmark ’40s and early-1950s recordings. There are also echoes of blues artists such as Blind Lemon Jefferson and Bukka White.

The album sold only 5,000 copies that year and just broke even, but it was a blueprint for what was to follow, and an album on which Dylan emerged as an artist unlike any other.

### LANDMARK SECOND ALBUM

In August 1962, Dylan signed a management contract with Albert Grossman, a mercurial figure with a confrontational personality who would remain his manager until 1970. “He was kind of like a Colonel Tom Parker figure,” recalled Dylan in Scorsese’s *No Direction*

*Home*; “you could smell him coming.”

From April 1962 to April 1963, Dylan undertook recording sessions that would yield his second album *The*

*Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, released on 27

May 1963.

*The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* is a landmark album, and one that established him as a songwriter without equal, such was its breadth of vision, imagination and skill. The protest songs such as *Blowin’ in the Wind*, *A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall* were the songs singled out for attention but tracks such as the whimsical *Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right* and the beautiful love song

## DRAMA DEBUT

### HOW BOB DYLAN CAME TO BE SELECTED FOR THE LEAD ROLE IN A BBC TV PRODUCTION

From December 1962 to January 1963, Dylan made his first trip to the UK to appear in a BBC play called *Madhouse on Castle Street*, directed by Philip Saville. The director had seen Dylan performing in New York City and cast him in the lead role although Dylan had no acting experience at all, and reportedly lacked the ability to learn his lines once rehearsals began. He was recast in a role that enabled him to pretty much just play himself. At the conclusion of the play, Dylan performed *Blowin’ in the Wind*, his powerful, thought-provoking song about social injustice and war that became an anthem for the emerging civil rights and anti-war movements.

While he was in London, Dylan performed at a number of folk clubs, including The Troubadour, Les Cousins and Bunjies. Dylan also learned a range of material from UK folk artists such as Martin Carthy.







*Girl From the North Country* showcased Dylan's more tender, introspective side.

The album transformed the public perception of Bob Dylan, propelling him at the age of 22 from just another folk singer to a major artist of real creative merit and one who spoke for disaffected youth. It was an album that would go on to have a profound influence on other emerging artists of the age, such as The Beatles.

"We just played it, just wore it out," George Harrison told *Mojo* magazine in 1993. "The content of the song lyrics and just the attitude – it was incredibly original and wonderful".

### CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

By August 1963, Dylan and Joan Baez were prominent figures in the Civil Rights

**ABOVE** The civil rights march on Washington D.C., 28 August, 1963

**RIGHT** Baez and Dylan performing at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival

**BELOW** 1963's *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* and 1964's *The Times They Are A-Changin'*



Movement and sang together on 28 August 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom.

"I looked up from the podium and I thought to myself, 'I've never seen such a large crowd'," said Dylan in *No Direction Home*. I was up close when [Martin Luther King Jr.] was giving that speech. To this day, it still affects me in a profound way."

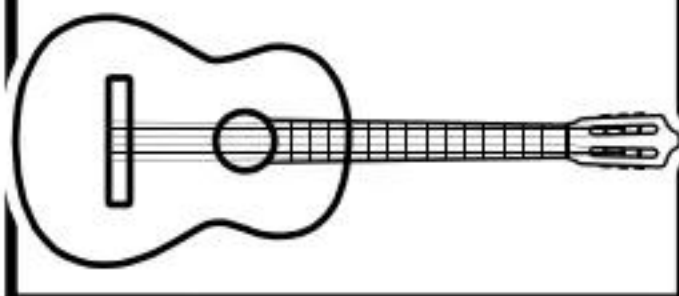
Dylan's third album *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, released on 10 February 1964, reflected his more political stance. The opening title

track was Dylan's direct attempt to write an anthem for the dramatically shifting social and cultural climate of the times.

"This was definitely a song with a purpose," Dylan told journalist Cameron Crowe in 1985. "It was influenced of course by the Irish and Scottish ballads. I wanted to write a big song, with short, concise verses that piled up on each other in a hypnotic way. The Civil Rights Movement and the folk music movement were pretty close for a while and allied together at that time."

The song reached number 9 in the UK when released ➡





as a single and contained the iconic lines: "Come mothers and fathers throughout the land/ And don't criticise what you can't understand."

The songs *North Country Blues* and *Ballad of Hollis Brown* focused on the desperation and poverty of miners and farm workers in the US, while *Only a Pawn in Their Game* is a powerful and emotive song about the assassination of civil rights activist Medgar Evers in Jackson, Miss. on 12 June, 1963.



By contrast, the beautifully imagined love ballad *Boots of Spanish Leather*, believed to be inspired by Suze Rotolo, and the gentle, melancholic *One Too Many Mornings* are two classics that ooze quality and songwriting craftsmanship. *The Times They Are A-Changin'* may not have the breadth and richness of its predecessor *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, but it is an undeniably impressive collection of songs.


### MOVING ON

But by the time the album was released in February 1964, Dylan was already moving on. He felt constrained and manipulated by the folk and protest movements and shifted away from political songs towards more personal and experimental material.

He showcased this new direction on his fourth studio album *Another Side of Bob Dylan*,

recorded in a single evening on 9 June, 1964 and released on 8 August that same summer.

He unveiled some of the songs from this album in a four-song set at the annual Newport Folk Festival on 24-26 July, 1964, when he performed the album's tracks *All I Really Want to Do*, *To Ramona* and *Chimes of Freedom*, as well as a new song, *Mr. Tambourine Man*.

While many in the 15,000-strong audience embraced his emerging new style, those aligned with the more traditional folk music considered this to be an unwelcome departure. Like all the greatest and most gifted artists, Dylan's creative strength lay in his restless desire to challenge himself and to move forward. For him, the folk music world that had so inspired and enticed him back in 1960 was now proving to feel restrictive. By the end of 1964 he would be on a fresh creative trajectory that would open up whole new sonic and stylistic vistas, yet challenge and ultimately alienate some of his most fervent admirers like never before. 

**BELOW** From left: A poster for Gerdes Folk City, New York, 1961; Dylan (from behind) at the Newport Folk Festival, 1963







# Another Side of BOB DYLAN

DESPITE BEING ONE OF DYLAN'S MOST UNDERRATED ALBUMS, **ANOTHER SIDE OF BOB DYLAN** CHANGED THE DIRECTION OF HIS SOUND FOREVER – AND ARGUABLY INVENTED FOLK-ROCK IN THE PROCESS



**Another Side of Bob Dylan** is one of the most underrated – and arguably the most important – of his career.

Having been crowned the reluctant king of the folk protest movement, Dylan rebelled against the rebellion, setting himself on an entirely new path altogether.

The 14 songs he recorded in one marathon session at New York's Columbia Studios on 9 June, 1964 reflected a more poetic vision of the world around him; the songs were less socially conscious and more introspective than on previous records.

On August 8, 1964, barely two months after the recording had taken place, Columbia released 11 of the songs as his fourth album. Three songs from the session did not make the final cut: *Denise Denise*, *Mr. Tambourine Man* (Dylan felt the song was special and the performance did not do it justice) and *Mama, You Been on My Mind*.

While it is only *Chimes of Freedom* which contained the kind of songwriting that had led to him being dubbed the voice of his generation, Dylan had not abandoned the protest song entirely. Rather, he had changed

focus. *I Shall Be Free No. 10* and *Motorpsycho Nitemare* were both talking blues songs – harking back to his early career – that poked fun at his fame and the increasing paranoia of mainstream America towards the rising counterculture.

Despite writing plenty of songs about relationships in the past, Dylan was now exploring the subject in greater depth. In the lead track, *All I Really Want to Do*, Dylan lists the things he doesn't want from a relationship: "I ain't lookin' to block you up, shock or knock or lock you up/ Analyse you, categorise you, finalise you or advertise you..." All he wants to do is be friends.

Elsewhere, *My Back Pages* – with the line "I was so much older then/I'm younger than that now" – reflected that Dylan had been taking things too seriously and it was time to move on.

When Dylan debuted a number of the songs at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, it initiated a round of controversy that foreshadowed the firestorm that would ensue the following year when Dylan would 'go electric'. That set – backed by members of the Butterfield Blues Band – would have the force of a nuclear blast; shattering the

established interpretation of the role of pop music. While this was nothing compared to what would follow, the folk community Dylan had once led was left feeling alienated.

In an open letter to Dylan, printed in the November 1964 issue of the influential folk publication *Sing Out!*, Editor Irwin Silber urged Dylan to return to his old self, rather than relate to "a handful of cronies behind the scene". But in typical fashion, Dylan was way ahead of his time. Silber had missed the point.

Three songs from *Another Side of Bob Dylan* – *Spanish Harlem Incident*, *All I Really Want to Do* and *Chimes of Freedom* – were covered by the Byrds on their 1965 debut, *Mr. Tambourine Man*. The Byrds would also tackle *My Back Pages* two years later. Meanwhile, the Turtles had their break by placing *It Ain't Me, Babe* in the Top 10. And that's why this album so important: it invented folk-rock.

Over the next two years, Dylan would release three albums that changed the course of songwriting forever: *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965), and *Blonde on Blonde* (1966). But it was *Another Side of Bob Dylan* that started this journey.



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IMAGES Adobe Stock, Getty



# BOB AND BAEZ

THEY MADE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC  
TOGETHER, THEN FAME  
GOT IN THE WAY

WORDS Bill DeMain

**I**n 1961, when Joan Baez met Bob Dylan at Gerde's Folk City in New York, she was 20, and he was 19. A year apart in age, but worlds apart in their careers. Thanks to her breakout performance at the Newport Folk Festival, a debut album full of interpretations of traditional songs and a *Time Magazine* cover story, Baez was the rising star of the folk scene.

Dylan was the new kid – or as Baez affectionately described him, “a ragamuffin”.

“My mothering instincts all poured out because he was a scruffy little mess,” she said in the 2009 documentary *How Sweet the Sound*. “It was just that initial blast of talent, his strangeness and mystique. He was already a legend by the time he got his foot into Gerde’s.”

Dylan was equally smitten. “She had that heart-stopping

soprano voice,” he said in that documentary. “I couldn’t get it out of mind. Joanie was at the forefront of a new dynamic in American music.”

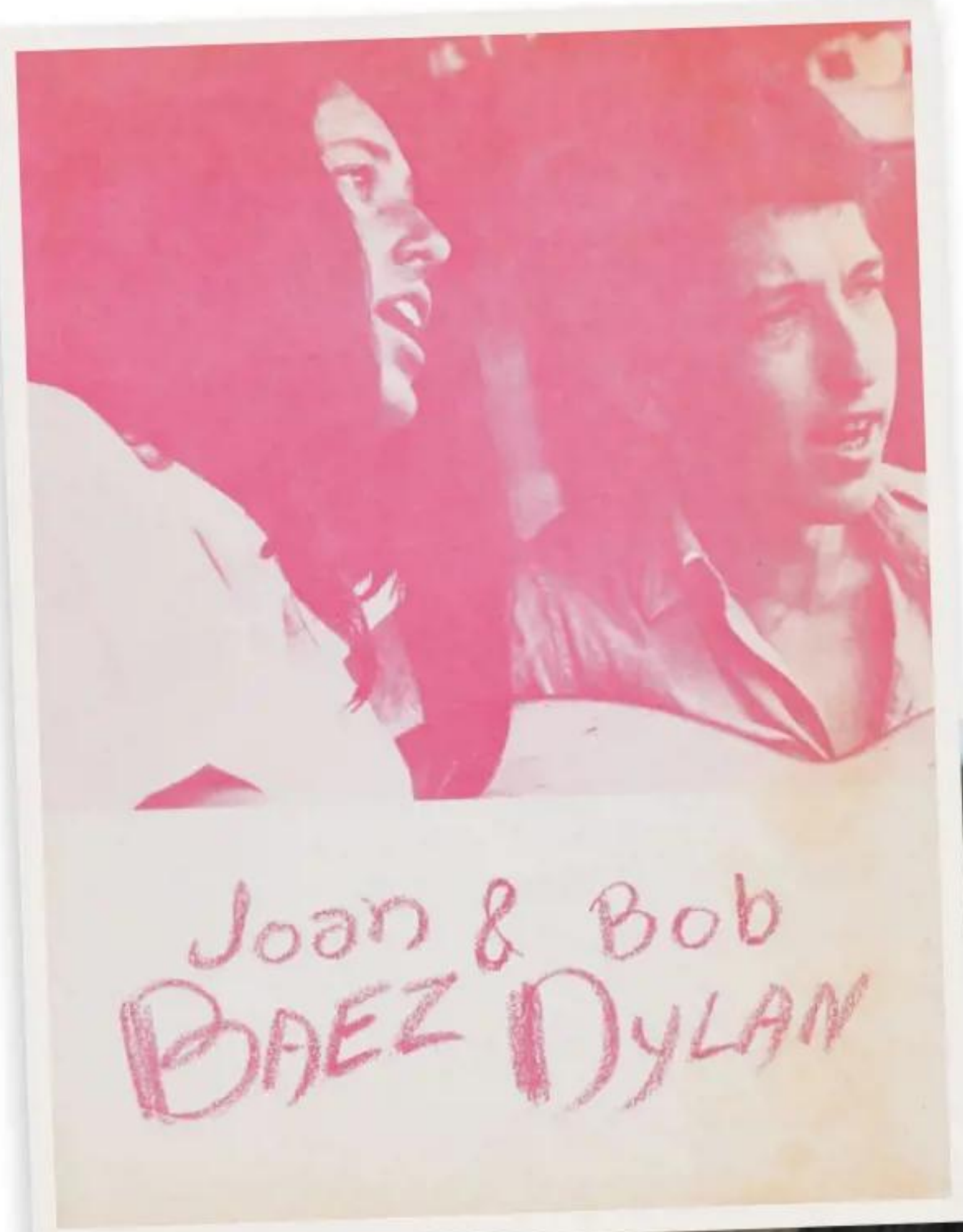
In 1962, Baez invited him to open for her on tour, and soon they were doing duets during her set. “I always liked singing and playing with her,” Dylan said. “Our voices blended well. We could sing just about [anything], and make it make sense.” ➔

**LEFT** A poster for Dylan and Baez’s 1964-65 East Coast tour

**BELOW** Monica Barbaro and Timothée Chalamet as Joan and Bob in James Mangold’s 2024 film *A Complete Unknown*

**OPPOSITE** The real Bob and Joan, Embankment Gardens, London, 27 April 1965

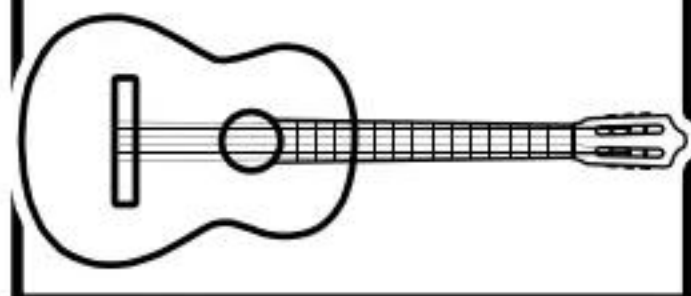
“SHE HAD THAT HEART-STOPPING  
SOPRANO VOICE. I COULDN’T  
GET IT OUT OF MY MIND”











**“JOAN IS A TRULY  
INDEPENDENT SPIRIT; NOBODY  
CAN TELL HER WHAT TO DO.  
I LEARNED A LOT FROM HER”**



Initially, their relationship was musical, as both had romantic partners. But watching clips of them together at the time, singing *With God On Our Side* and *It Ain't Me, Babe*, you can feel the spark; Dylan's usual inscrutable expression all lovestruck smiles (and captured beautifully in James Mangold's Bob Dylan biopic *A Complete Unknown* from last year, with Timothée Chalamet as Dylan and Monica Barbaro as Baez).

“I was crazy about him,” Baez told Dan Rather in an interview. “He was as taken with my music as I was with his. We were an item and we were having wonderful fun.”

Though they never lived together, they were entrenched in each other's lives. Baez once described a typical scene at his apartment, of her “feeding him salad and red wine while he wrote songs like ticker tape.”

One of those songs, *She Belongs to Me*, from 1965's *Bringing It All*

**ABOVE** Joan and Bob performing during a civil rights rally on 28 August, 1963 in Washington D.C.

**LEFT** Baez and Dylan on stage in Providence, Rhode Island, on 4 November, 1975 as part of Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue tour

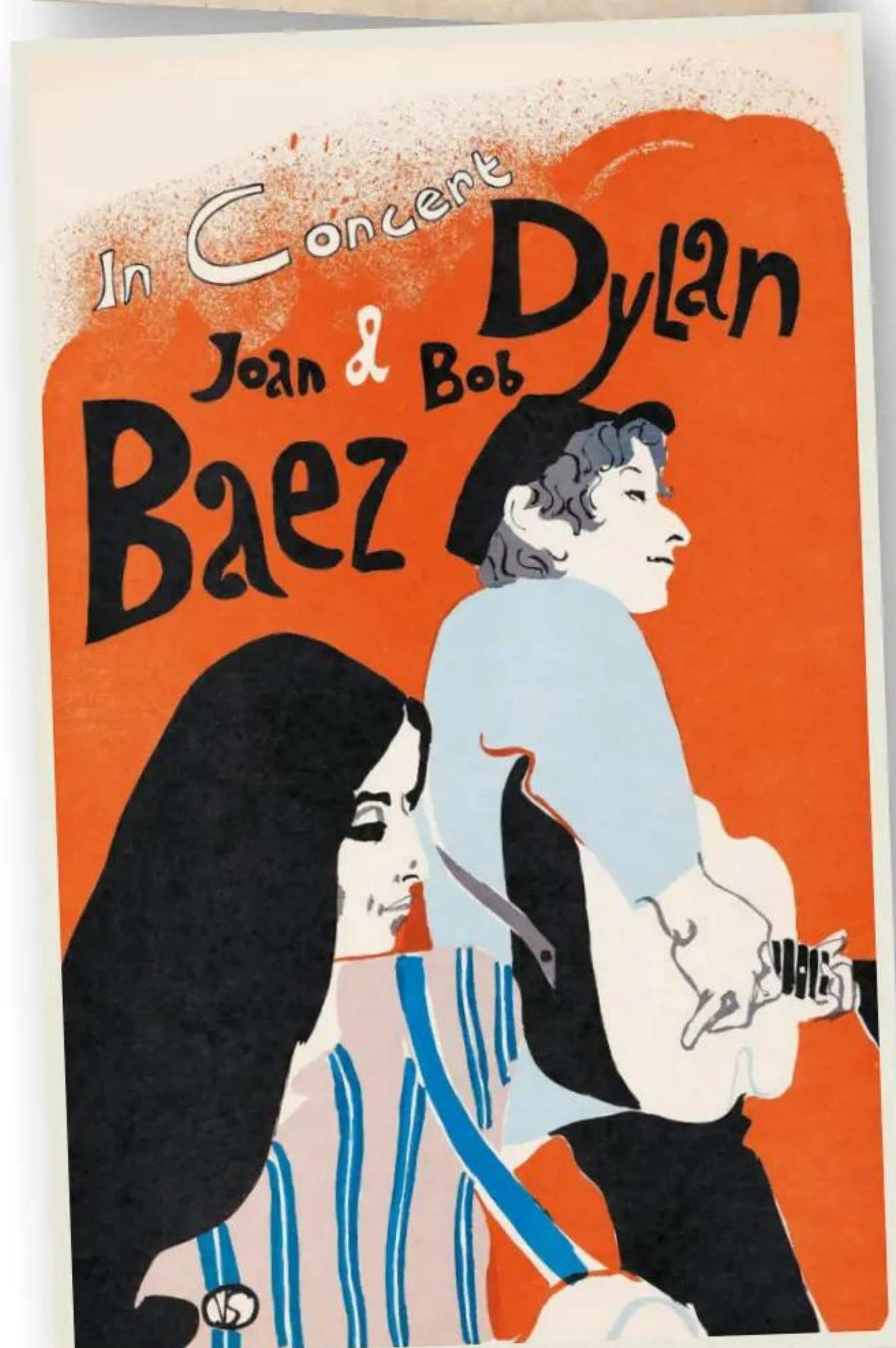
*Back Home* album, was a paean to Baez's beauty and strength. With its opening lines “She's got everything she needs/She's an artist, she don't look back,” it had the feel of an omen.

For a year and a half, their young lives dovetailed in harmonic bliss. But as Dylan's star rose, and his fame began to rival The Beatles, he pivoted away from folk music towards rock. And Baez got left behind. “We were in a bubble and didn't last,” Baez told Rather. “In the



beginning, I had a kind of claim on him. Later on, I was just part of the pack.”

Being a rock star was one thing, but add in “the voice of his generation” tag and Dylan felt overwhelmed. “Having these colossal accolades and titles – they get in the way,” he said. In 1965, when Baez joined him for a tour of the UK, the Dylanmania had turned him remote and cold,



hiding behind his shades and cryptic remarks. There were no more duets. The days of red wine and ticker tape were over. Baez later called her experience on the tour “totally demoralizing.”

“I was just trying to deal with the madness that had become my career,” Dylan said. “Unfortunately, she got swept along and I felt very bad about it. I was sorry to see our relationship end.”

Adding to the betrayal, a few months later, Dylan married Sara Lownds, who was pregnant with his child. If Dylan had a gift for moving on in both his artistic and personal life, it took Baez much longer to process the break-up.

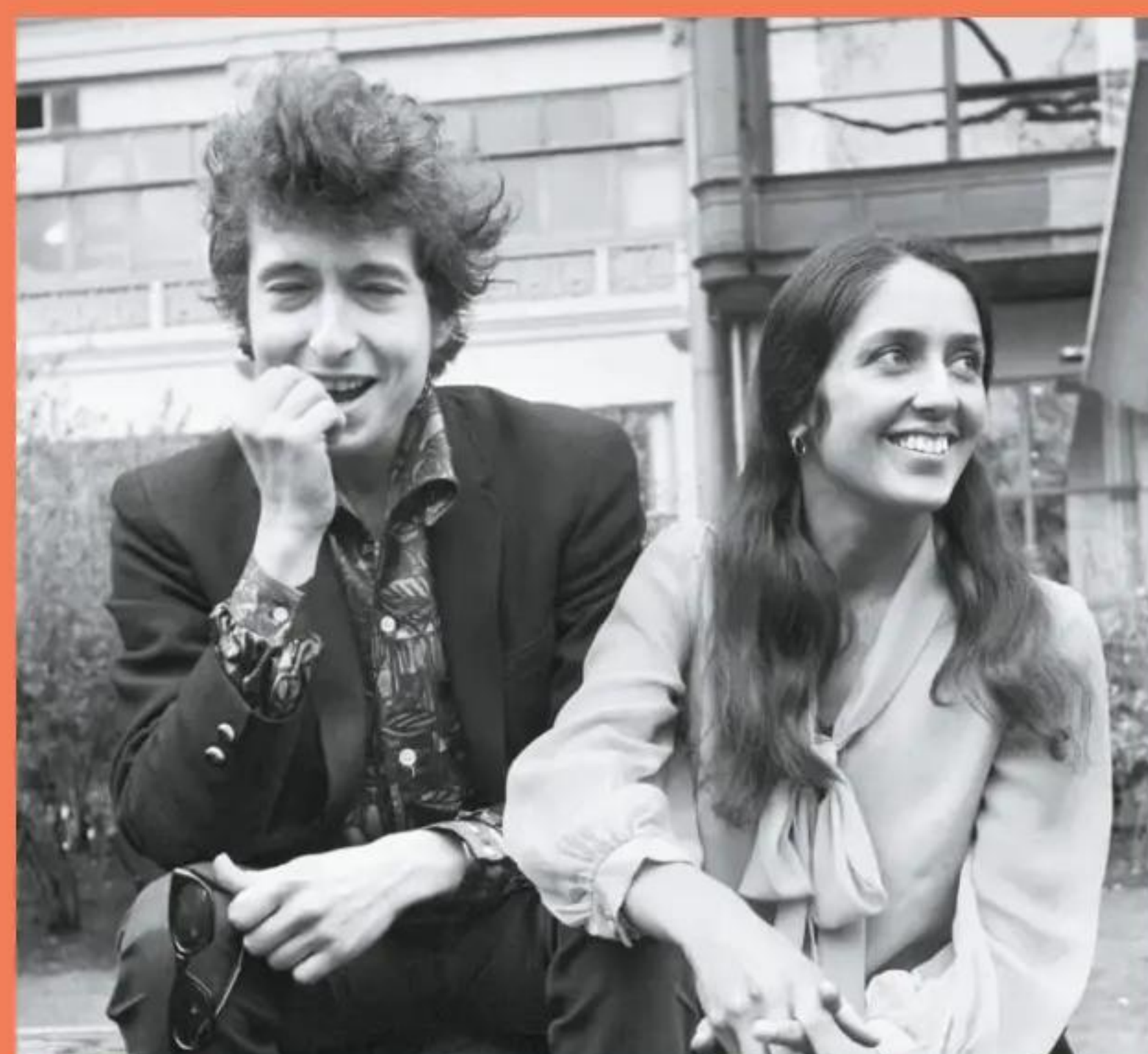
It would be ten years before they were in each other’s lives again, when Dylan invited her to be part of his Rolling Thunder Revue. She duetted with him on two songs whose titles seemed like summaries of their relationship – *Never Let Me Go* and *I Shall Be Released*, and in keeping with that, she sang her latest hit, *Diamonds and Rust*. The footage from the concert film shows that they still enjoyed each other’s company, but as Baez told *People* magazine, they “never truly reconnected”.

It wasn’t until decades later, when she was commissioned to paint a portrait of the young Dylan that Baez finally found “total forgiveness.” She told *People*, “I put his music on and I just dissolved into tears. When I was through with the painting, I had no animosity left. None. It’s remained that way.”

As for Dylan, in 2015, at a Music Cares event in Baez’s honour, he said: “Joan is as tough-minded as they come. A truly independent spirit, nobody can tell her what to do if she doesn’t want to do it. I learned a lot of things from her. For her kind of love and devotion, I could never repay that back.”

## DIAMONDS AND RUST

BAEZ’S SIGNATURE SONG  
IS ALL ABOUT BOB



In 1974, Joan Baez was working on a new song “about memories”. It was called *Diamonds and Rust* – a poetic way to contrast the shining moments of a relationship with its eventual decay. Almost on cue, she got an out-of-the-blue phone call from Dylan. They reminisced and had a bit of guarded back-and-forth catch-up, as exes do. But the memories the conversation stirred brought Baez’s song into sharp focus, with such vivid couplets as:

“Our breath comes out white clouds  
Mingles and hangs in the air  
Speaking strictly for me  
We both could have died then and there”

*Diamonds and Rust* became her biggest hit, reaching #35 on the Billboard Top 40. And Baez sang it on the Rolling Thunder Revue in 1975 (though she denied Dylan the satisfaction of thinking he was the inspiration, telling him she’d written it for her husband). Decades later, after she’d acknowledged the song’s origins, Dylan said: “I love that song. To be included in something that Joan had written, whew... I mean to this day, it still impresses me.”

**LEFT** From top: A concert poster for The Rolling Thunder Revue tour, “starring”

Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Jack Elliott and Bob Neuwirth, 1975; A Bob Dylan & Joan

Baez 1965 concert poster designed by folk musician and painter Eric Von Schmidt

IMAGES Alamy, Getty







# PROTEST POET

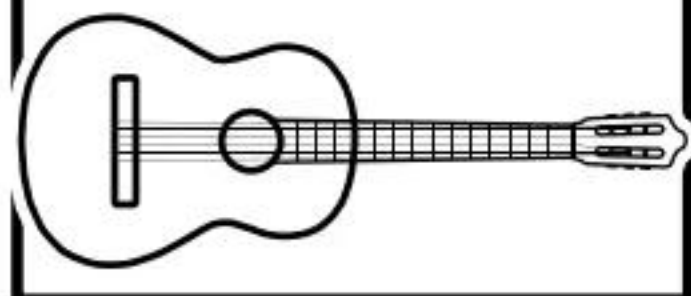
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DYLAN MIGHT HAVE FELT UNDESERVING OF HIS PROTEST SINGER CREDENTIALS, BUT THROUGH A RAIN OF RUBBER BULLETS, MANY REMEMBER HIS SONGS AS THE ENERGISING SOUNDTRACK TO AN ERA OF PROTEST, BRUTALITY, AND ABOVE ALL, CHANGE

WORDS Kate Puttick







**W**as there ever a candidate more deserving of the award for most contrarian artist in popular music than Dylan in his 1960s protest years?

“I don’t write protest songs,” he once told a reporter. “I just react.”

As we know from his famous Newport Folk Festival episode, at certain points in the ’60s his hatred for the label “protest singer” was nearly visceral.

In this section we will not argue for or against Dylan’s own perception of his musicianship. His ability to embody different forms of songwriting speaks for itself: he said it best himself in 2020 with the name of his song *I Contain Multitudes*, and who can argue with that?

What is instead worth highlighting are the very real achievements he made in the field of politicised popular music – whether he saw it that way or not.

### IRONS IN THE FIRE

Putting a start date on Dylan’s transition into a protest singer is a difficult task. The awakening of his consciousness of societal ills appears to have started young. Much has been made of the half truths he often disseminated about his early life – the tall tales of touring the countryside as a ragamuffin circus kid, hitching rides on trains and learning blues from those on the musical frontline. It’s often implied these lies were told to obfuscate the boring reality of his true middle class upbringing, incompatible with the credentials needed for protest.

Yet many would also point out that ‘comfortable’ is not the whole story of his time in Hibbing, Minnesota.

Firstly, with paternal grandparents who had had to

leave their native Ukraine during Russian antisemitic pogroms at the turn of the 20th century, and a family who continued their Jewish traditions well into Dylan’s youth, it’s fair to say that the young musician would have been well aware of the cruelties of world politics from an early age, by osmosis.

There is little specific reference to his Jewishness in his songs (other than in the often-assumed pro-Israel sentiment of his somewhat controversial ’80s song *Neighbourhood Bully*). However, he retained spiritual and cultural links with his family’s religion

**ABOVE** Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Rosa Parks seated on stage behind the podium by the Washington Monument for The Great March organised by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin

**RIGHT** A still from Ang Lee’s 2009 film *Taking Woodstock*, in which a fictional fan at the 1969 festival pleads for Dylan to make an appearance

throughout his life – and his sorrow and frustration at the treatment of Jewish people is evident in songs like *With God On Our Side*, with its bitterly sung sentiment that “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”.

Secondly, while his midwest hometown had its affluent corners, this was still a deeply industrial, in places downright bleak part of the world, where inequalities were stark. Hibbing was the home of the Hull- ➡

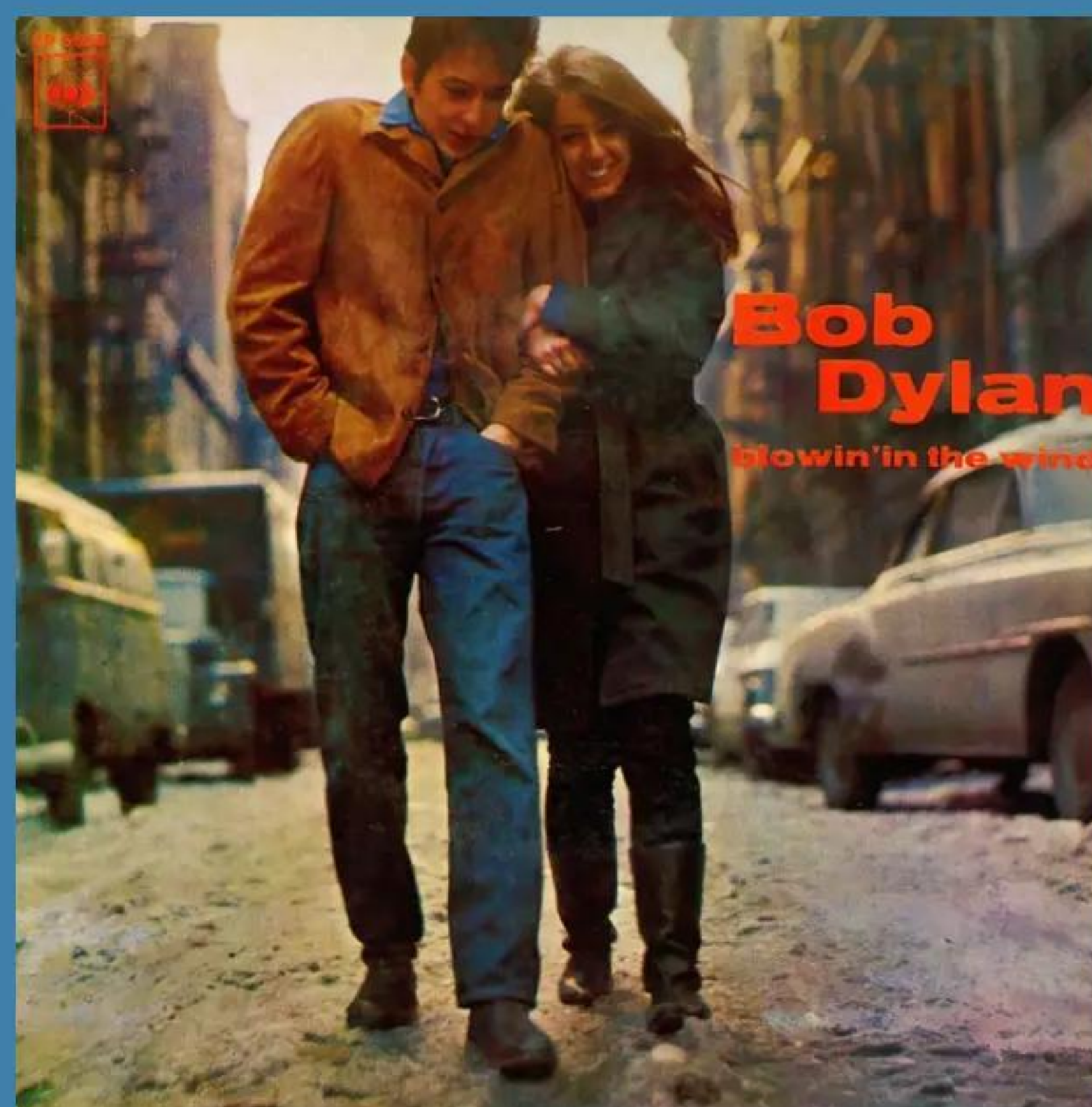






## BLOWIN' IN THE WIND (1963)

THIS ERA-DEFINING TRACK WAS LIFE AFFIRMING – BUT FAR FROM BREEZY



Heralded as the 14th best song of all time by *Rolling Stone* magazine, *Blowin' in the Wind* was not Dylan's first protest song, but its impact was felt immediately. For people listening to the album in succession from the still impressive, but arguably more naive first album, the seismic uptick in songwriting skill and confidence demonstrated in this album-opening track must have blown a few socks off.

Offhand, part of its success could certainly be said to lie in its universality, as opposed to other songs' esoteric meanings – and it has of course been heard at protests across the world since its inception. But we can't underplay what it meant to audiences at the time, either.

Its opening line "How many roads must a man walk down/Before you call him a man?" sums up one specific experience alone: that of the Black man in the segregation-era US, forever cursed with the slavery-recalling epithet "boy".

Based on the song *No More Auction Block For Me*, popularised by Odetta, the melody was, already well known. But with a new directness and simplicity of message, the song reached whole new audiences, both through Dylan's performances and those such as Peter, Paul and Mary's monumental cover of it just before Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial.



"I DON'T WRITE PROTEST SONGS," DYLAN ONCE TOLD A REPORTER. "I JUST REACT"



Rust-Mahoning Open Pit Iron Mines, at one point the US's most prodigious – and the sights and sounds of toil and hard labour were never far away.

As he wrote in his memoir, *Chronicles: Volume One*: “The heavy rumble of the foghorns (of the big lake freighters) dragged you out of your senses by the neck. Something out there [felt like it] could swallow me up.”

It was this landscape that Dylan would revisit in 1964's *North*

**RIGHT** Dylan's protest-singer idol Woodie Guthrie, with his famous anti-fascist guitar label

**BELOW** A protester in support of Palestine holds up a sign quoting Bob Dylan in London

## A HARD RAIN'S A-GONNA FALL (1963)

COLD WAR PARANOIA MEETS SONGWRITING SO 'EPIC' IT'S PRACTICALLY BIBLICAL

The origin story of this sixth track from *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* could not have been more evocative. The tale that Dylan once spun was of a night, during the terror of the Cuban Missile Crisis, spent fervently scribbling his best collected imagery into one heartfelt opus, lest there be no tomorrow. Certainly hugely powerful.

Alas, it turned out to be something of a mis-remembering – Dylan was later to contradict himself, and besides, as some Dylan historians pointed out, the chronology of when the song was written made that explanation unlikely. But nevertheless, the relentless onslaught of powerful Rimbaud-inspired imagery – built line-by-line as per its British folklore jumping-off point (the folk song *Lord Randall*) – is hard-hitting to say the least.

Another of Dylan's protest songs that somehow dodges the “finger-pointing” category, whether its ‘true’ meaning is about the now-sadly-periodic global threat of nuclear fallout, the summoning of Dante or Old Testament-style epic symbolism or simply the tenderness of a mother-son dialogue fraught with anguish, it's a song which has brought many – including poet Alan Ginsberg – to tears.

*Country Blues*: “Come gather ‘round friends and I’ll tell you a tale/Of when the red iron ore pits ran plenty/But the cardboard filled windows and old men on the benches/Tell you now that the whole town is empty.”

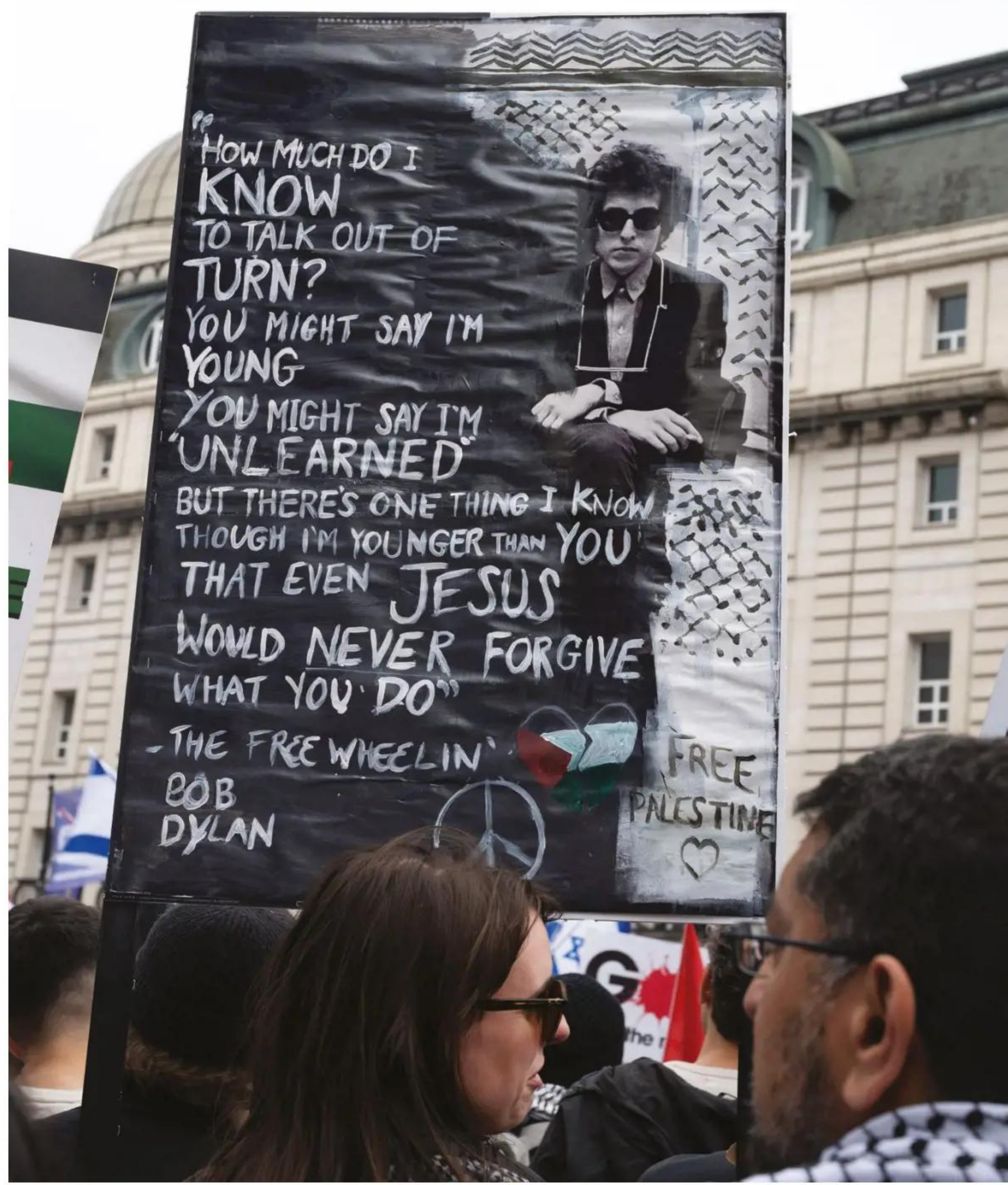
As a teenager, tasked by his appliance-store-owning father with repossessing goods from hard-up customers in the area, he saw biting poverty first-hand. As Dylan's teen girlfriend Echo Helstrom described it in *Chronicle*: “Bob and his friend would have to go over and take away all the stuff bought from Zimmermans. Load it onto the truck and just leave. Bob hated that; used to dread it worse than anything.”

Therefore, while his transition from Little Richard-loving teen to drop-out Woodie Guthrie fanboy may have seemed abrupt, it's likely that the latter's appeal awoke something in Dylan that had laid dormant for a while.

Woodie Guthrie was a posterboy of protest music



## IT'S LIKELY THAT GUTHRIE'S APPEAL AWOKE SOMETHING DORMANT IN DYLAN







who had seen the worst ravages of the Great Depression and encapsulated that pain in song form. But, it's sometimes argued, it wasn't just his political credentials that won him a young Dylan's heart. It was something in his itinerant, hard-living lifestyle – also mirrored in the bohemian ways of the Beat poets – that Dylan found appealing.

### FINDING HIS VOICE

In 1961, after only two years of college, Dylan ditched the

**ABOVE** Dylan with frequent collaborator and protest singer, Joan Baez

relatively bright lights of the Twin Cities, Minneapolis-St Paul for the full-beam dazzle of Greenwich Village, New York.

While one of his early acts was to make a pilgrimage to Woodie Guthrie's hospital bedside, where the older legend was convalescing as treatment for Huntington's disease, Dylan's early days in New York weren't necessarily characterised by political activism.

The charm of his early performances in folk clubs led

to a record deal, and on his first album, 1962's *Bob Dylan*, he offered the world a glimpse of his singular talent and voice, with rich scene-setting that hinted at the midwest American experience. But these were not protest songs.

Encounters with a series of New York residents would change all that. The first was Suze Rotolo, a bright, politically engaged young woman from a Communist family with sparkling activist credentials. ➡

## THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' (1964)

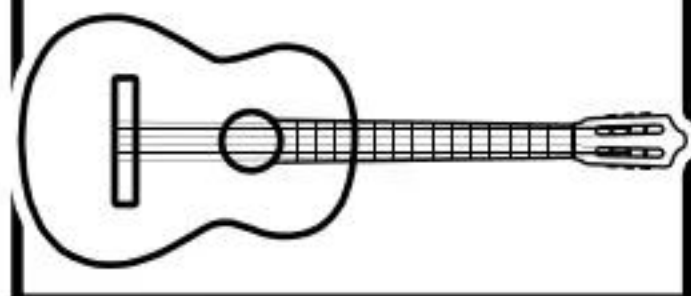
THE SONG THAT SOUNDTRACKED THE SAD NEWS OF JFK'S MURDER  
– AND THE WORLD'S MAJOR EVENTS THEREAFTER

Once again drawing upon the rallying structure of folk music, imploring various parties to "Come gather 'round" at the start of each new verse, Dylan has gone on record to say that *The Times They Are A-Changin'* was specifically meant to have a sense of purpose. Its release came at another time of seismic change in US politics; just after its debut, President John F Kennedy would be assassinated, leaving the whole world in a state of shock and stupefaction. The ways in which Dylan became intertwined in the lore of that moment in the weeks that followed are discussed elsewhere. But in the evening

that followed the murder itself, it was with this song that he nervously addressed a stunned crowd, expecting a backlash.

After all, the lyrics were (explicitly in one verse) damning of politicians of JFK's ilk – "Come senators, congressmen/Please heed the call/...he that gets hurt/Will be he who has stalled". But Dylan's instincts were off on this occasion. The crowd, like many after, were able to look past those dark allusions, to the timeless wisdom of the core message – surrounding the frustrations of intergenerational conflict that are often ignored at their peril. He "wanted to write a big song". That he did.





As can be seen from the iconic image of the two of them on the cover of *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, Dylan was undoubtedly smitten. However, the relationship arguably also provided the missing step in Dylan's careful adherence to the Guthrie career model. Rotolo's connections with CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, opened up opportunities. Dylan began to mine newspaper headlines for song ideas that would satisfy the editorial and show-booking policies of leftwing outlets. One particular magazine, *Broadside*, lapped up his contributions.

Another omnipresent well-known influence in Dylan's politics would be Pete Seeger. It's unclear if they met – as James Mangold's 2024 film *A Complete Unknown* suggests – at the bedside of Guthrie, or in the

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## SEEGER'S HELP IN INTRODUCING DYLAN TO NEW YORK'S LEFTIST SCENE WAS INVALUABLE

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salons of Greenwich Village, but Seeger would become an early champion of Dylan's, helping him in forging connections in the record industry and inviting him to perform at the Newport Folk Festival. Seeger, like Guthrie, was a troubadour-witness of the Depression, World War II and anti-Communist era. His battle scars were real – despite never having been a member of the communist party, he spent years fighting jail time for un-American activities. Affection for him as an artist and man of great principle is widely felt.

**ABOVE** Dylan performing on stage with Pete Seeger

Yet for all of Seeger's talent in music and advocacy, it appears he was more cerebral than a more visceral musician such as Dylan could rub along with, and this is perhaps where some people's suspicions of him as being too heavy-handed have come in. Nevertheless, Seeger's help in introducing Dylan to the movers and shakers of New York's leftist scene was invaluable.

Finally among the key triumvirate of peers in Dylan's activist era was Joan Baez. Often seen as the angelic voice translating 1960s unrest into



musical form, the Quaker-raised half-Scottish, half-Mexican New Yorker was also a steely, dedicated believer in social justice – a different kind of activist to Seeger, and with her new generation’s idiosyncrasies, but nonetheless her preferred performance spaces were at protests rather than concert halls.

The boundaries of all three of these political paramours and peers on Dylan’s early twenties would, as we would soon see, be tested and shaken – yet their seismic effect on his musicianship is undeniable.

### HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The protest songs seemed to veritably flow from Dylan’s typewriter in 1962.

*The Ballad of Emmett Till*, covering the racist Southern lynching of a young Black teen, *Talkin’ John Birch Society Blues*,

about a prominent communist-hunting political coven, *Oxford Town* about civil rights struggles, and *A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall* and *Let Me Die in My Footsteps* with their depictions of Cold War mentality.

By 1962, Dylan was already beginning to demonstrate signs of imposter syndrome towards his newfound success as a protest singer, but the listening public didn’t seem to agree. And they had their reasons – Dylan’s voice offered something different to those of older hands such as Seeger, with his less deft, less poetically gifted takes.

In 2025, eyes might rightly roll at the suggestion that the civil rights movement needed a provincial blow-in white boy to communicate the struggles of a beleaguered Black population. But in the early-1960s, to hear a voice such as his bridging the

gap between racially divided audiences with such aplomb and innate musicality was a rarity and even Black artists such as Sam Cooke went on record as having been moved by his work.

It was that spirit of respect that saw Dylan asked to contribute to some of the major events of the Civil Rights era, such as the SNCC-sponsored voter-

BELOW Dylan and one-time girlfriend Suze Rotolo



## THE LONESOME DEATH OF HATTIE CARROLL (1964)

### DYLAN’S HARD-HITTING REPORTAGE DOUBLED AS A CALL TO ARMS

It was on the way back from singing at the National March on Washington that Dylan happened to hear some news of the day. The details of the report, in *The Sun* newspaper, were later called sloppy journalism. But the core of it was hard-hitting. Just earlier, the case against one William Zanzinger, heir to a tobacco fortune, was heard in front of a jury. His apparent crime: causing the death, one night, of an African-American barmaid and mother of 10, Hattie Carroll. Her apparent crime: taking too long to prepare a drink for the drunken aristocrat, resulting in her receiving a litany of racist abuse, and a fatal blow to the head from his cane, triggering a haemorrhage, or as later reported, a stroke. Dylan set to work to chronicle the tale. Verse by verse he narrates events, characterising the unearned wealth of Zanzinger against the toil of silent, servile Carroll. But he ensures to punctuate each stanza with a warning: though they may be shocked, he implores the listener to hear the full story: “You who philosophise, disgrace and criticize all fears/Take the rag away from your face/Now ain’t the time for your tears.” However, reaching the final verse and revealing the true shocker – the miniscule six-month sentence handed down to Zanzinger – he relents: “Now *is* the time for your tears.” The song is not a sop written to sensationalise or scandalise, but a call to take action against the rigged, racialised, corrupt justice system of the land.





registration rally in Greenwood, Mississippi where he sang *Only a Pawn in Their Game*, about Medgar Evers' racist murder. He even appeared at the seismic August 1963 March on Washington. Dylan's offering to that event could even be considered two-fold on the basis

**OPPOSITE** Bob with his trusty harmonica, 1965

**BELOW** Dylan's show at Fort Collins, Colorado (now known as the Hard Rain concert) saw him perform some of his most notable protest songs

## SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK BLUES (1965)

MYSTERIOUS, CATCHY AND GENRE-BREAKING – THIS DITTY CHRONICLED GENERATIONAL WARFARE IN ICONIC, CONTRARIAN STYLE

Following a trajectory from the previous single – *The Times They Are A'Changin'* – to *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, you might try and draw a simplistic timeline. The jagged edged but still open-hearted earnestness of his earlier protest songs, with their traditional melodies, easily identifiable good guys and bad guys and a relatively slow pace sits almost awkwardly next to a more (at first glance) nihilistic, chaotic, Chuck Berry-channeling proto-rap, chock full of riddles and Kerouac-reminiscent drug allusions. But pay no mind to first impressions. The injustice-hating fire under Dylan is still burning; it's just been dowsed with the oil of disillusionment at the possibility of simple answers.

Assorted allusions include references to healthcare inequalities of the time: "The man in the trench coat, badge out, laid off/Says he's got a bad cough, wants to get it paid off." The cat and mouse game faced by protesters in the Civil Rights Movement: "Better stay away from those/That carry around a fire hose/Keep a clean nose/Watch the plain clothes." The lies of the American Dream: "20 years of schoolin' and they put you on the day shift."

But uniting it all is an increased sense of the generation gap, and the feeling that no matter how important the young person's cause it will be trampled upon: "Look out kid/It's somethin' you did/God knows when/But you're doin' it again." That sentiment clearly struck a chord – and morsels from the track's awe-inspiring word salad have found their way into the vocabulary like few others before it.

that his song *Blowin' in the Wind* was also played by Peter, Paul & Mary just before Martin Luther King Jr. gave the legendary "I Have a Dream" speech.

His credentials as a speaker of truth to power were only heightened by what was seen as a brave turn by Dylan in 1963, refusing to be censored in his appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Producers found fault with the selection of *Talkin' John Birch Society Blues* as Dylan's chosen track to perform, asking him to play something else – ironically, given the song's allusions to McCarthyite suppression.

### LONELY AT THE TOP

But for all the plaudits and enviable kudos, Dylan began to find himself more and more uncomfortable.

At the 1963 Tom Paine Award from the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee event, a drunken Dylan would lampoon the well-meaning – but in his opinion stuffy and out of touch – liberal white attendees, to their very faces, with added shock factor apologism for the crimes of Lee Harvey Oswald – and a good dose of ageism – thrown in to boot.

This would be the beginning of the end – in formal terms – of his place among the big protest singers of the '60s. In 1972, Baez expressed her heartbreak at Dylan's failure to translate his gifts into demonstrable political influence – while unconsciously also perhaps

giving a glimpse of the almost emotional blackmail he may have been under from his peers – in the song *To Bobby*: "You left us marching on the road and said how heavy was the load/The years were young, the struggle barely had its start/Do you hear the voices in the night, Bobby?/They're crying for you."

Of course, Dylan did not just abandon his heartfelt allegiance to the underdog in one fell swoop – with appearances at fundraisers for diverse causes stretching into the '80s and songs such as *Hurricane* in 1975 showing he had not lost his touch in journalistic storytelling. But from 1964's *Another Side of Bob Dylan* onwards, we get a clear and present message, best seen in the double entendres of *It Aint Me Babe* – he was not the voice of a generation people were looking for. 



## DYLAN REFUSED TO BE CENSORED WHEN PERFORMING ON THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW





## MAGGIE'S FARM (1965)

AN OVERLY-ANALYSED TANTRUM, OR AN IMPOSSIBLY ENERGISING CALL TO  
DOWN TOOLS FOR ALL BELEAGUERED EMPLOYEES THE WORLD OVER?

Much has been written about the schism-inducing, cataclysmic, friendship-ending qualities of Dylan's electric-guitar-laden performance of this song at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965. We'll never know if Pete Seeger truly threatened to end the show with an axe to the electrics. But one thing Seeger has since said, is that the song in question, *Maggie's Farm* – even if interpreted as a savage affront to him and his peers personally – was indeed

actually a favourite Dylan song of his. The lyrics themselves are certainly antagonistic. "Well, I try my best to be just like I am/But everybody wants you to be just like them/They say, 'Sing while you slave' and I just get bored/I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more." As a song expressing the pure hell of wage-slavery – even if it turns arguably whiny and tone-deaf to the real suffering of slaves working in those conditions – it is second to none.





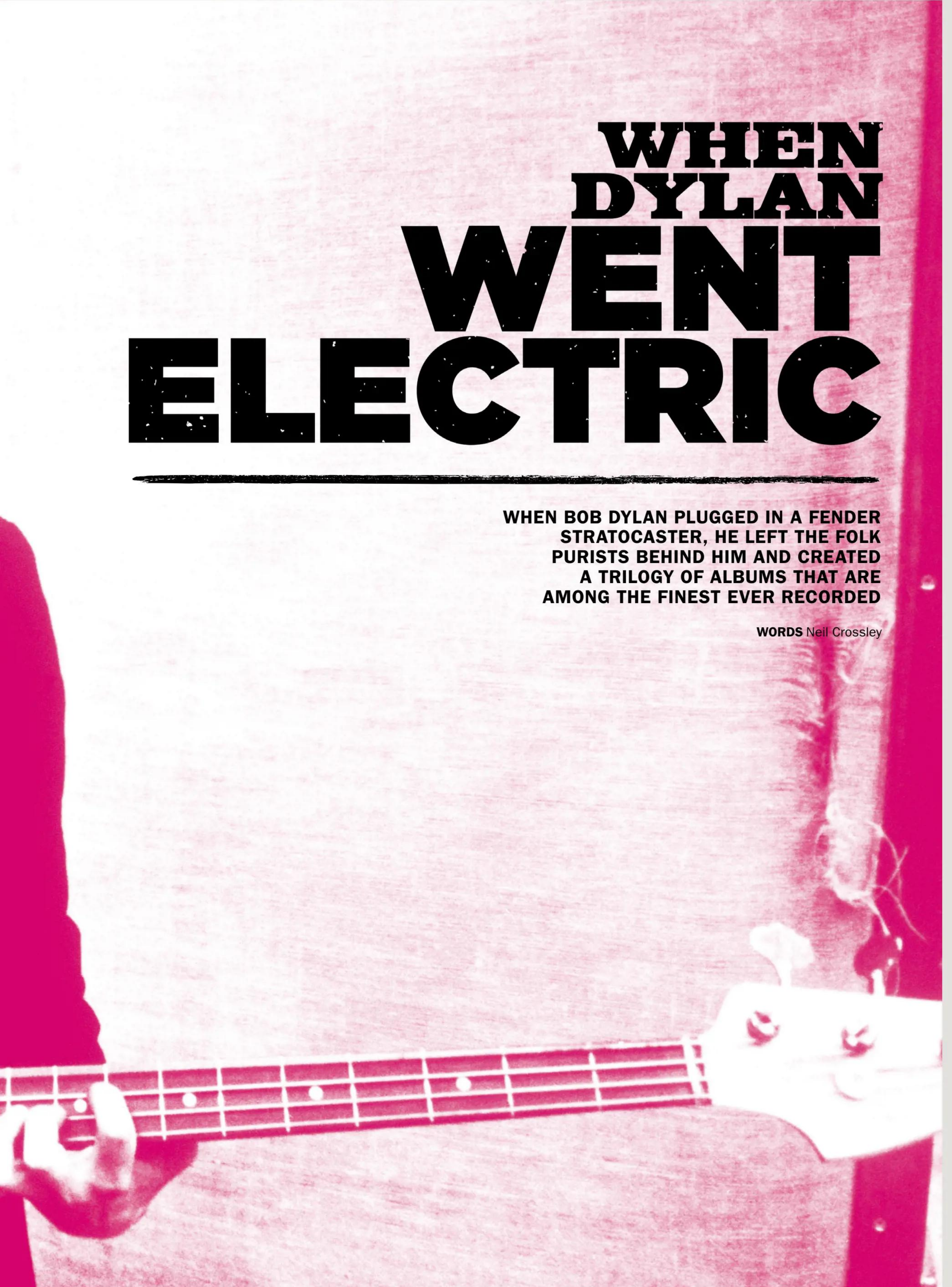


# WHEN DYLAN WENT ELECTRIC

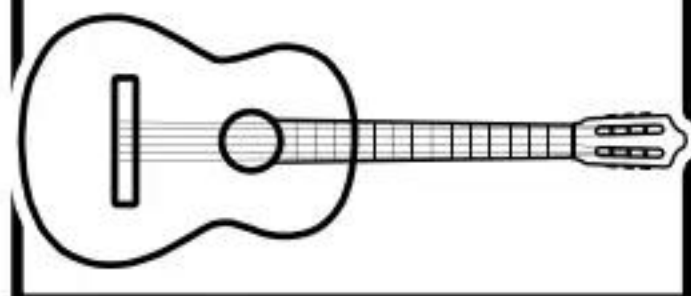
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WHEN BOB DYLAN PLUGGED IN A FENDER STRATOCASTER, HE LEFT THE FOLK PURISTS BEHIND HIM AND CREATED A TRILOGY OF ALBUMS THAT ARE AMONG THE FINEST EVER RECORDED

WORDS Neil Crossley







**B**y the beginning of 1965, Bob Dylan was hurtling towards a future that had increasingly little to do with the world of folk music. This was the year Dylan went electric. He knew from his rock 'n' roll teenage years the intensity and attack that a full electric band can create and by 1964 he was becoming struck by the soaring, jangling tones of The Beatles.

In Antony Scudato's 1971 book *Bob Dylan: An Intimate Biography*, Dylan recalls hearing The Beatles while on a road trip in February 1964. "When we were driving through Colorado we had the radio on and eight of the 10 top songs were Beatles' songs," he said. "In Colorado! *I Want to*

*Hold Your Hand*, all those early ones. It wasn't just the songs' popularity; it was the way they were being played, too. They were doing things nobody was doing. Their chords were outrageous, just outrageous, and their harmonies made it all valid. You could only do that with other musicians."

### BUILDING BRIDGES

The Beatles inspired Dylan to build a bridge between rock and folk, and by the end of 1964, Dylan was assembling his own electric band. On 13 January, 1965, Dylan entered Studio A at Columbia Records on 7th Avenue and spent three days recording his fifth studio album, *Bringing It All Back Home*. It was an album of two halves, the first side being



**ABOVE** 1965's *Bringing It All Back Home*

electric and the second side being acoustic.

*Bringing It All Back Home* was the first in a trilogy of Dylan's mid-1960s electric albums and it is a masterpiece, with stream-of-consciousness lyrics set against a backdrop of raw blues and beat poetry. There's a real sense of immediacy to the album, infused with socio-cultural concerns of the times.

Most of the musicians on this album were session players such as guitarist Bruce Langhorne and drummer Bobby Gregg. But unlike most session players of the time, these musicians had grit, groove and attitude. As Tom Wilson put it, they had "the skill of session musicians and the outlook of young rock 'n' rollers".





## A WHOLE NEW GENRE

In the studio, Dylan kept the musicians on their toes. “Bob would launch into a song. No warning, no explanation, no nothing,” recalled Langhorne in a piece by Mat Snow in *Mojo* magazine in March 2024. “We’d just leap in and try to keep up. He didn’t try to arrange people’s performances. It was spontaneous, almost telepathic. We had to catch the moment.”

Dylan unleashed an explosive imagination on songs such as *Maggie’s Farm*, *Outlaw Blues* and *Subterranean Homesick Blues*. “You don’t need no weatherman to know which easy the wind blows,” he sings in rapid-fire tones on the latter. Side Two, the acoustic side, opens with *Mr Tambourine Man* and closes with the beautiful *It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue*.

*Bringing It All Back Home* was a game-changer. In one fell swoop,

“BOB WOULD LAUNCH INTO A SONG,  
NO WARNING. WE’D TRY TO KEEP UP”  
Bruce Langhorne

**ABOVE** Dylan performing with Joan Baez (left) and solo at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival

Dylan created a new genre of folk-rock. He had taken elements of The Beatles and transcended them to create something startlingly new and exciting.

Lyrical, this album marked a departure from politically-motivated lyrics as Dylan began questioning the folk protest movement. By 1965, he felt constrained by the expectations he felt the folk community had placed upon him. He had a greater desire for artistic freedom and focused instead on more introspective, surreal and personal lyrical themes. Released in April 1965, the album reached number 1 in the UK and number 6 in the US Billboard 200 chart.

## LIKE A ROLLING STONE

At the end of April 1965, Dylan returned from a short UK solo tour and wrote a song that would become one of the most influential compositions of all time: *Like A Rolling Stone*.

The recording took place on 15 and 16 June, 1965, and Dylan invited musicians who would prove pivotal to his electric sound, such as Mike Bloomfield, the dynamic Chicago-based guitarist with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band.

Producer Tom Wilson had invited a young guitarist called Al Kooper to watch the session. But Kooper was determined ➡









## “I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN, BUT THEY CERTAINLY BOOED, I’LL TELL YOU THAT”

to be involved and slipped relatively unnoticed into the live room, positioning himself behind the Hammond B2 organ. When the band kicked in, Kooper launched into a spontaneous organ riff that would become a crucial element of the song.

*Like A Rolling Stone* is Dylan’s defining moment as an electric artist, and from the very first bars, there’s a real power and authority to the track. The core line “How does it feel?” creates an immediate and personal connection.

It’s been suggested the song could be about ’60s socialite Edie Sedgwick, but Dylan has never confirmed this.

“It was 10 pages long,” Dylan told journalist Jules Siegel. “It wasn’t called anything, just

**ABOVE** Dylan playing piano with a harmonica around his neck during the recording *Highway 61 Revisited* in the summer of 1965

**OPPOSITE** Dylan recording *Bringing It All Back Home* with a Fender Stratocaster electric guitar in January 1965

a rhythm thing on paper, all about my steady hatred directed at some point that was honest... I had never thought of it as a song until one day I was at the piano, and on the paper, it was singing, ‘How does it feel?’ in a slow-motion pace, in the utmost of slow motion.”

Dylan edited it down to four verses and a chorus. It still had a running time of over six minutes, but it ultimately didn’t matter. *Like A Rolling Stone* was so unique that it existed in its own space and on its own terms.

The song was released on 20 July, 1965 and reached number 2 in the US Billboard Hot 100. Five days later, the song had its live debut when Dylan headlined the Newport Folk Festival. By then, his band consisted of Al Kooper

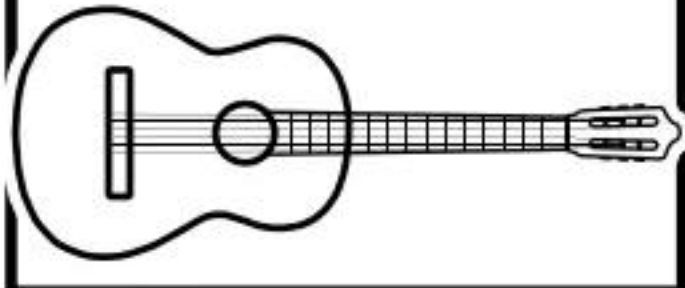
(organ/bass), Barry Goldberg (piano/organ) and three members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band: Mike Bloomfield (guitar), Jerome Arnold (bass) and Sam Lay (drums).

### NEWPORT ’65: A CLASH OF CULTURES

It was late in the evening of 25 July when Dylan walked out on stage dressed in black jeans, black boots and a black leather jacket, clutching a 1964 Fender Stratocaster. What happened next has become the stuff of legend as Dylan and the band tore straight into *Maggie’s Farm*.

By the time they finished the song, there was as much booing from the crowd as there was applause. Dylan and the band launched straight into *Like A Rolling Stone* before concluding their set with *It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry* and then bolting from the stage. They had been on stage for just 17 minutes. In a bid to placate the crowd, the organisers ➡





persuaded Dylan to go back out with an acoustic, and he played *It's All Over Now*, *Baby Blue* and *Mr. Tambourine Man*.

Opinions vary wildly on exactly who booed Dylan at Newport and why (see boxout below), although folk purists were seemingly incensed by Dylan's adoption of electrified rock music, which many viewed as crass and puerile. Five months later at a press conference in San Francisco, Dylan was asked about the Newport performance again. "I didn't know what was going to happen, but they certainly booed, I'll tell you that," he replied. "You could hear it all over the place..."

**BELOW**  
1965's *Highway 61 Revisited*

## NEWPORT: THE MYTHS AND THE REALITY

60 YEARS ON, MYTHS STILL PERSIST ABOUT DYLAN'S ELECTRIC PERFORMANCE AT THE 1965 NEWPORT FOLK FESTIVAL

Opinions vary wildly about what actually happened during Dylan's performance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. One popular theory is that veteran folk singer, songwriter, musician and social activist Pete Seeger was wielding an axe to cut the power cable in a last-ditched attempt to halt Dylan's electric performance. This is not the case. In a 2004 interview with New York broadcaster *Democracy Now*, Seeger said he was more incensed by the poor sound than the fact that Dylan had gone electric.

"I was furious that the sound was so distorted you could not understand a word that he was singing," said Seeger. "He was singing a great song, *Maggie's Farm*, but you couldn't understand it. And I ran over to the sound man and said 'Fix the sound so you can understand him'. And they hollered back 'No, this is the way they want it'. But I was so mad I said 'damn if I had an axe I'd cut the cable right now'. I really was that mad. But I wasn't against Bob going electric."

## HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED

A few days after Newport, Dylan and his band returned to Columbia Records' Studio A on New York's 7th Avenue to record the album that would become *Highway 61 Revisited*. This was the first album on which Dylan performed using his full electric band on every track.

*Highway 61 Revisited* is a seminal folk-rock classic. Across songs like *Ballad of a Thin Man*, *Tombstone Blues* and *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*, Dylan unveiled a musical vision that is harrowing, hilarious and epic.

His lyrics are rich in surreal and metaphorical imagery, as evidenced on the 11-minute closing track *Desolation Row*: "Einstein disguised as Robin Hood/With his memories in a trunk/Passed this way an hour ago with his friend/A jealous monk."

The album was released on 30 August, 1965 and climbed to number 4 and number 3 in the UK and US, respectively.

## OUT ON TOUR

By the end of August 1965, Dylan had recruited two new members into his band – guitarist Robbie Robertson and drummer Levon Helm of The Hawks, a group that would later become better known as The Band. On 28 August, 1965, they played a show at Forest Hills Tennis Stadium in Queens, New

York, when a hostile audience let their feelings be known.

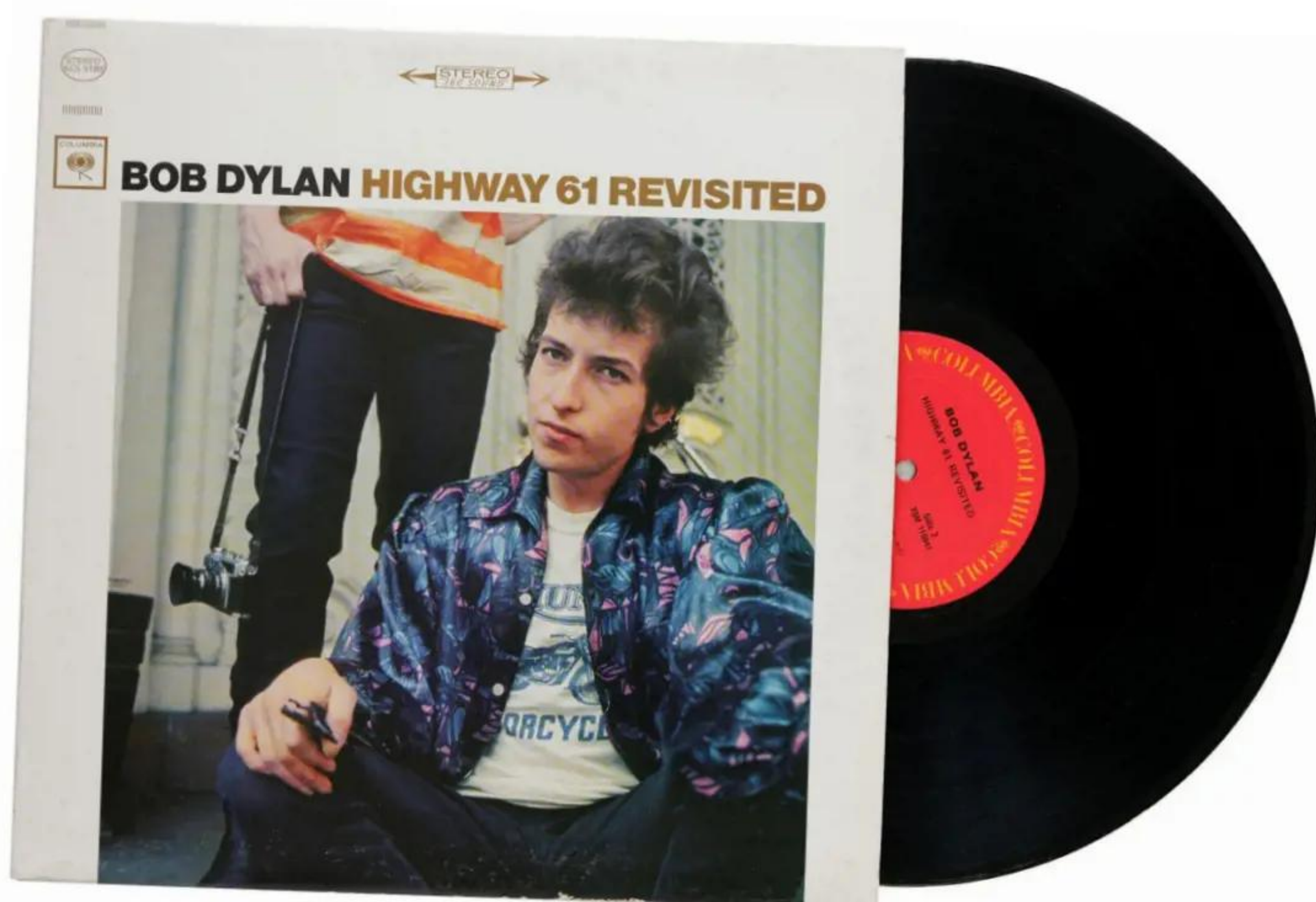
Al Kooper was reportedly knocked off his stool by a fan fleeing from the police and there were allegedly shouts of "traitor", "scumbag" and "where's Ringo?" as Dylan and the band were pelted with fruit.

On 24 September, Dylan and The Hawks embarked on a tour of the US and Canada with remaining Hawks Rick Danko (bass, vocals), Richard Manuel (piano, drums, vocals) and Garth Hudson (organ, keyboards) completing the line-up. In November, Helm left the band, disillusioned by the relentlessly hostile live reaction to Dylan's music. He was replaced by Mickey Jones.

## DYLAN GETS MARRIED

On 26 November that year, Dylan married Sara Lownds, who was pregnant with Jesse, the first of their four children. Dylan had met Lownds back in 1964 when she was working as a secretary in Time Life's production division. By the end of 1965, they had moved to the rural idyll of Woodstock in upstate New York, where they would raise their children in relative domestic stability.

In late 1965, Dylan and the Hawks began recording his next album, but by January







1966, they only produced one usable track. In a bid to create a more conducive environment, producer Bob Johnson persuaded Dylan to move sessions to CBS Studios in Nashville, Tennessee, in February.

In addition to the Hawks, Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper, Johnson brought in some top-rate session players such as drummer Kenny Buttrey and pianist Paul Griffin. The resulting album was *Blonde on Blonde*, Dylan's seventh studio album and one of the first double albums in rock music.

*Blonde on Blonde* is an album of immense depth, on which folk, rock, blues and country converge in one glorious, textural whole. Witty and surreal lyrics abound across the two discs, from the edgy, joyous intensity of tracks such as *Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again* to poignant ballads such as *Just Like a Woman*, *Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* and *Visions of Johanna*.

The album was completed on 10 March, 1966 and released



**ABOVE (Top)** An electric Dylan, on stage; 1966's *Blonde on Blonde*

three months later, reaching number 3 in the UK and number 9 in the US. Critics hailed the album. Peter Johnson of *The Los Angeles Times* concluded that "Dylan is a superbly eloquent writer of pop and folk songs with an unmatched ability to press complex ideas and iconoclastic philosophy into brief poetic lines and startling images."

While there were signs that Dylan's audiences were slowly thawing to his new electric sound, the response in other countries was still verging on near apoplexy.

Dylan and his band toured the UK in May 1966, and fans' dislike of his electric sound is evident in footage shot by D.A. Pennebaker for his 1967 documentary *Dont Look Back*, which was used in Martin Scorsese's 2005 documentary *No Direction Home*.


The boos can be heard at the Odeon Theatre in Newcastle on 21 May, 1966. Five days earlier in Sheffield Gaumont Theatre, the response was equally negative. "It makes you sick listening to this rubbish now," said one audience member after the show.

At Manchester Free Trade Hall show on 17 May, 1966, the filmmaker captured the now-infamous moment when a heckler shouts out "Judas". Dylan quickly retorts "I don't believe you – you're a liar", before turning to tell the band to "Play fucking loud!"

The anger over Dylan's decision to go electric only highlights how innovative his sound was. Within a year of the 1965 Newport Festival, music had shifted dramatically and the world had caught up. The 1966 Newport Folk Festival featured numerous electric acts such as *The Lovin' Spoonful*. *New York Times* critic Robert Shelton noted that their warm reception "reflected the growing acceptance of folk-rock and other amalgamations of contemporary folk songs with electric instruments".

The level of hostility directed at Dylan must have been draining, and it's to his credit that he

persisted in creating the music that he felt compelled to make. It's a staggering achievement. In just 14 months, from 15 January, 1965 to 10 March, 1966, Dylan created three albums that are

among the greatest ever recorded. In the course of it all, he invented folk-rock, blazed a trail that even The Beatles endeavoured to emulate and in the process, opened up a whole new sonic vista for those who would follow in his wake. 





# LIKE A ROLLING STONE

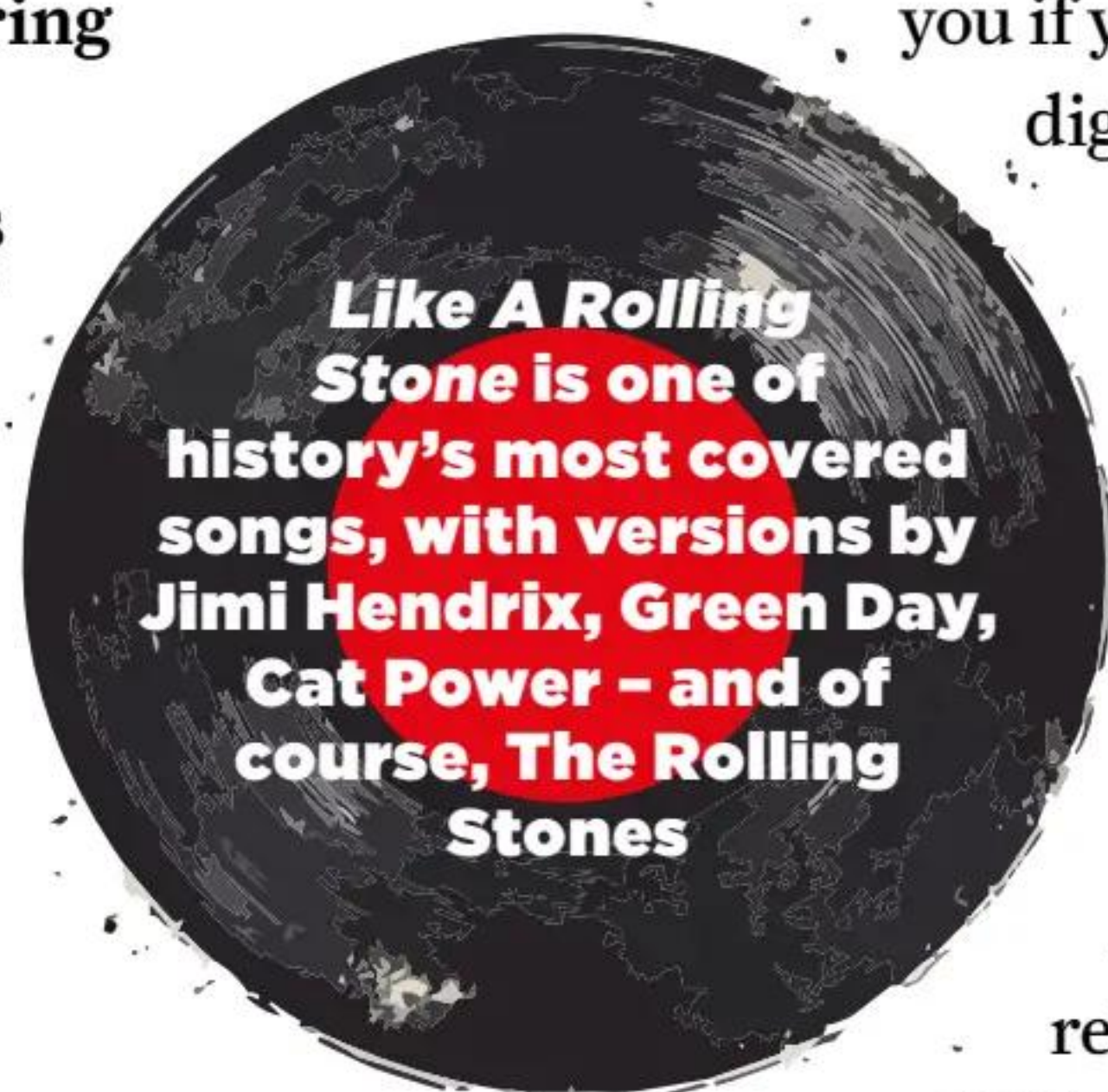
BOB DYLAN'S 1965 CLASSIC TRANSFORMED HIM FROM FOLKIE TO ELECTRIC WARRIOR, WHETHER FANS LIKED IT OR NOT

WORDS Henry Yates

**I**t was spring 1965, and Dylan was done. After grinding out the thankless UK tour chronicled in *D.A. Pennebaker's 1967 documentary *Dont Look Back**, the singer-songwriter found himself airing his "drained" headspace across a 10-page rant that fell somewhere between a freeform poem and a professional suicide note.


Dylan would later reflect that, at the time, he was ready to quit music, suffocated by the expectations of his audience, wondering if writing a novel might offer an escape hatch from the 'spokesman of a generation' tag. He certainly didn't think of those scrawled pages as

a potential song, Dylan recalled, until he sat down at the piano. "*Like A Rolling Stone* changed it all," he explained in a 1966 interview with *Playboy*. "I mean, it was something that I myself could dig. It's very tiring having other people tell you how much they dig you if you yourself don't dig you."



By that point, Dylan had already discovered electricity – the first side of *Bringing It All Back Home*, released in March 1965, found the former folkie backed by a full rock lineup. But that June, during sessions at Columbia Records' studio in New York – and having aborted an early waltz-time version – the singer bottled the folk-rock scene's masterpiece and signature tune.

**OPPOSITE Insert:** The cover art for the *Like A Rolling Stone* single, with *Gates of Eden* as its featured b-side

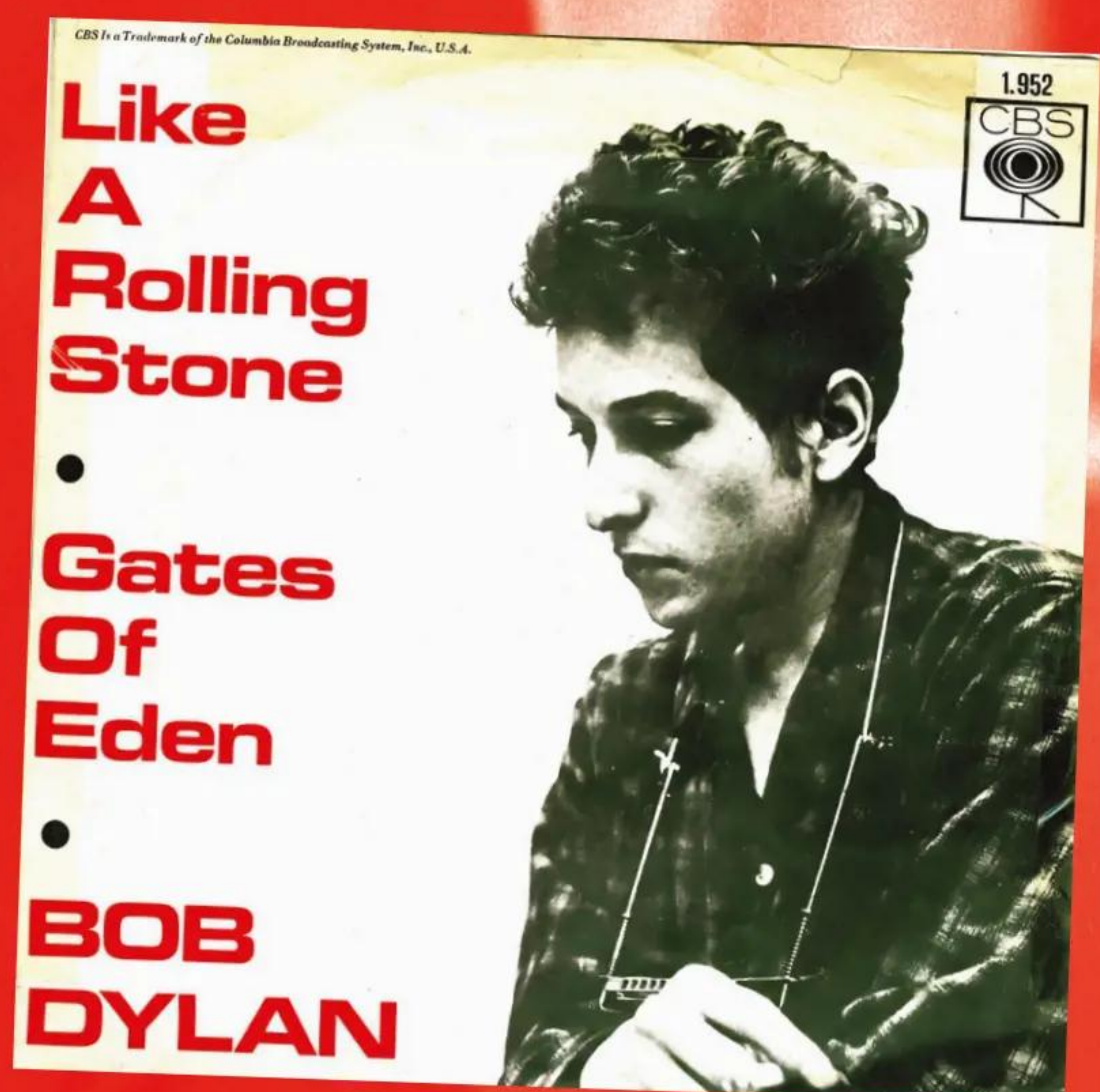
Dylan's early genius is evident in an acerbic lyric seemingly targeting a society beauty fallen on hard times. But it's hard to imagine how *Like A Rolling Stone* might have sounded without Al Kooper: the 21-year-old session guitarist who blagged his way onto the studio's organ stool despite barely playing the instrument. "I go in the booth afterwards and they start playing it back," he told the *Strange Brew* website. "And after the second verse, Dylan leans over to [producer] Tom Wilson and says, 'Can you turn the organ up?'" Fretting over its six-minute length and rocking sound, Columbia opted to shelve *Like A Rolling Stone*. But after the label's release coordinator Shaun Considine snuck an acetate onto the New York club scene, the clamour from DJs forced the song's launch as a single on 20 July, pinging it to number 2 in the US and into the history books. 



## POWER TO THE PEOPLE

### DYLAN AND THE 'JUDAS!' INCIDENT

Not everyone was a fan of *Like A Rolling Stone*. As heard on *The Bootleg Series Vol. 4*, during a May '66 show at Manchester's Free Trade Hall, a folk-purist heckler furious at Dylan's controversial new electric sound yelled "Judas!" at the stage – only for the singer-songwriter to respond by commanding his band to play the song "fucking loud".











CHAPTER

BB

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IT'S ALL OVER  
NOW, BABY BLUE

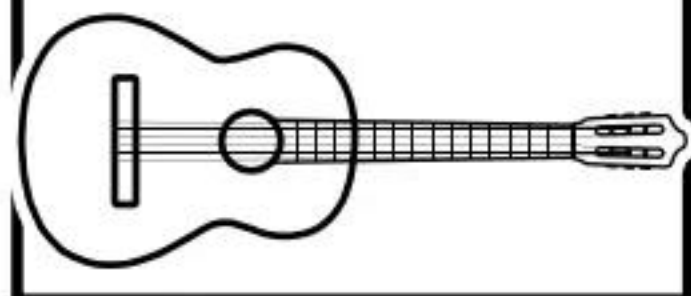
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50. **Leaving The Limelight**

58. **No Direction Home**

66. *Hurricane*



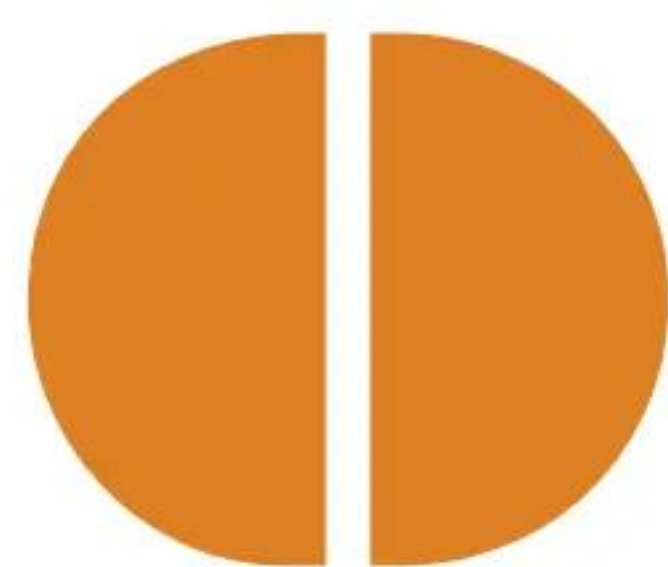


# LEAVING

## THE LIMELIGHT

A MOTORBIKE CRASH, A LONG, LOUD SILENCE AND A COMEBACK ON HIS OWN TERMS

WORDS Bill DeMain



**In the morning of 29 July, 1966, while riding along a winding road in Woodstock, New York, Bob Dylan lost control of his Triumph T100 motorcycle.**

Despite the many books written about Dylan – not to mention his own memoir – the details of what actually happened that day are sketchy, and often contradictory. The bike spun out on a patch of oil. The sun got in his eyes. He was thrown clear off the bike. He merely tipped over. He broke his back and got a serious concussion. He just had a few scrapes and bruises.

Was the whole story an exaggeration? Or even a fabrication?

What is generally agreed upon is that Dylan had been leaving the home of his manager, Albert Grossman, with his wife Sara following in a car behind him. After he fell from the bike, she drove him back to Grossman's house, where Grossman's own wife recalled that Dylan was "moaning and groaning," though she saw no signs of injuries. Dylan was taken to

Middletown, an hour away, to see a physician he knew and trusted, Dr. Ed Thaler. In an interview with *The Associated Press*, Thaler's wife said Dylan was "very upset, but he didn't want to go to the hospital. So we said, You can stay here" (Dylan would later say that he first spent "a week in the hospital").

Whatever the case, Dylan remained with the Thalers for six weeks, living "in the attic, with a window looking out," eating dinner every night with the family, having friends over

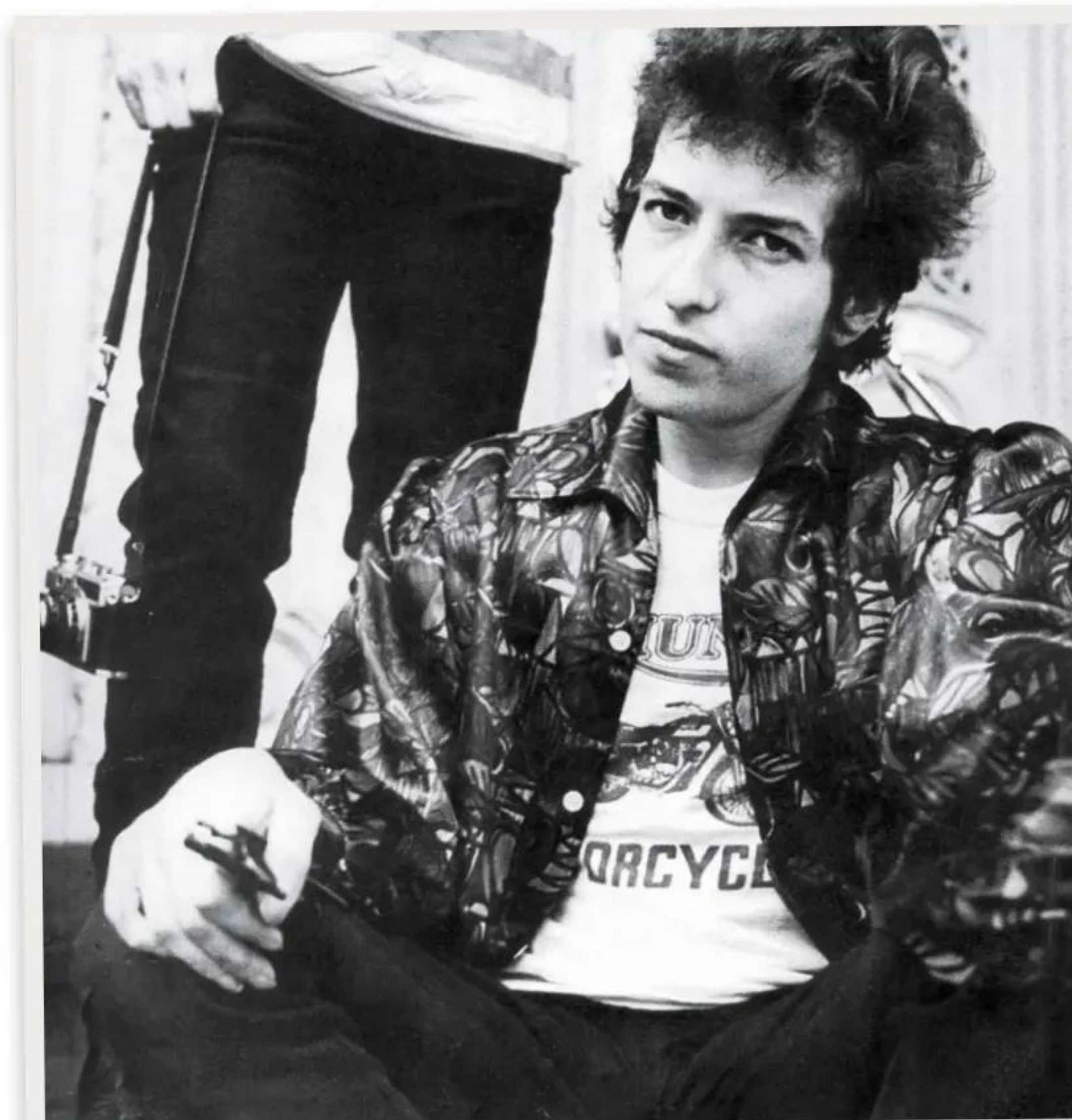
on weekends, including poet Allen Ginsberg and the musicians who would soon be known as The Band (Robbie Robertson remembered Dylan "up all night, smoking a million cigarettes"). Mrs. Thaler described Dylan as a fine houseguest. Though she once claimed that he had broken his neck, she also said she couldn't recall him showing any signs of injury.

For someone as famous as Bob Dylan, you'd think there would've been immediate and extensive press coverage around all of this.

Or at the very least, a police report detailing the crash. There wasn't. Four days after the accident, *The New York Times* ran a single paragraph under the less-than-sensational headline 'Dylan Hurt in Cycle Mishap'. It reported that the singer was currently "under a doctor's care."

Dylan's friend, journalist Al Aronowitz, was one of the first to talk with the singer after the accident and said he was dubious about Dylan saying that he'd seen "his whole life flash before his eyes." In David Dalton's *Who is That Man?*, Aronowitz says, ➡

**BELOW** Dylan photographed by Daniel Kramer for the cover of *Highway 61 Revisited*, 1965











"I got the feeling he wanted me to go around and tell the story just as dramatically as I'd heard it from him. He survived with barely a scratch, but I think he was enjoying the fact that his accident had taken on such hair-raising proportions in people's imaginations, that there were people coming up with bizarre speculations about his physical and mental state, stories like about Elvis and James Dean."

In his memoir, *Chronicles: Volume One*, Dylan recalled, "I had been in a motorcycle accident and I'd been hurt, but I recovered." But he admitted that "the truth was I wanted to get out of that rat race."

Whatever happened that morning, it dramatically changed Dylan's trajectory for the rest of the decade. It may have even saved his life.

Consider that by the summer of 1966, he'd gone from Greenwich Village folk singer to the 'voice of his generation'. He'd gone electric

and become an international rock star. He played celebrated venues such as Carnegie Hall, L'Olympia and the Hollywood Bowl for the first time. He toured extensively through North America, the UK, Europe, and Australia. While most dates were successful, some fans were still booing him because of his betrayal of his folk roots. He was exhausted by it all, and by some accounts, became hooked on amphetamines (Dylan told *Rolling Stone*, "It takes a lot of medicine to keep up this pace. A concert tour like this has almost killed me").

As the sparring matches with the press of the time show, Dylan was roiled by the constant attention and criticism. Even home life back in Woodstock, where he was newly married with a baby, had become "a nightmare," with overzealous fans showing up at his house, wanting pictures, money or moments of his time.

As he wrote in his memoir, "Everything was wrong, the world was absurd."

**ABOVE** Dylan, centre, on stage at Carnegie Hall in New York with Rick Danko, left, and Robbie Robertson of The Band – Dylan's first public appearance after his 1966 motorcycle accident

**MIDDLE** "Dylan talks to NME" – news pages from an issue of the New Musical Express;

**RIGHT** Bob and wife Sara leaving London's Heathrow Airport, 1969







## “I’D BEEN HURT, BUT I RECOVERED. THE TRUTH WAS I WANTED TO GET OUT OF THAT RAT RACE”

All remaining tour dates for 1966 were cancelled (he wouldn’t tour again until 1974). When a writer from the *New York Daily News* interviewed him, he said he was spending time with friends, “poring over books by people you never heard of, thinking about where I’m going, and why am I running and am I mixed up too much and what am I knowing and what am I giving and what am I taking.”

Between recovery and such rumination, it would be a year and a half – December 1967 – before

**ABOVE** From top: Dylan at the Mayfair hotel in London while on his 1966 World Tour; Dylan during the *Bringing It All Back Home* recording sessions circa 1965

he released his next album. In the ’60s, when artists from The Beatles to The Rolling Stones never let more than a few months pass without putting out a new single or album, this was an eternity. Though it may have been in the name of his recuperation, Dylan was effectively the first rock artist who turned his back on the album-tour-album cycle to create by his own schedule.

And though absent from the scene, Dylan was on fire creatively. He was writing and recording songs on a reel-to-reel at home in his “Red Room,” and in a big pink house in nearby Saugerties, NY, that belonged to

his friends Rick Danko, Richard Manuel, Robbie Robertson, Garth Hudson and Levon Helm. Collectively, The Band (Dylan, who’d also taken up visual art post-accident, painted the cover for their classic debut album, *Music from Big Pink*).

Nearly a decade later, those prolific homemade recordings, dubbed *The Basement Tapes*, were released (and again, with the complete 138 songs, in an extensive box set, in 2014). It was the sound of an artist just enjoying himself as he covered obscure folk and blues songs, and worked out new originals. During this period, Dylan also penned ➡



the sweetly melodic *Too Much of Nothing* for Peter, Paul & Mary. And in 1968, he had a visit from his friend George Harrison, where the two co-wrote *I'd Have You Anytime*, a highlight on Harrison's *All Things Must Pass*.

Rather than put the music he was making with The Band out at the time, Dylan mysteriously chose to return to Columbia Studios in Nashville, where he'd made *Blonde on Blonde*. If that record was a collision of his more extroverted rock impulses with the city's A-team session cats, his next two, 1967's *John Wesley Harding* and 1969's *Nashville Skyline*, showed a more open embrace of Music City's laid-back, country-western feel.

*John Wesley Harding* found him back in acoustic-guitar-and-

harmonica harness, exploring cowboy mythology and religious themes. Its solid set of songs boasted one classic, *All Along the Watchtower* (Jimi Hendrix would soon electrify it and make it his own). Meanwhile, *Nashville Skyline*'s simple, romantic ballads like *Lay, Lady, Lay* (Dylan's last hit single of the '60s) and *Tonight I'll Be Staying Here with You* were so traditional in style they might've tumbled from the pen of Hank Williams.

To sing them, Dylan adopted a new voice. Smooth and horn-like, his approach was far from the sneer of his earlier albums. It almost seemed like a different singer. Dylan credited the resonant style to having quit his nicotine habit. "You stop

smoking those cigarettes and you'll be able to sing like [opera singer] Caruso," he told *Rolling Stone* in 1969.

Along with the change in sound came a more muted image. His halo of curls was shorn. He grew a beard and moustache. The dark shades were swapped out for wire frames, the snazzy polka dot shirts for basic white button-downs. He looked less wild mercury rock star, more serious scholar.

Exiting its Nashville phase, Dylan's voice returned to its more familiar nasal twang on *Self-Portrait* and *New Morning* (both 1970). His re-teaming with keyboardist producer Al Kooper on the latter brought a welcome electric funkiness back to his sound. It also featured Dylan's confident, gospel-tinged piano playing on *Sign on the Window* and *Father of Night*.

By late 1970, four years after the motorbike accident, ➔

**"YOU STOP SMOKING THOSE CIGARETTES AND YOU'LL BE ABLE TO SING LIKE CARUSO"**

**ABOVE** From top: John Wesley Harding Nashville Skyline, Self-Portrait and New Morning



**ABOVE** Clockwise from left: Ringo Starr of The Beatles watching Dylan at the Isle of Wight Festival, August 1969; the artwork inside the gatefold LP of Self-Portrait; the back cover of New Morning









**ABOVE** Dylan recording *Self-Portrait* in Nashville with Charlie Daniels on guitar, 1969

**RIGHT** Dylan with friend and collaborator, Johnny Cash

## WITH ITS RIDDLES AND CONTRADICTIONS, THE ACCIDENT CONTRIBUTED TO DYLAN'S MYSTIQUE

Dylan had released four albums – *John Wesley Harding*, *Nashville Skyline*, *Self-Portrait* and *New Morning*. With no overt political material, he had side-stepped the burden of being ‘the voice of his generation’. Interestingly, the first album had arrived within months of psychedelic landmarks *The Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *The Rolling Stones’ Their Satanic Majesties Request*. It was as if Dylan was pointing the way forward from the baroque excess of that sound.

Indeed, the ‘White Album’ and *Beggar’s Banquet* found The

Beatles and the Stones following his lead, getting back to basics. Dylan’s Nashville albums also opened the floodgates for other artists to record in Music City, among them The Byrds, Linda Ronstadt, Leonard Cohen, Joan Baez and Eric Anderson. During that period, he also found time to edit the D.A. Pennebaker-shot documentary *Eat The Document* and release a book of poetry, *Tarantula*.

Whether the motorcycle crash was serious or not, it pushed a much-needed pause on Dylan’s rocket ride, giving

him freedom and nearly a full decade to enjoy domestic life, while he explored new musical ideas and collaborations. With its riddles and contradictions, the accident itself contributed to his ever-deepening mystique. The whole thing seemed as if he’d stepped into a couplet from *Like A Rolling Stone*: “When you ain’t got nothing, you got nothing to lose/You’re invisible now, you’ve got no secrets to conceal...”







# Nashville SKYLINE

AS THE 60S TOOK A DARK TURN, DYLAN MADE HIS MOST BLISSED-OUT ALBUM TO DATE. WITH A SMOOTH, SMOKE-FREE VOICE, DYLAN MADE COUNTRY COOL AND SET CHARTS ALIVE DOING SO

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IMPORT

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MODERN MUSIC  
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**I**n the lead up to Bob Dylan's ninth studio album, 1969's *Nashville Skyline*, the '60s were taking a turn for the worse.

Following the assassinations of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy, riots in the streets, and the escalation of the Vietnam War, there was more demand for protest songs than ever.

Amid all this chaos, however, a typically defiant Dylan returned with his most blissed-out album to date. After flirting with country music for a few years, Dylan fully embraced the influence of Hank Williams, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley on *Nashville Skyline*. With a cocksure tip of the hat on the cover, Dylan seemed a million miles away from the problems of the decade.

While a minority of critics berated Dylan for turning his back on the movement when it needed him the most, the album generally earned a positive reaction from the press and was a rip-roaring success among fans, reaching number 3 in the US and earning Dylan his fourth UK number 1 album.

Along with more basic lyrical themes, simple songwriting structures

and charming feel, it introduced fans to a whole new singing style, too. *Lay, Lady, Lay* – a ballad written for the film *Midnight Cowboy* – showcased his new voice, as well his smooth croon on the album's opener *Girl from the North Country*, a ballad with Jonny Cash.

Released in April 1969, *Nashville Skyline* found Dylan in a reflective space after 'going electric'. Following a motorcycle accident in upstate New York, not far from the future site of the Woodstock Festival in 1966, Dylan took the opportunity to reconnect with family life and his music became more personal.

After suggesting a country shift in direction with 1967's *John Wesley Harding*, Dylan went all-out with *Nashville Skyline*, recruiting the best players the city could offer for the sessions. With Charlie McCoy on guitar, Kenneth Buttrey on drums, Charlie Daniels on bass, and pedal steel master Pete Drake, Dylan succeeded in creating a colourful, full-band sound. Dylan told *Rolling Stone*: "I play it, and everyone else sort of fills in behind it."

In its own way, *Nashville Skyline* was a revolutionary album. In adopting a totally non-ironic approach

to country music, Dylan kicked the down the door for the burgeoning Americana movement to follow.

Michael Gray wrote in the *Bob Dylan Encyclopedia*: "Country music was despised, hick music when Dylan took it up. People were divided into the hip and the non-hip."

Of course, Dylan didn't want to be the leader of the country music any more than he did the poster boy for the protest song movement at the beginning of the decade.

"Not only did I not want it, but I didn't need it," Dylan told the *Sunday Telegraph* in 2004. "I couldn't understand it either. None of us like to be defined by what other people think of us. I wasn't the toastmaster of any generation and that notion had to be pulled up by the roots."

*Nashville Skyline* produced three charting songs, the biggest being *Lay, Lady, Lay*, which matched Dylan's second-best-ever showing on the Billboard chart at number 7.

Dylan had proved, once again, that doing his own thing and ignoring what was to be expected was the only way to approach his music and his life.

Whether he wanted it or not, Dylan was a powerful cultural force – and more relevant than ever.

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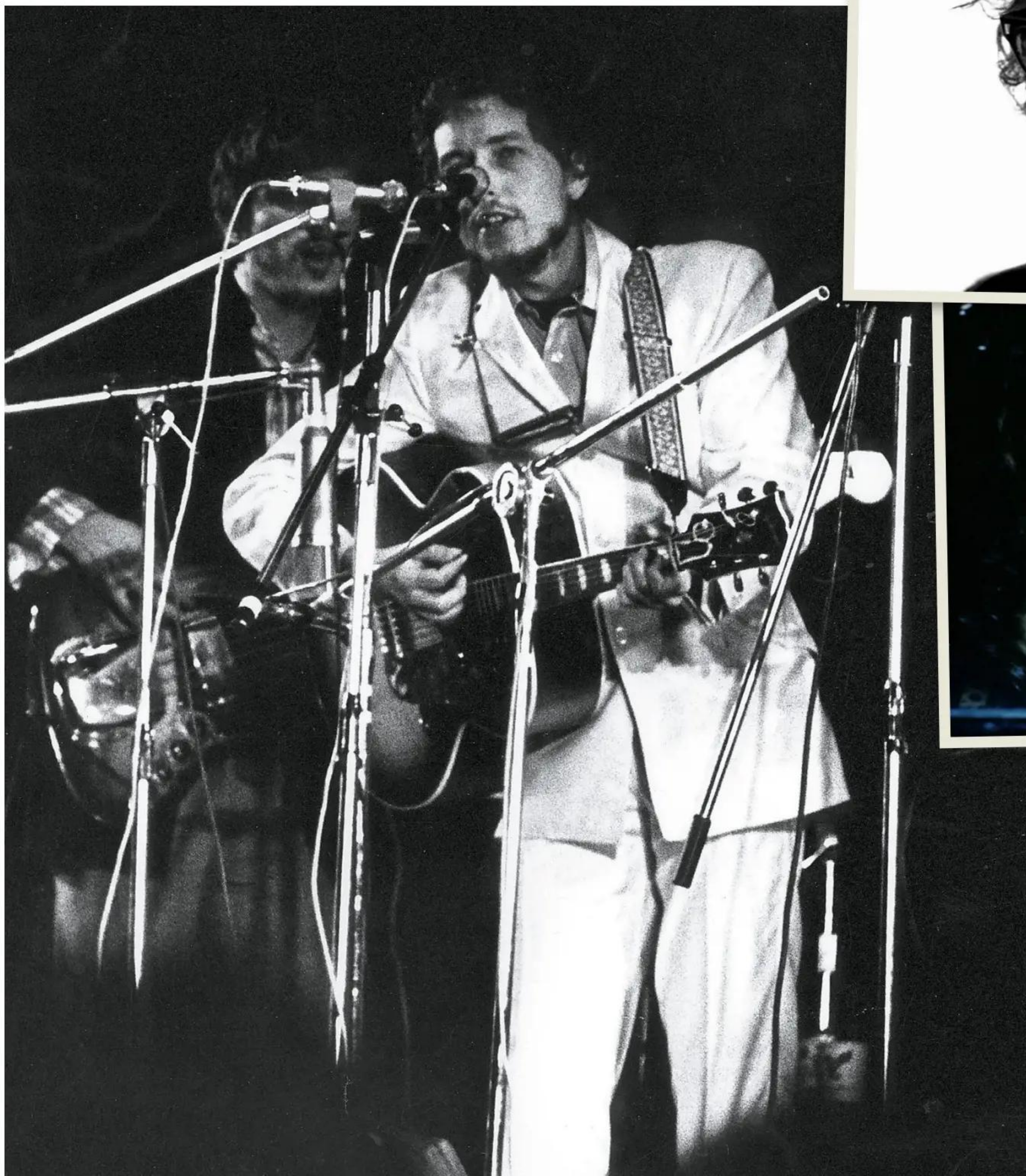


# NO *DIRECTION* HOME

DYLAN HAD DONE HIS BEST TO BLOW UP HIS CAREER,  
BUT THE 1970s SAW HIM REACH HIS COMMERCIAL  
AND CREATIVE PEAK – IN AMONG THE CHAOS

WORDS Owen Williams





**A**t the dawn of the 1970s, Bob Dylan was in retreat from the monster he'd created: namely himself. He'd

achieved success beyond his wildest dreams in the decade since he'd slung his guitar across his back and left his home in Hibbing, Minnesota "like Columbus going off into the desolate Atlantic". But he'd become deeply uncomfortable with his status as the voice of a generation and icon of 1960s counterculture. As early as the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, Ronnie Gilbert of The Weavers had introduced Dylan with the words: "Here he is, take him,

you know him, he's yours." Looking back for his 2004 memoir *Chronicles: Volume One*, Dylan was still aghast. "What a crazy thing to say," he marvelled. "Screw that. As far as I knew, I didn't belong to anybody." The motorcycle accident provided the perfect excuse for him to step back and regroup.

Nevertheless, the late '60s and early '70s didn't want for Dylan material, although he seemed to be deliberately trying to shed his previous audience. 1969's *Nashville Skyline* was followed just over a year later by the confounding double-album *Self Portrait* which, if you believed

**ABOVE** Clockwise, from left: Dylan performing at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970; Bob in his iconic sunglasses; Sara and Bob in L.A.

Dylan himself, was compiled from anything and everything he could sweep up from the studio floor; a rattle bag of cover versions and live cuts of old songs with only two new compositions. Recent years have seen *Self Portrait*'s reputation improve, but fans and critics have had to work hard to love it.

*Self Portrait* was a leftover, however, largely recorded in 1969 during the Nashville sessions with Dylan still employing his odd new crooner vocal style. So it was *New Morning*, released just four months after *Self Portrait*, in October 1970, that really signalled a fresh start. Even if it still finds Dylan casting around for renewed inspiration, the old voice was back.

*New Morning* emerged from a proposed collaboration with Archibald MacLeish, described by Dylan as the one of the three Poets Laureate of America (alongside Carl Sandburg and Robert Frost). Dylan agreed to provide the songs for a new play by MacLeish called *Scratch* – a musical version of the Faust legend, about a man who makes a pact with the devil. It was





an intriguing prospect, taking Dylan out of his comfort zone into unfamiliar working methods and collaboration, but it didn't quite gel. Dylan wasn't convinced he was adding anything significant to MacLeish's weighty philosophical agenda, and MacLeish was concerned that the songs Dylan was coming up with weren't dark enough. So Dylan withdrew, taking the songs he'd written so far – *Father of Night*, *Time Passes Slowly* and *New Morning* itself – with him. They became the backbone of an album that Dylan was determined would “have no specific [cultural] resonance”, but that many critics saw as a return to form.

With that new momentum, Dylan naturally then disappeared for three years: a longer hiatus than even the bike crash had prompted. Domesticity beckoned, a new idyll in Woodstock, New York with Sara and their five children. “[They] changed my



**PAT  
GARRETT  
& BILLY  
THE KID**

**ABOVE** From top: Dylan and Ronee Blakely in London, 1970; on set with Kris Kristofferson; 1971's George Jackson single and Dylan's soundtrack for Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid

life,” Dylan wrote in *Chronicles*. “Outside of my family, nothing held any real interest for me and I was seeing everything through different glasses.” He continued to noodle in the studio, though, and those sporadic sessions at least produced the singles *Watching the River Flow* and *George Jackson*. The latter drew the most attention as Dylan's first protest song since the mid-60s. Jackson was a Black Panther leader given an indeterminate prison sentence for a robbery in 1961. After years of failed parole hearings and denied appeals, he was shot dead from a watch tower during an attempted escape from Soledad prison in 1969. Many radio stations refused to play the track for its controversial

politicking. Those that did play it had to censor it for a swear word in the third verse. Dylan's biographer Anthony Scaduto thought the song might have partly been a riposte to Joan Baez, who'd criticised Dylan for abandoning his activism in *To Bobby*. But a lot of people had been “asking in print, ‘Whatever happened to the old him?’” Dylan wrote in *Chronicles*. “They could go to hell.”

He next surfaced in 1973 in Durango, Mexico, on the sweltering and fractious set of Sam Peckinpah's revisionist western *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. Dylan was composing the soundtrack, at the suggestion of his friend Kris Kristofferson who was starring in the film, ➡



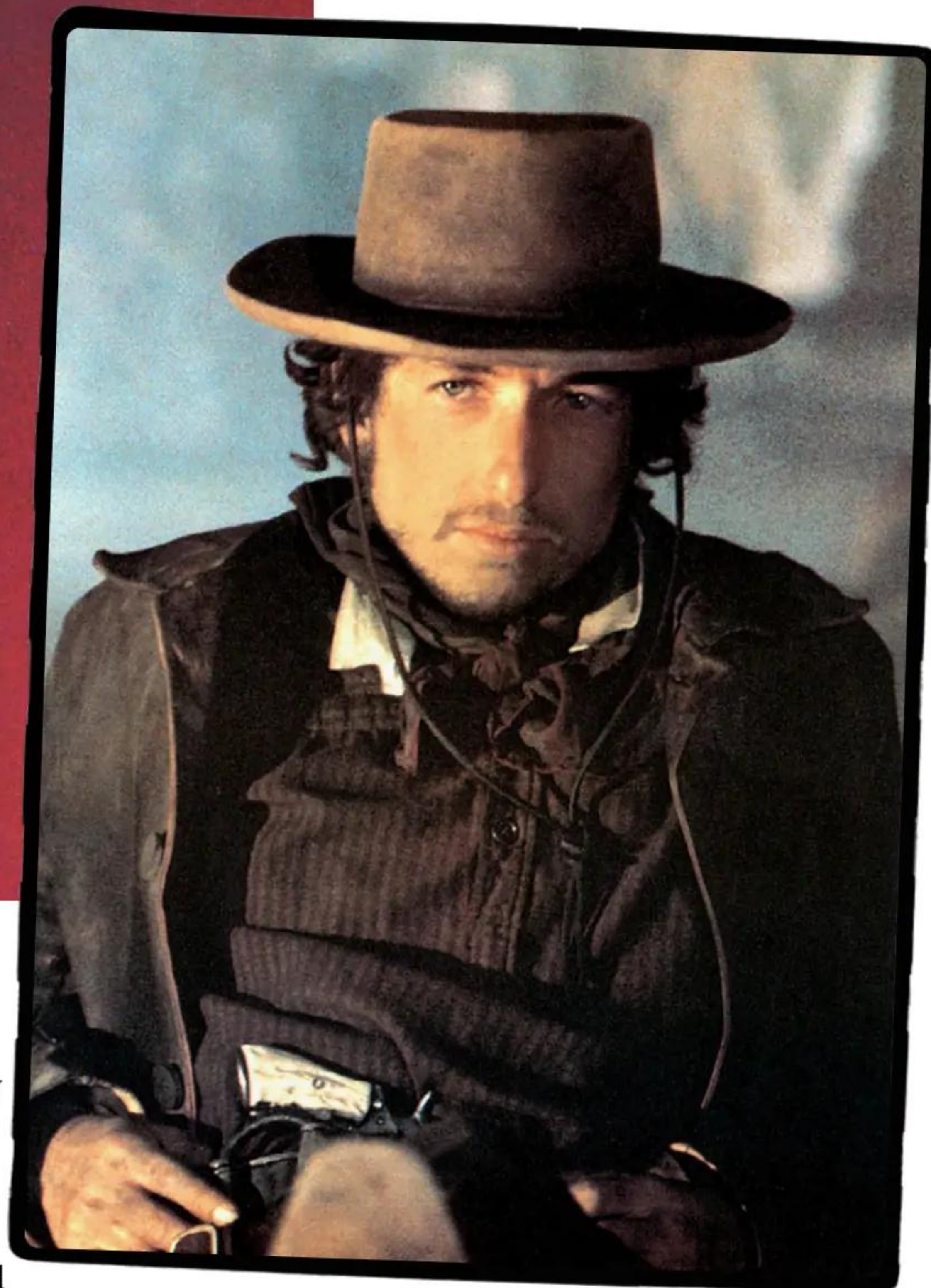


but he'd also scored himself an acting part. As with the abortive MacLeish collaboration, he was feeling his way in a new creative direction, seeing what he could learn. The notoriously difficult Peckinpah initially claimed not to know who Dylan was and was wary of the interloper, but he relented when Dylan played him the song which became *Billy*, and had screenwriter Rudy Wurlitzer actually beef up Dylan's role as the enigmatic Alias. Originally just a background member of Billy's gang, the character became a writer for the Lincoln County Bulletin who ditches his printer's apron to follow The Kid. He doesn't play much part in the action but he's often on the edges, watching. The implication was supposed to be that Alias would write Billy's legend when Billy himself was dead.

Dylan began work on the songs while still in Mexico, jamming with Kristofferson's band but producing few results. The finished tracks were assembled back in California once shooting had concluded, using a different set of musicians including the fiddle player Byron Berline.

Of the 24 tracks recorded, only 10 made it to the half-hour soundtrack album of melancholy acoustic Westernalia. Four of those were varied iterations of *Billy*, but the standout was a last-minute addition that would become an indelible classic and returned Dylan to the Top 20: the devastating *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*, which plays on screen as Slim Pickens' character slowly dies in his wife's arms (in some cuts of the film it's an instrumental version but the vocals returned in more recent restorations); it's also reworked as *Final Theme*. It gave Dylan his most sizeable hit in years and he performed it hundreds of times in concert until retiring it in 2003.

Meanwhile, Dylan's long-standing contract with Columbia Records was coming to an end and, rebuffing their attempts to re-sign him, Dylan prepared to jump ship to the young hotshot David Geffen's new Asylum label – for less money than Columbia offered him. Columbia's response was the petulant release in November 1973 of an album simply titled *Dylan*, a compilation



**ABOVE** From left: Dylan on stage at the Concert for Bangladesh, August, 1971; Bob in full Western costume as Alias in Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid

**OPPOSITE** Bob Dylan attends a Ronee Blakley concert at the Roxy in Los Angeles, 1977 – Ronee provided vocals on his 1975 single, Hurricane

**BELOW** 1973's *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* single and 1974's *Planet Waves*



of outtakes (all cover versions) from the *New Morning* sessions. Dylan was unimpressed but basically ignored that it had happened. By January 1974 he was already on to bigger things with a proper new album, *Planet Waves*, and a huge tour.

He was backed for both by The Band, the group previously known as The Hawks, who'd been with him in the mid-1960s for those infamous first electric gigs. More than 30 concerts in 21 cities were booked. Tickets had to be applied for by post, and there were 5 million applications for the 650,000 available seats. Takings were 93 million dollars – record-breaking at the time. And *Planet Waves* became Dylan's first album to reach number one on the Billboard chart. It sounded tight and melodic and joyful, the work of a Dylan who seemed newly re-energised.

Two of its 11 tracks were alternate takes of *Forever Young*, another future classic. Dylan wrote it for his eldest son and it appears on the album both as a gentle lullaby and – so as not to ➡

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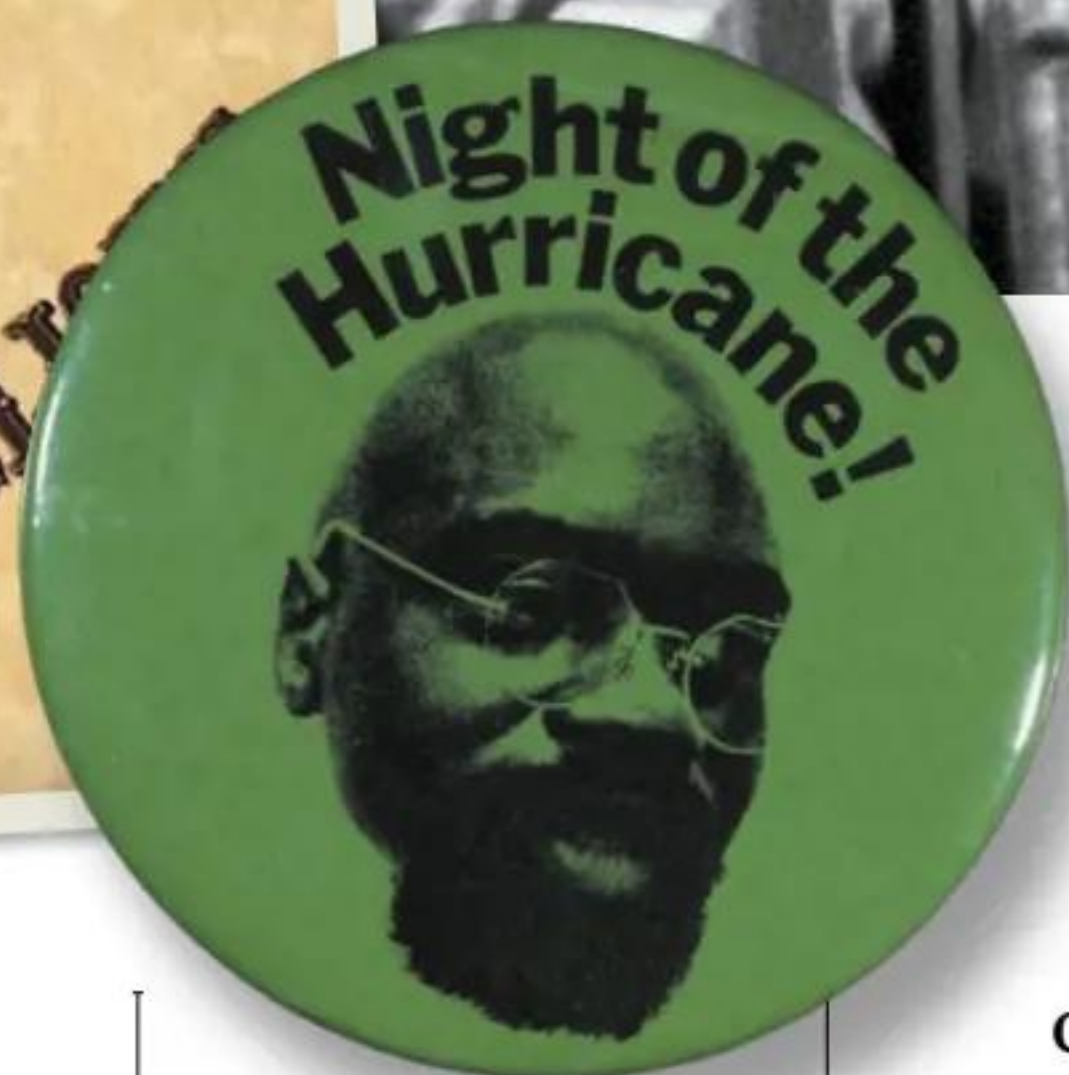
“PEOPLE HAD BEEN ASKING,  
‘WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?’  
THEY COULD GO TO HELL”

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**ABOVE**

Dylan and Baez on stage, a poster for the Rolling Thunder Revue and a badge depicting the face of Rubin Carter, "the Hurricane"

**BELOW** 1975's *Blood on the Tracks* and 1976's *Desire*



seem too sentimental – a louder and rockier arrangement.

Dylan was back, although domestically things weren't going so well. When the tour with The Band was over, Dylan moved to New York while Sara stayed at their home in Malibu. The couple were drifting apart, and Dylan channelled his raw emotions into *Blood on the Tracks*: arguably his masterpiece; often referred to as the ultimate break-up album. By turns poignant, angry, wistful, epic, raw, and excoriating (never more so than on the furious *Idiot Wind*), it seemed unprecedented in the glimpse it afforded of Dylan working through such personal circumstances in such a public way – although, true to form, Dylan has

always attempted to bat away suggestions that it's as autobiographical as all that.

The final release was cobbled together from several separate bouts in different studios with different backing bands. For such a cohesive album it's surprising how chaotic the recording was, with reports of session musicians struggling to understand or achieve what Dylan wanted, largely thanks to Dylan's inability to communicate his ideas (he also attributed the breakdown of his relationship with Sara partly to her never knowing what he was talking about anymore). He was still evolving as a songwriter, both musically and lyrically. Perhaps thanks to the movie experience, he was taking new approaches to narrative, as in the filmic *Tangled Up in Blue*, which jigsaws its story into non-linear flashbacks and flash-forwards. Before long, he'd

be attempting to write and direct a feature film of his own.

*Blood on the Tracks* was Dylan's biggest selling album to date. He was more popular than ever (and back on Columbia after his short-lived Asylum holiday). The release of *The Basement Tapes* in the summer of 1975 kept the momentum going: a fascinating snapshot of Dylan and The Band essentially playing for fun in relaxed, scattershot studio sessions that had been gathering dust since 1967. And after only another six months came *Desire*, with hindsight the third part of the trilogy that began with *Planet Waves* and continued with *Blood on the Tracks*. After the rawness of the latter, this is a shift back towards the mythical western landscapes of Billy the Kid, particularly on the folky *Isis*, but it opens with Dylan's second protest song of the decade, the eight-minute *Hurricane*. Dylan had been exercised by the case of former heavyweight boxer

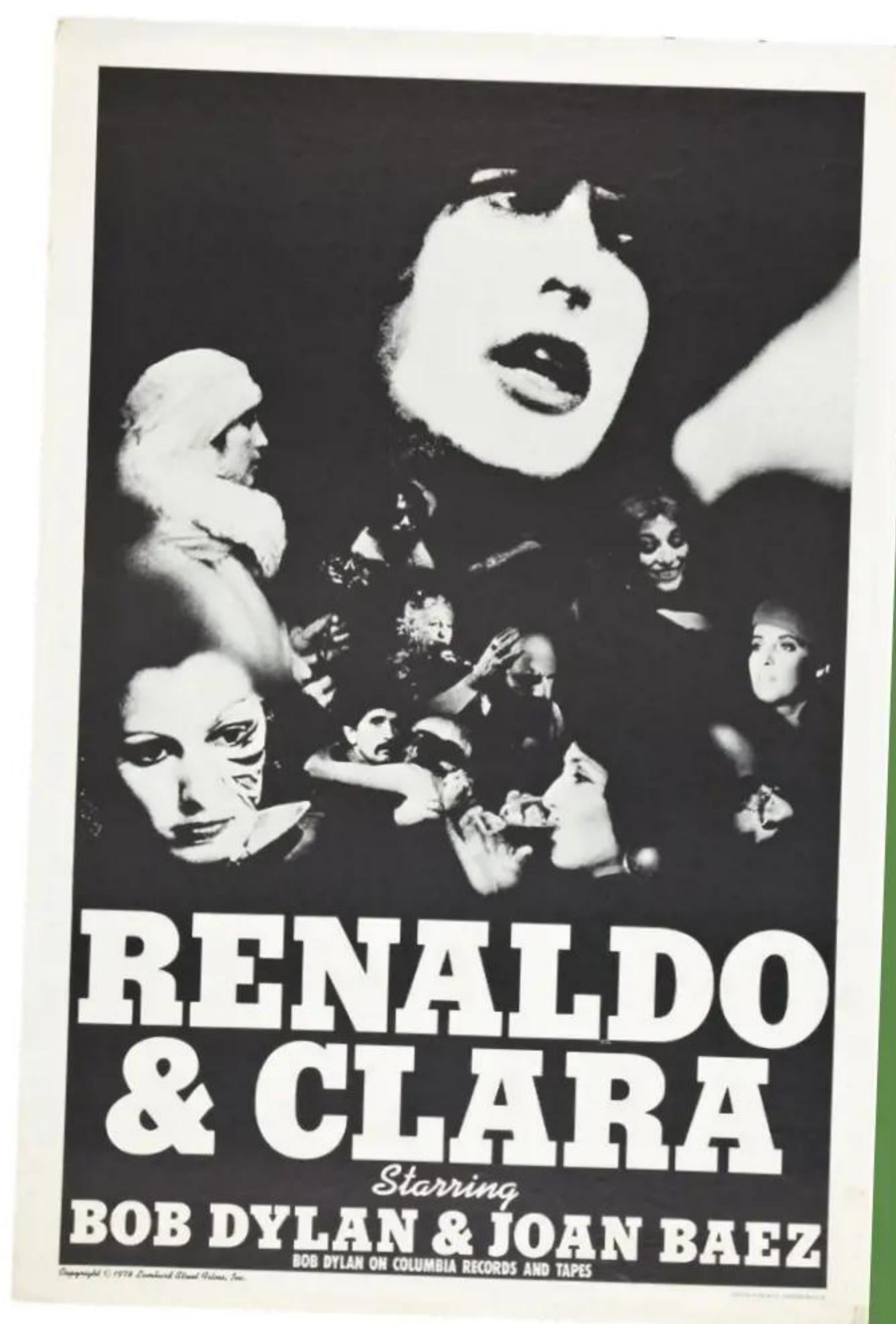


Rubin Carter, nine years into a prison sentence for a murder he didn't commit (he was eventually acquitted and released in 1985).

Hand-in-hand with *Desire* came the Rolling Thunder Revue, Dylan's ramshackle touring carnival of musicians and artists including Joan Baez, Roger McGuinn, Ronnee Blakely, Ramblin' Jack Elliott and the Beat poet Alan Ginsberg among several others. Joni Mitchell joined for the final few dates, and the last show was a benefit for Rubin Carter, where Roberta Flack and Robbie Robertson also joined the company. No longer with The Band, Dylan brought the musicians from *Desire* out with him – violinist Scarlet Rivera, bassist Rob Stoner, and drummer Howie Wyeth – with the addition of David Bowie's guitarist Mick Ronson. The company trundled through 1975 and 1976 for a total of almost 60 dates, the idea being to play smaller venues in out-of-the-way places.

Dylan was trying to reconnect with his audience, but he often played in strange white-face make-up – he had to keep himself at a distance somehow.

And while all this was going on, Dylan somehow found time to make *Renaldo and Clara*, finally trying his hand at filmmaking as was suggested to have been the plan since Mexico three years prior. Actor and playwright Sam Shepherd was a key collaborator, although the co-written screenplay was often ignored in favour of improvisation and the drama was interspersed with footage from the Revue.




In Martin Scorsese's film of the tour and this era, released on Netflix in 2019, Dylan claims that it's impossible to analyse or explain the Revue, "because it was about nothing."

A more conventional, year-long, 114-date world tour – dismissed by some as 'The Alimony Tour' – followed in 1978, taking in Europe, North America and the Far East including Japan. And a stop-off in Santa Monica in the spring produced the

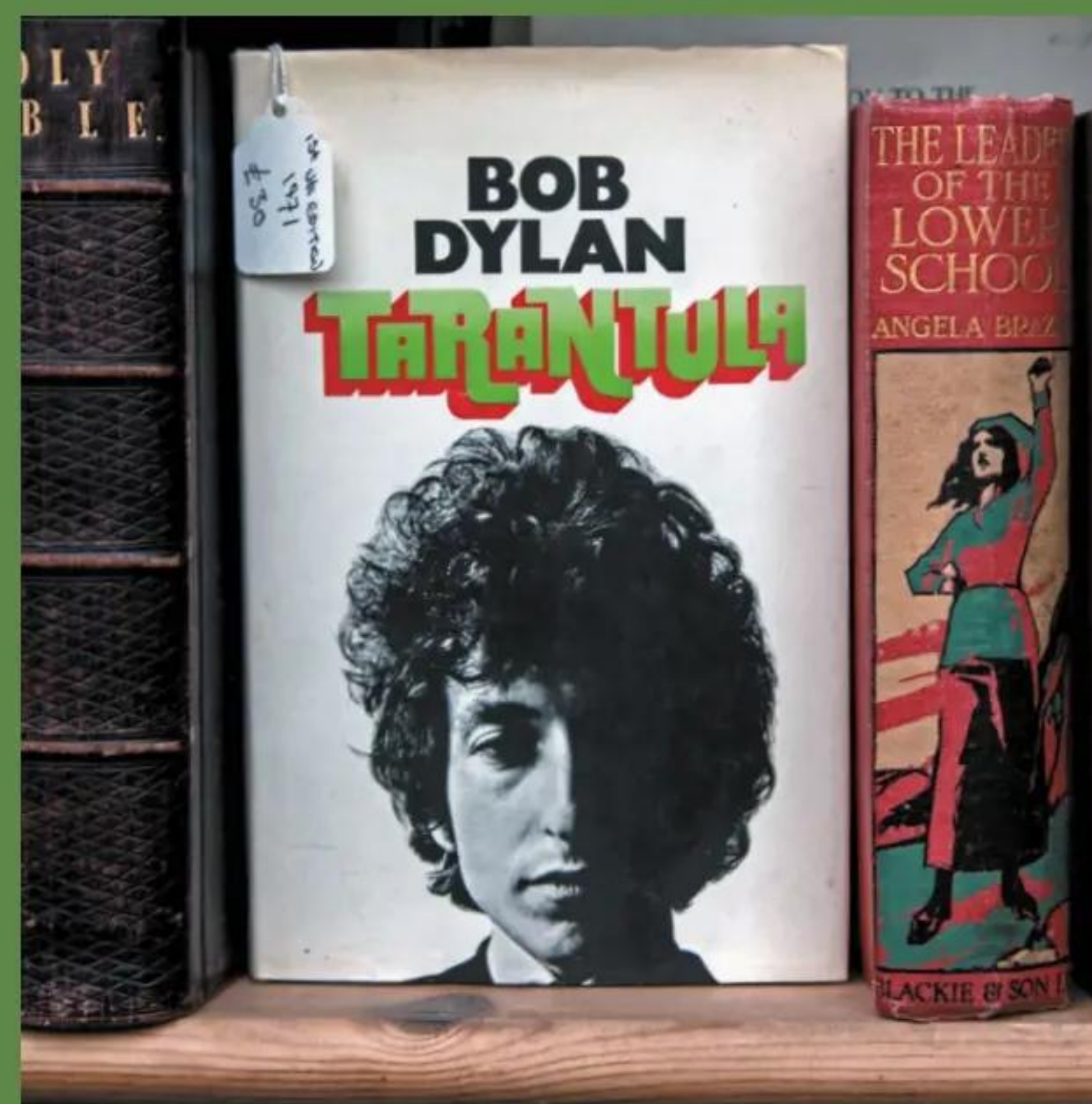
**A 14-disc box set of live recordings from the Rolling Thunder Revue was released in 2018 alongside Scorsese's film**

album *Street Legal* which, following some of his strongest work, felt unremarkable. None of its nine tracks would go on to become perennials, and sales were down. But he was

about to confound his critics yet again with a transformation predicted by nobody, perhaps least of all Dylan himself. As the sun set on his imperial 1970s, Dylan unveiled *Slow Train Coming*, the first of three albums inspired by his conversion to Evangelical Christianity. He'd never wanted to be the voice of a generation. But apparently now he was a prophet... 

## ALONG CAME A SPIDER

DYLAN'S PROSE-POETRY BOOK *TARANTULA* CONFUSED PEOPLE. HE CLAIMED HE DIDN'T WANT TO WRITE IT ANYWAY...



As Dylan later explained it, fans and journalists impressed with his lyrics often asked if he'd ever write a book. Albert Grossman, Dylan's infamous 1960s manager, said "Sure!" and suddenly there was a contract. "He made the deal and then I had to write the book," Dylan recounted in 2001.

"He often did things like that."

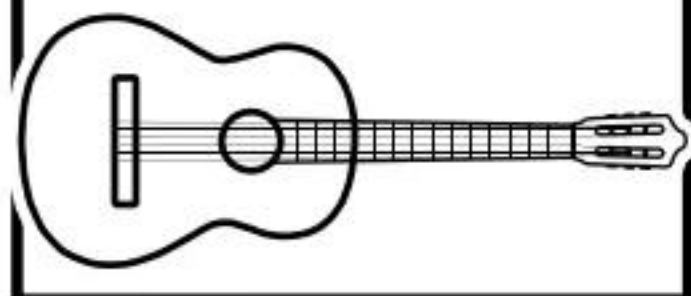
Dylan had played around with stream-of-consciousness prose poetry before in the sleeve notes for *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited*. *Tarantula* would be more of the same: a rambling collection of stories and lyrics and musings and nonsense stylistically inspired by the 'Beats' like Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, as well as earlier experimental authors such as Samuel Beckett and Arthur Rimbaud: all Dylan's literary heroes. His voice had been hailed as unique on record but seemed derivative on paper.

*Tarantula* was slated for publication in the mid-60s but never materialised. It was widely bootlegged, however, leading to Dylan deciding he might as well get it out officially.

It finally slunk into bookshops in 1971. Contemporary critics were unimpressed.

"Buy his albums," was the verdict in *The New York Times*.





# HURRICANE

PERHAPS HIS GREATEST PROTEST SONG, DYLAN'S FURIOUS  
CALL FOR THE FREEING OF A WRONGFULLY CONVICTED  
BOXER PROVED MUSIC CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS

WORDS Henry Yates

**B**y the mid '70s, Bob Dylan was the undisputed master of the protest song.

The singer-songwriter had previously railed against the East and West's nuclear standoff (on 1963's *Masters of War*) and racism (on 1964's *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll*, chronicling the murder of an African-American barmaid and her white killer's lenient sentence).

Now, 1975's *Hurricane* aired his most stinging socio-political broadside yet, addressing an injustice that sent ripples across America. Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter had been a fan-favourite middleweight boxer in the early '60s. But he would become notorious for the events of 17 June, 1966, when two men died during a shooting at the Lafayette Bar and Grill in Paterson, New Jersey. That night, at 3am, police stopped Carter's hire car – with friend John Artis at the wheel – and, despite a muddled trial marked by inconsistent witness testimony, both men were convicted of first-degree murder.

Fearing lawsuits from those involved in the case, Columbia Records made Dylan re-record *Hurricane* with altered lyrics in October 1975

Getting *Hurricane* right clearly mattered to Dylan; the usually prolific songwriter didn't put pen to paper until he had met with

Carter at Rahway State

Prison and consulted with the ranks of supporters who believed the pugilist was innocent. "He was just filled with all these feelings," wrote biographer Clinton Heylin in *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades Revisited*.

"He couldn't make the first step."


When the song finally flowed, it unfolded like a newspaper clipping, Dylan beating an

acoustic guitar while candidly recounting the murder case, real names and all ("Enter Patty Valentine from the upper hall/ She sees the bartender in a pool of blood/ Cries out, 'My God, they've killed them all'"). Carter, meanwhile, is pointedly described as

**BELOW** Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter in 1965

**OPPOSITE** Dylan performs a Rolling Thunder Review concert benefiting the legal defence of Carter at Madison Square Garden, New York, December 1975

"the man the authorities came to blame/For something that he never done".

Most protest songs are impotent screams into the void, never achieving their goals. *Hurricane* was different, with its release in November 1975 bringing the case to wider public attention, swinging support behind Carter – and arguably prompting the authorities to revisit a conviction that Federal Judge H. Lee Sarokin ultimately ruled was "based on racism rather than reason and concealment rather than disclosure". The boxer walked free in 1985 – and became executive director of the Association In Defence of the Wrongly Convicted (AIDWYC). 



IMAGES Alamy, Getty Images





## HURRICANE IN HOLLYWOOD

### HOW CARTER'S CASE HIT THE SILVER SCREEN

A quarter-century after Dylan's song, Carter enjoyed a second brush with popular culture when 1999's *Hurricane* cast Denzel Washington as the incarcerated fighter. The star took the role seriously – working with a boxing coach for a year – and scored a Golden Globe award and Oscar nomination for his performance. Carter, meanwhile, seemed pleased with the choice of leading man: “I didn’t know I was that good-looking...”









CHAPTER

# 4

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## BORN AGAIN

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- 70. **From Judas To Jesus**
- 76. **Road To Redemption**
- 82. **The Times They Are  
A-Changin' (Again)**
- 88. **Minstrel Of The  
New Millennium**



# FROM JUDAS

to Jesus

**IN THE LATE-1970s, A BORN-AGAIN DYLAN  
VEERED FROM POET TO PREACHER, ALIENATING  
EVEN HIS MOST DIEHARD FOLLOWERS**

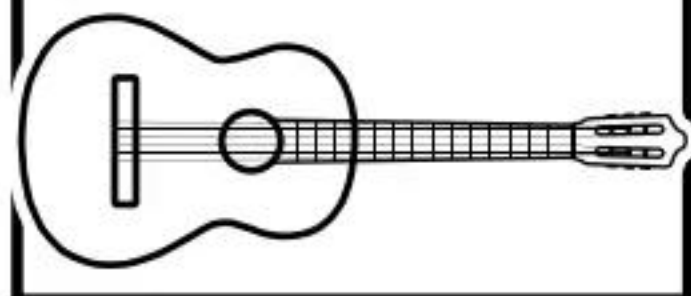
**WORDS** Bill DeMain











n 7 May, 1980, Bob Dylan took the stage in Hartford, Connecticut and greeted the crowd

by saying, “You don’t hear much about God these days. Well, we’re gonna talk about Him all night!”

It was strange enough to hear Dylan speaking at all. He’d never been one for between-song banter. But here he was sounding like a TV evangelist, spouting dogma and fire-and-brimstone admonitions. At another show, in Tempe, AZ, when some fans yelled out for old hits *Like A Rolling Stone* and *Positively 4th Street*, Dylan scolded them, saying if they “wanted rock ‘n’ roll,” they should “go and see KISS.” Then they could “rock ‘n’ roll all the way down to the pit.”

Dubbed Bob Dylan’s Gospel Tour, this run of concerts was at the heart of a remarkable four-year, three-album period when he embraced fundamentalist Christianity, accepted Jesus Christ as his saviour and somehow parlayed that strange left turn into one of his strongest albums of the decade.

As confounding as it all was for critics and fans, there were signposts leading up to his conversion. Or at least showing he’d always been a seeker.

Dylan was raised Jewish. When he was a child, his father instilled a strict moral code in him. When Bob was twelve, he was sent to study with a rabbi, to prepare for his Bar Mitzvah. As a young musician, even Dylan’s view of inspiration veered towards the mystical. He saw him himself as a channel. In 1963, he told *Sing Out!*: “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.” There was also



a kind of moral fervour running through that year’s breakthrough album, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, especially on *A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall* and *Down The Highway*.

In an interview with the *Chicago Daily News* in 1965, he claimed he didn’t “have any religion or philosophy” and didn’t “like anybody to tell me what I have to believe, how I have to live.” But then in the next breath, he praised the ancient Chinese divination text, the *I Ching*, saying, “It’s the only thing that is amazingly true.” The year after, in a *Playboy* interview, Dylan said, having already achieved everything he set out to do in music, the only thing he was looking forward to was “salvation”.

On his 1967 post-motorcycle accident album, *John Wesley Harding*, he explored spiritual seeking and Biblical themes on over half the songs, including *I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine*, *All Along the Watchtower* and *The Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest*.

Within popular music, Dylan wasn’t alone in exploring the divine, and blurring the sacred







## DYLAN SCOLDED THE CROWD, SAYING IF THEY “WANTED ROCK ‘N’ ROLL,” THEY SHOULD “GO AND SEE KISS”



**ABOVE** Clockwise from top left: Dylan on stage at the Fox Warfield Theatre, San Francisco in 1979; Dylan's live band on the Shot of Love Tour at the Loreley open-air theatre in St. Goarshausen, Germany, 1981; 1980's *Saved*; Bob at the 1980 Grammy Awards after party in Beverly Hills, California; at a taping of *Saturday Night Live* in New York

and the profane. Hank Williams sang old-time religion as Luke The Drifter. Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard both made numerous gospel albums. So did Elvis Presley and B.B. King. And Dylan's friend George Harrison christened the 1970s with the first-ever God-conscious number one single, *My Sweet Lord*.

Fast forward to 1978. Dylan was out on tour, and at a personal low point. His marriage had ended, and his wife Sara got custody of his five children. His movie *Renaldo and Clara* had bombed.

Elvis, one of his heroes, had died. The greatest hits stadium shows he was playing felt empty and formulaic.

Meanwhile, three of his band members were devout Christians – T Bone Burnett, Steven Soles and David Mansfield – as was Dylan's new girlfriend Mary Alice Artes (in *Precious Angel*, Dylan praised her as the “one to show me I was blinded”). Burnett told Dylan biographer Howard Sounes, “There was a spiritual movement going on in music back then.” On the tour bus every night, Burnett and his bandmates discussed religion and spirituality with their boss.

Then, at a show in San Diego, when Dylan “wasn't feeling too well,” a fan tossed a silver cross pendant on stage. “I picked ➡



up the cross and put it in my pocket,” Dylan said in *Behind The Shades*. “I brought it with me to the next town. I was feeling even worse than I’d felt in San Diego. I said, ‘Well, I need something tonight that I didn’t have before.’ And I looked in my pocket and I had this cross.”

He took to wearing it, and a few days later, he had what he called “a vision and a feeling,” in a hotel room in Tucson. As he told the *L.A. Times*: “There was a presence in the room that couldn’t have been anybody but Jesus. Jesus put his hand on me... I felt my whole body tremble.”

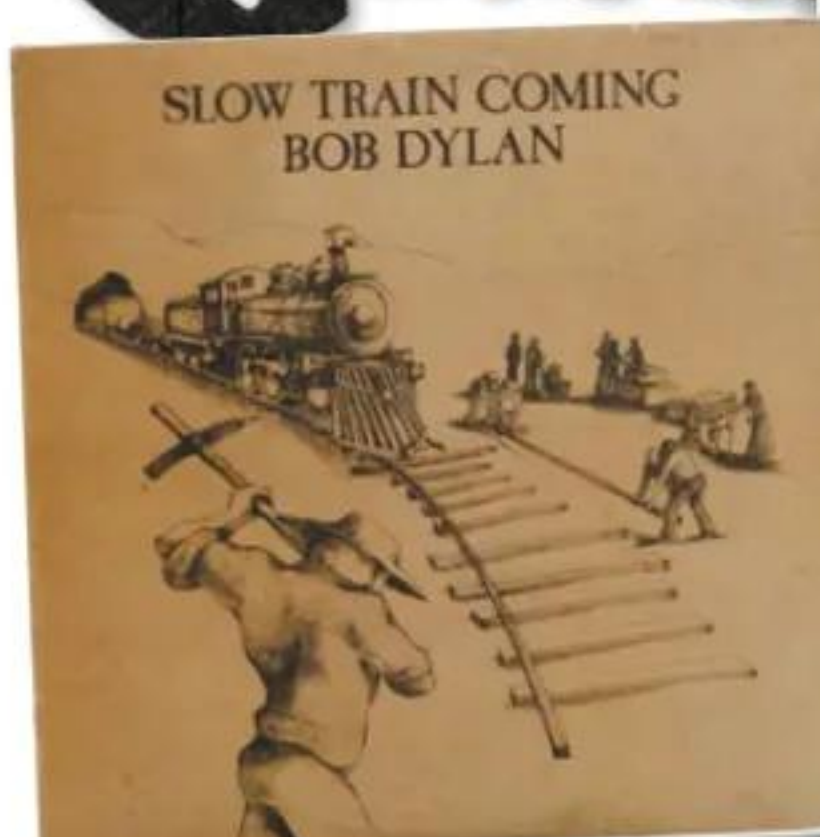
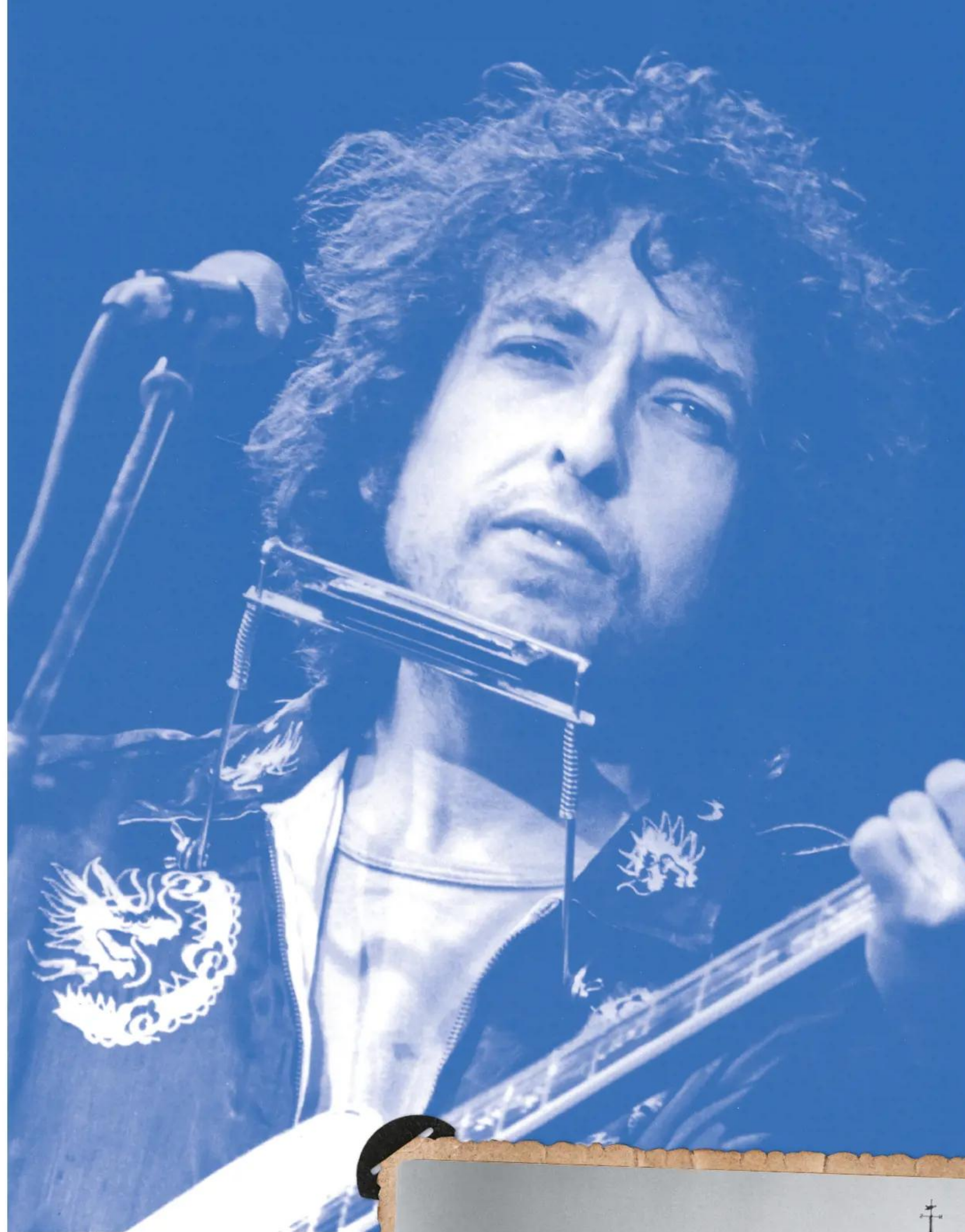
From there, Dylan accompanied his girlfriend to the Vineyard Fellowship, an evangelical church in L.A., and they started attending Bible classes together over the next few months. In 1979, he was baptised in the Pacific Ocean. In 1980, Dylan told Robert Hilburn: “I truly had a born-again experience, if you want to call it that...”

Dylan’s Jewish friends and family were puzzled, though a few admitted that his conversion made him warmer and more loving. Some musician pals doubted his sincerity. Ronnie Hawkins told him, “After this, you are gonna be an atheist and sell to all them cats who don’t believe nothing.” Keith Richards called him “the prophet of profits”. Eric Clapton was more philosophical: “Bob goes through changes. Sometimes he’s a heavy drinker, sometimes dry. Sometimes he’s into dope, then not. He can disappear with a carload of Mexicans. No phase is the final one.”

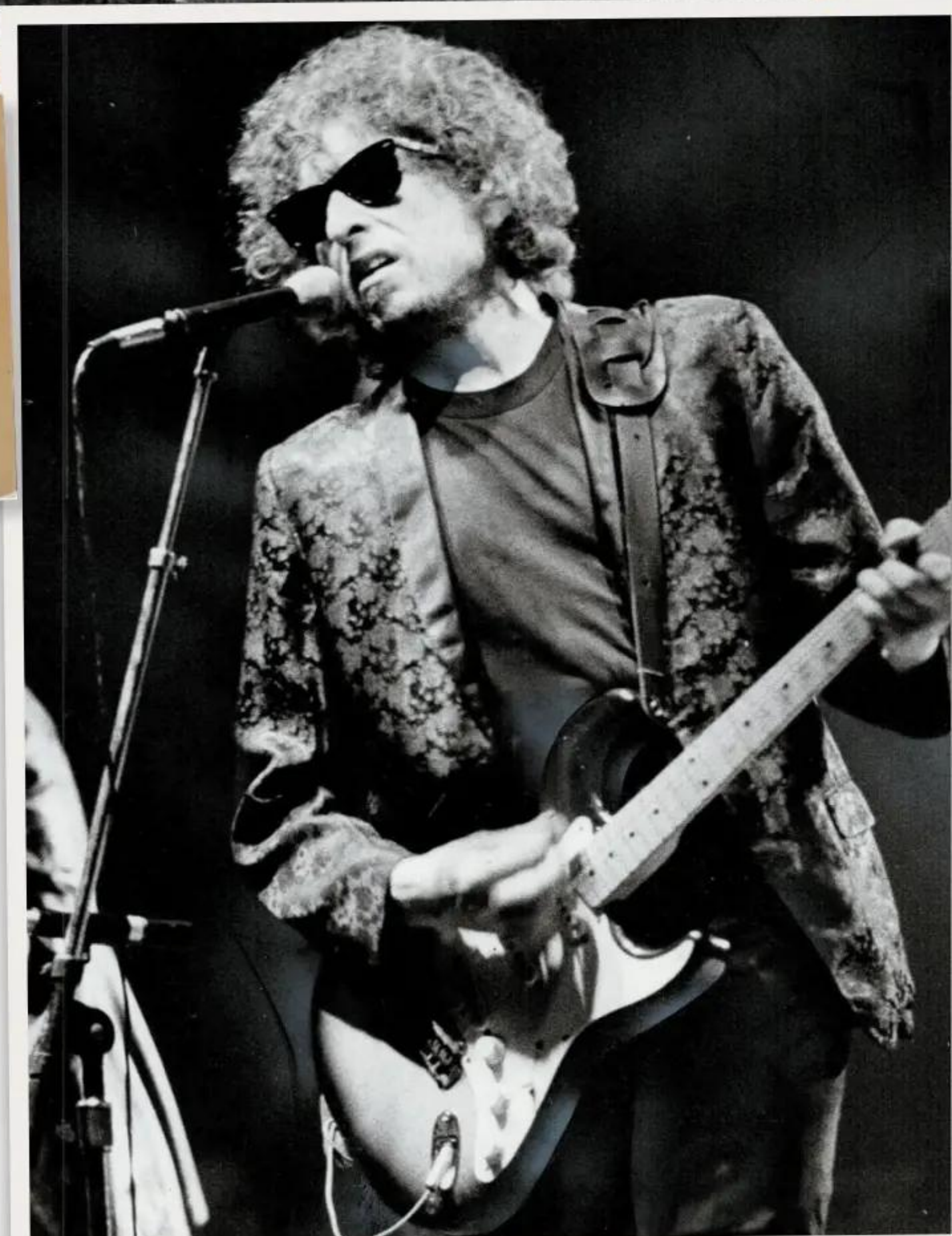
Whatever his motivation, Dylan’s blossoming faith stirred his muse. *Slow Train, Do Right to Me Baby (Do Unto Others), When You Gonna Wake Up* – the new songs that poured out caught

both his joy at being saved and – Dylan being Dylan – also a kind of stinging ferocity reminiscent of his earlier protest songs like *Masters of War*. It was heaven and hell, seen through the lens of the newly converted.

Dylan recorded the material at Muscle Shoals’ FAME studio, with Jerry Wexler producing and Dire Straits’ Mark Knopfler leading the band (Dylan recognized the musical influence he had on Knopfler, telling Wexler, “Mark does me better than anybody”). With its funky grooves roiling behind Dylan’s proselytising, 1979’s *Slow Train Coming* was his best-sounding album since *Blood on the Tracks*. Not surprisingly, it was dismissed by some as a betrayal worse than his going electric. But the controversy, plus an unlikely hit single in *Gotta*



ABOVE Dylan's house, under construction, in Malibu, California; 1979's *Slow Train Coming*

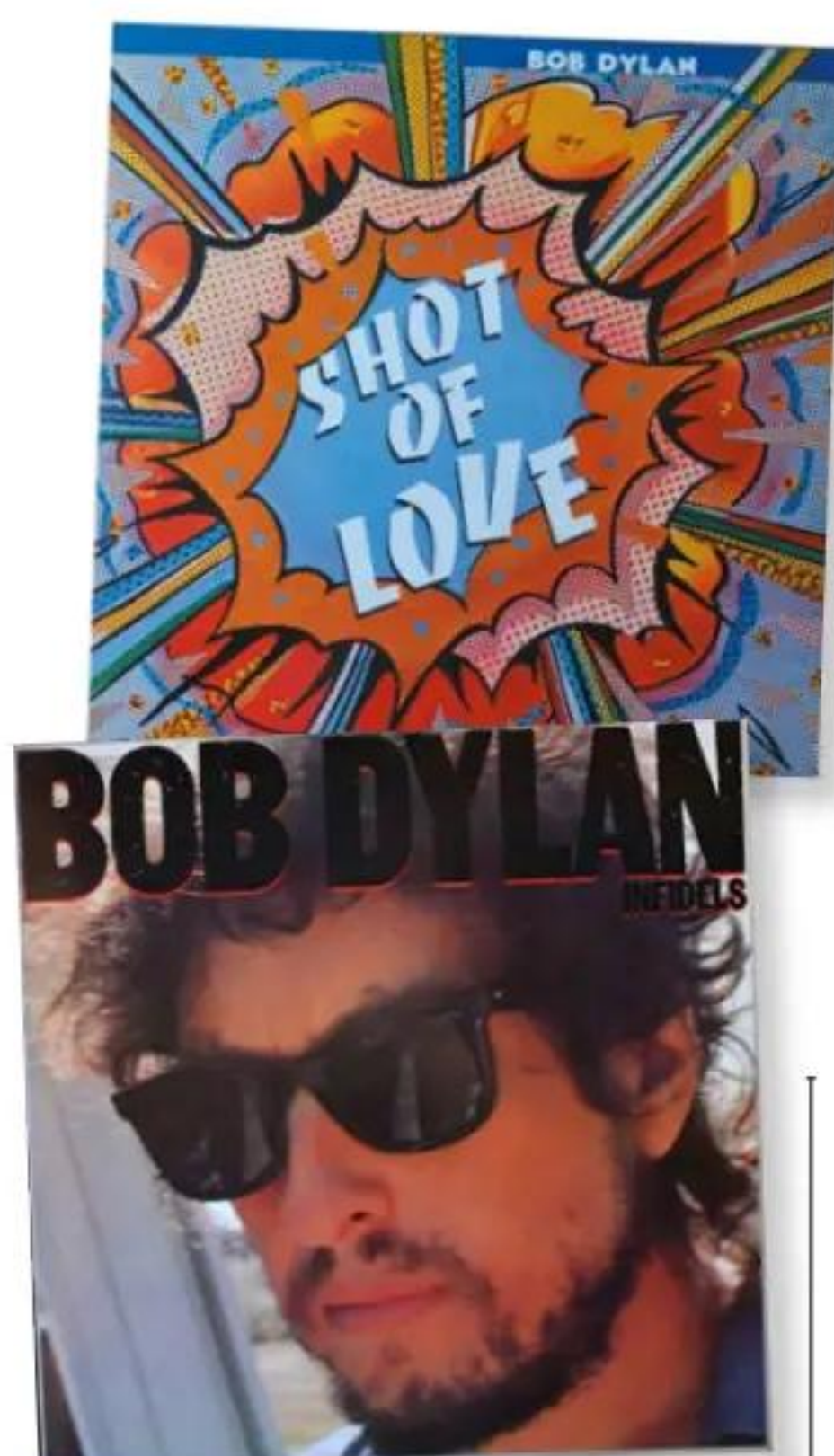




*Serve Somebody*, drove the record to platinum sales and a #3 spot on the Billboard albums chart.

Where *Slow Train Coming* was fiery with Old Testament passion, its follow-up, 1980's *Saved* felt repetitive and laced with platitudes. On *Pressing On*, he sang, "I'm pressing on to the higher calling of the Lord." Indeed, the whole record feels like Dylan recycling variations of the converted sinner's line – "I was blind but now I see." And really, even if you're a genius songwriter, how far can you take that?

The answer, on 1981's *Shot of Love*, was not much further. *Property of Jesus*, written in the third-person, suggested that Dylan was moving away from being tagged as easily identifiable



**ABOVE** The final entry in Dylan's born-again trilogy, 1981's *Shot of Love*, and his return to secular music, 1983's *Infidels*


**BELOW** Dylan and his band performing live in 1980

## "I TRULY HAD A BORN-AGAIN EXPERIENCE, IF YOU WANT TO CALL IT THAT..."

convert, while *Lenny Bruce* was a secular tune about his taxi ride with the counterculture comedian. The record's final song – and the final statement of Dylan's born-again trilogy – made the whole strange detour worth it. *Every Grain of Sand* summarised his career so far and search for redemption in a way that gently balanced the poetic and the preachy – "I am hanging in the balance of the reality of man/Like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand."

By 1982, old hits started creeping back into his live sets.

And in 1983, *Infidels* – another collaboration with Mark Knopfler – returned him to secular songwriting, exploring the blues and the story of Blind Willie McTell. He had assimilated his born-again experience, used it as a framework to make art and as he put it, "come at things from different sides to get a different perspective." It was time to move on.

As he told *Rolling Stone*: "Every so often you have to have the law laid down so that you know what the law is. Then you can do whatever you please with it." 





# Road to REDEMPTION

HOW BOB DYLAN SURVIVED HIS MOST CHALLENGING DECADE

WORDS Rob Hughes

**T**he '80s were pretty unforgiving for many of rock's greatest icons – McCartney, the Stones, Bowie and Neil Young included. But Bob Dylan seemed to have it worst of all. Writing in *Chronicles: Volume One*, Dylan recalled taking stock of himself sometime in late 1987. His own songs, he said, were like strangers. Unable to locate the musical instincts that had served him so well down the years, he felt “done for, an empty burned-out wreck. Too much static in my head...”

Dylan would soon initiate a creative reset, pulling himself back from the brink to finish the decade on a high. But his brutal self-assessment certainly

wasn't groundless. Even diehard Dylanologists have a hard time with much of his '80s output.

The decade began promisingly enough. In February 1980, Dylan picked up a Grammy for *Gotta Serve Somebody*, the song that had returned him to the Billboard Top 30 for the first time in six years. By the spring though, the advent of *Saved*, his second gospel album after the big-selling *Slow Train Coming*, halted his momentum. Sales were comparatively poor; critics were divided. If the post-conversion Dylan was really here to stay – eschewing his past self and brimming with religious fervour – then the songs, it was argued, needed to carry more than mere sermonising.

**OPPOSITE** On stage in Buffalo, New York, April 1986

Hope arrived, at least in part, with the following year's *Shot of Love*. Dylan appeared reinvigorated at times, enlisting Little Richard's old producer, Bumps Blackwell, to oversee the rattling Southern blues of the title track. Issues of faith still prevailed, but the album was altogether less preachy, counterweighted with more secular songs. The undoubted highlight was *Every Grain Of Sand*, a hymnal gospel ballad that found Dylan wrestling with notions of self-determination and divine providence. It remains one of his finest achievements to this day.

**BELOW** Dylan at a party thrown for him in 1985

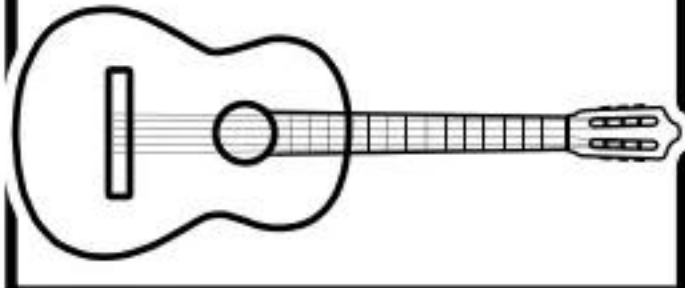
Dylan's subsequent tour of the US and Europe dialled down the Christian songs, peppering ➡











his setlists with old classics like *Maggie's Farm*, *Ballad of a Thin Man* and *Girl from the North Country*. The suggestion was that his Born Again period was nearing an end. Doubters, meanwhile, were still voicing their dismay at his music. *Shot of Love* was mauled by reviewers. The *NME*'s Nick Kent called it "Dylan's worst album to date."

In the States, *Shot of Love* was his poorest commercial showing for nearly 20 years. Laying low for a while seemed sensible – hence a quiet 1982. Aside from a few informal jam sessions and guesting on an Allen Ginsberg album, Dylan spent most of his time at home in Malibu.

His only live performance was an unexpected spot at an anti-nukes benefit at Pasadena's Rose Bowl in June '82. Midway through an all-star bill that included CSN, Stevie Nicks, Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt, Joan Baez interrupted her set to announce

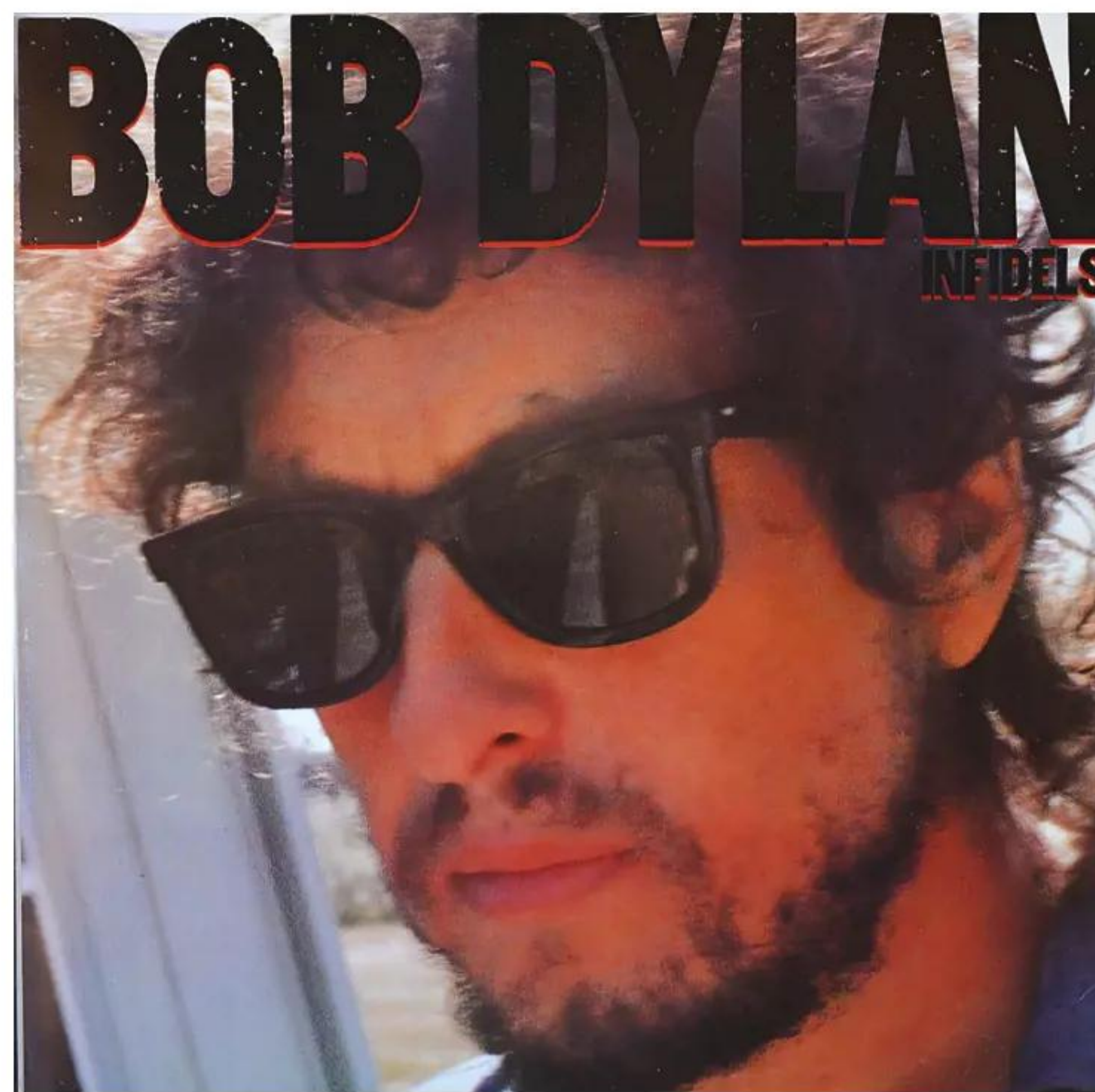
a special guest. On walked Dylan, acoustic guitar in hand, to join his old flame for *With God on Our Side*. The 85,000-strong crowd roared their approval. Here were the two most visible totems of the post-war folk revival, reprising their duet from Newport 1963, giving further credence to the notion that Dylan was slowly reconnecting with his old self.

Though Dylan's Christianity was still very much intact, he began steering clear of further public declarations of faith. This was supported by 1983's *Infidels*, which marked a return to secular music. "Maybe the time has

come and gone," he said, referring to his prior habit of impressing upon non-believers the need to save their souls. "Jesus himself only preached for three years."

*Infidels* didn't quite reclaim past glories, but it at least showed that the muse hadn't entirely deserted him. Produced by Dire Straits' Mark Knopfler, it

**Dylan played washed-up rocker Billy Parker in 1987's *Hearts Of Fire*, a dud that lasted a fortnight in UK cinemas and just a week Stateside**



**ABOVE** 1983's *Infidels*

housed the six-minute *Jokerman*, a compelling piece flooded with strange, symbolic imagery and boasting a killer vocal. Other songs, particularly the unguarded *Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight*, were equally promising.

The album did better than its predecessor, but sales figures were only modest. Undaunted, Dylan retreated to his home studio to record a bunch of new demos, inviting along numerous guests at random intervals, followed, in May 1984, by a six-week stadium tour of Europe with a backing band that included former Rolling Stones guitarist Mick Taylor.

Taylor was one of an exhaustive list of players who subsequently fetched up on 1985's *Empire Burlesque*. Culled from various sessions that ran from the summer of '84 to the following spring, the album was a jumble of songs that lacked cohesion and a strong guiding hand. The sheer volume of personnel (Ronnie Wood, Al Kooper, Sly & Robbie and members of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers among them) didn't help either.

Dylan elected to produce it himself, but also turned to DJ/hip-hop producer Arthur Baker to mix the album in an attempt to make it more modish. The result

**BELOW** Bob with Rupert Everett and Fiona at the *Hearts of Fire* photocall in London, 1987







sounds horribly dated today, the songs laden with synths, gated 80s reverb and over-compression. If this was Dylan's attempt to engage with a contemporary audience, he appeared to be selling himself short. Tellingly, the album's standout track (the sparse, poetic *Dark Eyes*), featured Dylan alone on acoustic guitar and harmonica.

However uneven '80s Dylan was proving to be thus far, Dylan the legend was in demand.

He was among the A-listers on 1985 charity single *We Are the World*, recorded by supergroup USA For Africa, joining Ray Charles for the final chorus. Soon after, Steven Van Zandt enlisted him for anti-apartheid 45, *Sun City*. And it was no surprise to find him closing the main show – just ahead of a *We Are the World* finale – at that summer's Live Aid bash in Philadelphia.

Flanked by Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood, Dylan drew flak by suggesting that some of the Live Aid proceeds might be diverted to help struggling American farmers pay off their bank debts. His pedestrian

**ABOVE** Dylan performing with Tom Petty in Buffalo, 1986

**BELOW** Clockwise: 1989's *Oh Mercy*; with and Ron Wood (left) and Keith Richards (right) of The Rolling Stones at Live Aid in Philadelphia, 13 July, 1985; The Bootleg Series Vol. 16: *Springtime in New York 1980–1985*

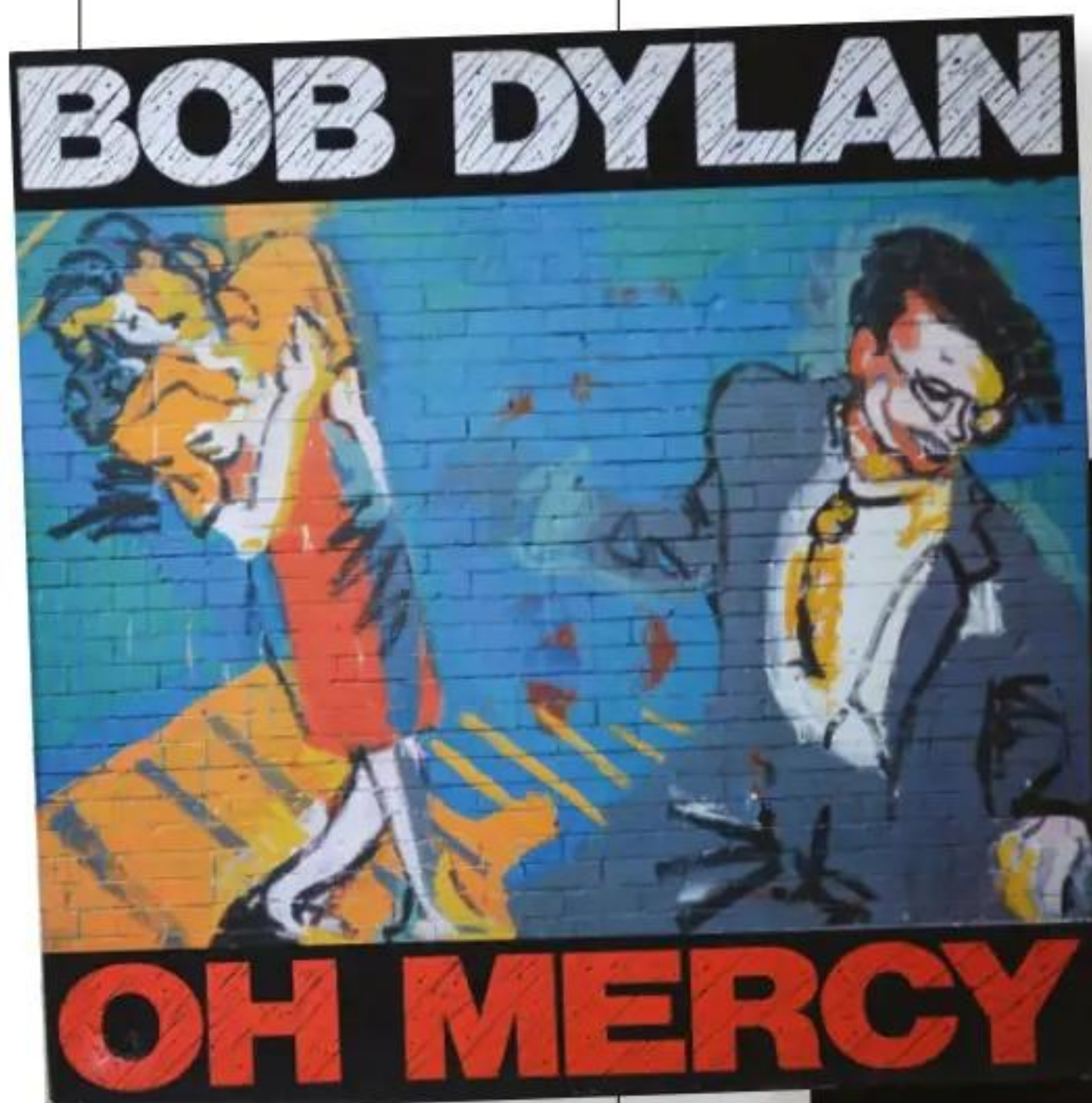
three-song performance didn't win him any favours, either. It's nevertheless interesting to note that, within two months, Dylan's comments had directly inspired Willie Nelson, Neil Young and John Mellencamp to organise the first annual Farm Aid benefit.

Dylan's Farm Aid appearance saw him backed by Tom Petty & Heartbreakers. In contrast to Live Aid, he seemed inspired, ripping through a short set that

concluded, appropriately, with a grandstanding

*Maggie's Farm*. The Heartbreakers association had legs. By February 1986, Dylan and his new cohorts were heading to Australasia to begin the True Confessions tour, leading to 41 shows across the States and Canada throughout the summer.

Columbia saw it as an opportune moment, encouraging Dylan to complete a new album. The resultant *Knocked Out Loaded* was another underwhelming affair, patchworked together from sessions stretching back two years. There were only eight ➔





## THE NEVERENDING ROAD

BOB WAS ON TOUR FOR THE MAJORITY OF THE 1980s



On 7 June, 1988, Bob Dylan and his three-piece band began his Interstate 88 tour at the Concord Pavilion in California. His predilection for never staying away from the road too long led to all subsequent live activity being popularly dubbed the Never Ending Tour. The name itself can be traced to UK-based journalist Adrian Deevoy while interviewing Dylan in 1989. Deevoy remarked how his previous tour had virtually gone straight into the next one. When Dylan called it “all the same tour,” Deevoy replied: “It’s the Never Ending Tour?” “Yeah,” said Bob, with a marked lack of enthusiasm.

Well over 3,000 dates later, the name has stuck, often to Dylan’s chagrin. In 1993, writing in the liner notes to *World Gone Wrong*, he said: “Don’t be bewildered by the Never Ending Tour chatter. There was a Never Ending Tour, but it ended in 1991 with the departure of guitarist G. E. Smith.”

It was still clearly an issue when he spoke to *Rolling Stone* more recently: “Does anybody call Henry Ford a Never Ending Car Builder? Anybody ever say that Duke Ellington was on a Never Ending Bandstand Tour? Anybody with a trade can work as long as they want.”



songs, three of them covers. Its redeeming feature is *Brownsville Girl* (co-written with playwright Sam Shepard), an 11-minute meditation on identity, love and memory couched in an allegorical tale about a Western gunslinger. In terms of epic-masterpiece Bob, it sits beside *Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands* and *Desolation Row*.

Such moments of greatness were, however, frustratingly sporadic. Especially in light of *Biograph*, a career-bridging boxset of hits, rarities and album tracks issued just months before *Knocked Out Loaded*. Its release served to remind people, lest Dylan’s recent output was slowly tainting their perception, of his unbridled genius. Sadly, there was precious little sign of that on 1988’s *Down in the Groove*. Generally perceived as Dylan’s 80s nadir, another overcrowded guestlist – from Eric Clapton, Jerry Garcia and Bob Weir to Ronnie Wood, Paul Simonon and ex-Pistol Steve Jones – only added to its messy confusion. This time around, covers accounted for over half the songs. He seemed, instead, to have already expended most of his energy on the road.

1987 had occasioned two major tours. Somewhat ill-advisedly, the first saw him play US stadiums

alongside the Grateful Dead. The profits were eye-watering; the shows were colourless. Those of a strong disposition can seek out subsequent live album *Dylan & the Dead* (1989) for disheartening proof. Dylan was better suited to another swing around the block with Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers. Climaxing with four nights at Wembley Arena in October ’87, the Temples In Flames Tour caught fire slowly. But Dylan had been struck by a renewed sense of purpose midway through. His vitality returned, as did the spontaneous thrill of performing. When it was all over, he wrote in *Chronicles*, “instead of being stranded somewhere at the end of the story, I was actually in the prelude to the beginning of another one.”

Initially mooted by Jeff Lynne and George Harrison during sessions for the latter’s *Cloud Nine*, the Traveling Wilburys came together in April 1988 after the pair had floated the idea of a supergroup to Dylan, Petty and Roy Orbison. Their first joint endeavour was a single, *Handle With Care*, partly cut at Dylan’s home studio. By October, five months after the limp *Down in the Groove*, Dylan was back in the upper reaches of the Billboard



charts with *The Traveling Wilburys Vol. 1*. The album's success provided Dylan with the boost he needed. Warm, rootsy and amenable, the co-written songs breathe easily, particularly Dylan-led pieces like the playful *Tweeter and the Monkey Man*. Aside from winning a Grammy, *The Traveling Wilburys Vol. 1* went multi-platinum. It also became the first Dylan album to reach sales of two million. Its entry into the charts coincided with the onset of what has since become known as Dylan's Never Ending Tour (see panel, left). Once the initial dates were over, he wasted little time in returning to the studio, accepting an invite from producer Daniel Lanois to record in New Orleans. Fresh from overseeing albums by Robbie Robertson and U2, Lanois proved an ideal foil for Dylan, bringing a focus and intensity to the sessions that rarely wavered,

**OPPOSITE** On stage with Mick Jagger of The Rolling Stones

even when his charge was suffering bouts of indecision.

At times, the ensuing *Oh Mercy* nudges the heights of Dylan's finest work: rich, allusive, occasionally direct, often transcendent. It's easily his best and most consistent album of the decade. *Man in the Long Black Coat*, for instance, is an extraordinary ballad, a demon parable dripping in Crescent City ju-ju. Painful self-admonishment steers the beautiful, bluesy *What Good Am I?*; *Most of the Time* is pure storm-simmering drama. And so it goes on. Thematically, every stripe of Dylan is here, from unreliable confessor to vulnerable romantic, gothic narrator to agent of portent.

Released in September 1989, *Oh Mercy* chimed with critics and fans alike. Dylan's redemption arc, after a difficult decade in which he refused to take the easy route by simply disappearing for a while rather than playing out his creative struggles in public, was complete. The album peaked at no.6 in the UK and made the Top 30 and went gold in the US. Dylan was back, only different. In the '60s and '70s, he'd seemed capable of making the world bend to his will. Bob's power had dwindled, but, surrounded by the likes of Madonna, Prince, Garth Brooks and Janet Jackson, Dylan had found his place, and it would be enough to sustain him for the foreseeable future. 



**BELOW** *The Traveling Wilburys*, L-R: Roy Orbison, Jeff Lynne, Bob Dylan, Tom Petty, George Harrison



IMAGES Alamy



# The Times

# THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

HOW DID DYLAN FARE IN THE 1990s – THE DECADE OF GRUNGE AND PRE-MILLENNIAL TENSION?

(Again)

WORDS Joel McIver



ever an artist to adhere to anyone's expectations, Bob Dylan followed up September 1989's

excellent *Oh Mercy* with the unexpectedly naive *Under the Red Sky* just a year later. Despite its promising, U2-style title, hinting at commentary on social ills such as warfare, Dylan gave us several songs aimed at nursery-age children. While simple ditties such as *Wiggle Wiggle* weren't exactly terrible, and the master himself made his intentions clear by dedicating the new record to his four-year-old daughter Desiree, none of this was what critics wanted to hear and the album flatlined, commercially speaking. Dylan more or less completely disowned it in later years, citing simultaneous commitments with the Traveling Wilburys, a too-many-cooks scenario in the studio and the divorce he was going through at the time.

He was correct that rather too many musicians were involved in *Under the Red Sky* for comfort

– including George Harrison, Guns N'Roses guitarist Slash, David Crosby, Bruce Hornsby, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Elton John – although this didn't stop him from doing much better work with the Wilburys, whose second album was released in October 1990. Titled *Traveling Wilburys Vol. 3* as a wry reference to a bootleg album that had been

**BELOW** 1990's *Under the Red Sky* and supergroup *The Traveling Wilburys' Vol. 3* album from the same year

marked the end of the Traveling Wilburys, whose brief moment in the sun is remembered fondly by fans of the project: George Harrison died in 2001, and Tom Petty followed him in 2017, leaving Dylan and Jeff Lynne as its only survivors today.

As was Dylan's preferred modus operandi by this stage, he continued the Never Ending

Tour through 1990 and into '91 with his usual diligence, kicking off with the Fastbreak Tour – including dates in the USA, Brazil, France and the UK in less than a month – and adding Canadian and American shows before returning

to the European festival circuit. In the summer he played 23 North American gigs and 30 more in the autumn, including five consecutive nights at the Beacon Theatre in New York.

Around this time, rumours began to circulate that Dylan was drinking more alcohol than he really should, leading to a deterioration in his live performances. He denied this, telling *Rolling Stone* magazine "That's completely

NOW IN HIS EARLY FIFTIES, DYLAN RISKED BECOMING A CULTURAL ICON LONG PAST HIS BEST

released since *Vol. 1* in 1988, the album was by necessity a more restrained affair than the debut, as one of its more prominent members, Roy Orbison, had died of a heart attack at the age of 52 in December 1988.

However, Dylan played a more prominent role in the recording this time, having sung more of the songs before heading out on the road for his 1990 dates. This album











accompanying speech, a paraphrased biblical excerpt

that ran: "My daddy once said to me, 'Son, it is possible for you to become so defiled in this world that your own mother and father will abandon you. If that happens, God will believe in your ability to mend your own ways.'"

Still, legions of Dylan fans were with him, physically and in spirit, as he performed a landmark concert on 16 October, 1992, at Madison Square Garden. Bobfest, as guest star Neil Young nicknamed it, also featured contributions from his contemporaries Stevie Wonder and Lou Reed as well as younger musicians such as Eddie Vedder and John Mellencamp. It was designed to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Dylan's debut album (now 63 years old as you read this) and was later released as a live album, *The 30th Anniversary Concert Celebration*.

It was difficult, perhaps, to predict at this point in his career that Dylan would ever make a significant comeback. Now in his early fifties and with a patchy last decade of albums behind him, he could well have been consigned to the same niche

inaccurate. I can drink or not drink. I don't know why people would associate drinking with anything I do, really." His tour manager Victor Maymudes later revealed that Dylan quit the booze permanently in 1994, although whether this indicates that he was addicted to it has not been confirmed.

A different form of rehabilitation awaited Dylan as

the early 90s became the middle of the decade: that of his musical reputation. In February 1991, he was awarded a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award at that year's ceremony, receiving the trophy from actor Jack Nicholson. As the Gulf War started at the same time, he used the opportunity to perform *Masters of War*, although his vocal performance was unclear. Indeed, so was his

**ABOVE** Clockwise from top: Live in 1993; with James Brown in New York; (opposite) on stage at Madison Square Garden with George Harrison and others; with Jack Nicholson at the 1991 Grammy Awards in New York; on stage in La Coruna, Spain, July 1993

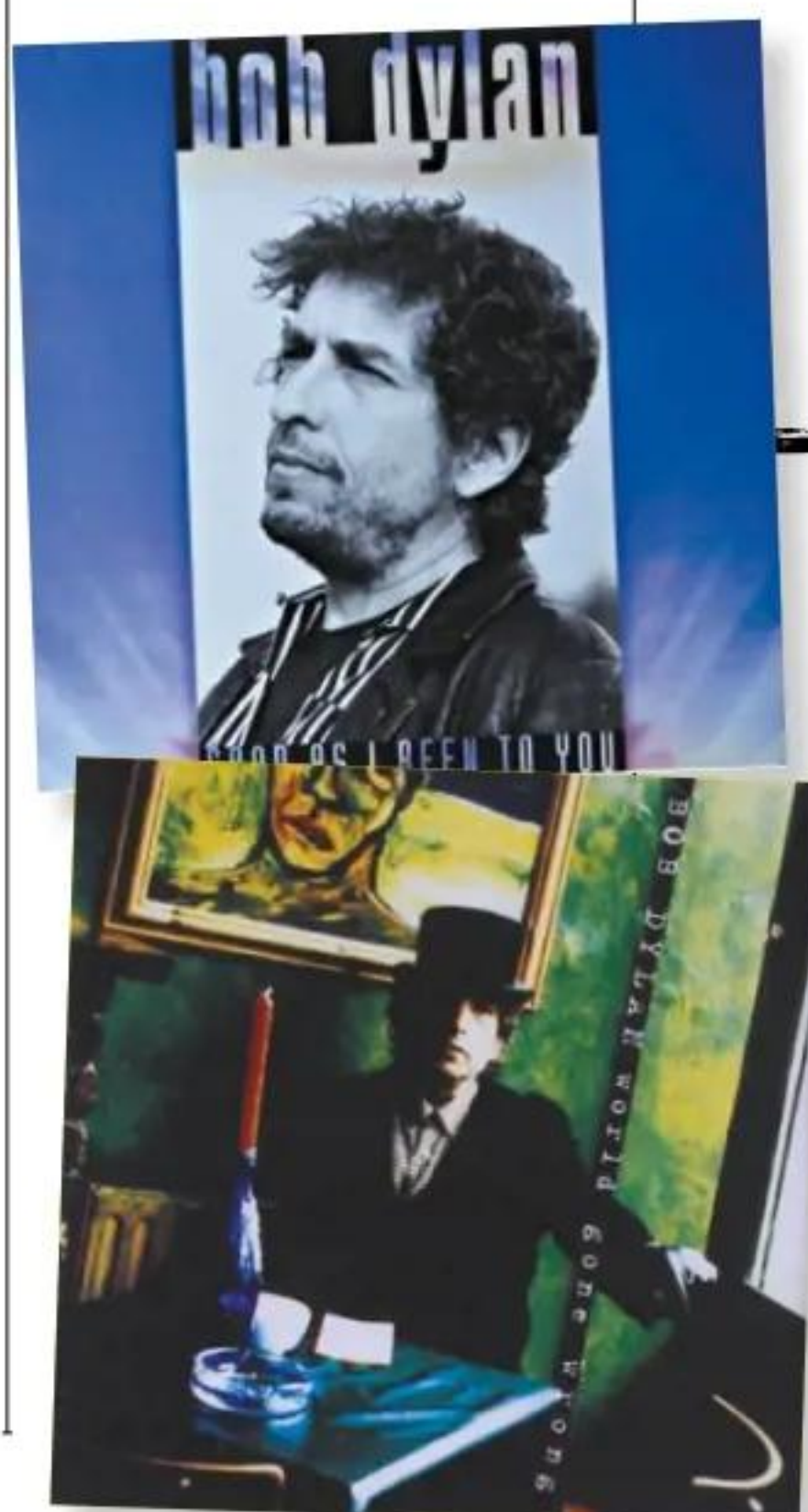




category as, say, the Grateful Dead or David Crosby, as a cultural icon now long past his best and noticed only by a loyal coterie of ageing nostalgists. To his credit, he pulled himself out of this likely-looking scenario, firstly by staying steadfastly on the road through this difficult period – with shows worldwide in 1991 and 1992, and UK, US and Middle East dates in '93 – and also by at least partly rediscovering his creative muse.

Two new albums, 1992's *Good As I Been to You* and 1993's *World Gone Wrong*, tapped into the spirit of the age to a large extent. Grunge had redefined rock

**BELOW** 1992's *Good As I Been to You* and 1993's *World Gone Wrong*



## AN INTEREST IN MUSICAL HONESTY HAD FUELLED A RETURN TO PROMINENCE OF FOLK AND FOLK-ROCK

music as a more serious art form than it had been in the 1980s, and an interest in musical honesty and authenticity had fuelled a return to prominence of folk and folk-rock. These two albums showcased

Dylan at his simplest, playing traditional folk and blues covers on an acoustic guitar, allowing space for the lyrical sentiments to breathe new air. This was the Dylan that we'd been waiting for.

This return to form was cemented by his appearance ➡





## ART ATTACK

DYLAN'S 1994 ART COLLECTION  
DRAWN BLANK



Bob Dylan has been painting artworks for his own enjoyment since the 1960s, and in 1994, a collection of 92 of his works created from 1989 onwards were published by Random House in a book called *Drawn Blank*. Some of his best-known works were included in the collection, including one called *Train Tracks* – a four-piece artwork which sold for £40,000 – as well as the more prosaically-titled *Woman in Red Lion Pub* and another called *The Man on a Bridge*, which sold for £20,000 each. The book was reviewed favourably and eventually led to a full-blown exhibition of the same name in 2008. Not bad for a hobby which, as the man himself explained on several occasions, was simply a way to relax during and after the rigours of the road.

in August at Woodstock '94 and on MTV *Unplugged* in November, the latter performance released as an album. You can now watch both of these on YouTube, and although Dylan's voice was less strong in concert at this point than it was on record, the performances are still enthralling. It's particularly gratifying to recall that Dylan didn't play the original Woodstock in 1969, having declined the invitation to do so.

The brand-new 'classic rock' generation was incoming as the 90s wore on, composed of music consumers who would later be labelled 'boomers' by younger generations. In their middle age and financially able to support the higher ticket prices introduced to the market at this point by veteran acts such as the Eagles, these people flocked to see Dylan through the Never Ending Tour dates of the decade's second half. In 1995 this included a tour of Europe and the UK, plus 29 dates



In 1997, Dylan said: "I don't adhere to rabbis, preachers, evangelists, all of that, I've learned more from the songs than I have from any of this entity"

in the USA, another 19 in the States, a Euro leg and yet more American gigs for a total of 116 shows that year. 1996 was a little less hectic, with US, Canadian and Euro dates leading up to sessions for a new studio album, Dylan's first original set since the ill-fated *Under the Red Sky*.

Before the recordings could get underway, however, Dylan fell seriously ill with a heart condition, pericarditis, caused by a histoplasmosis infection. He was hospitalised and the impending European dates were cancelled, and although he made a full recovery, he quipped afterwards "I really thought I'd be seeing Elvis soon." He went on to complete his new album in early 1997, assisted by the producer





## DYLAN FINISHED UP THE 20th CENTURY WITH RENEWED ENTHUSIASM

Daniel Lanois, then hot as a pistol after his work with U2. A notable show that year took place in the Italian city of Bologna, where


Dylan performed for Pope John Paul II, who based that day's homily on *Blowin' In the Wind*.

The new album, *Time Out Of Mind*, was a turning-point for Dylan. Had it been another mediocre collection, he would have entered the new century – and his sixties – with a huge amount of ground to reclaim. As it turned out, the record was his most accomplished in many years, with Elvis Costello even declaring “I think it might be the best record he’s made”, and its songs later covered by artists such as Billy Joel, Garth Brooks and Adele. The album scooped a Grammy for Album of the Year and the song *Cold Irons Bound* won Best Male Rock Vocal Performance.



**ABOVE** Clockwise from opposite top: Dylan performing at the Lollipop music festival in Stockholm, Sweden, 1996; with Sheryl Crow at the Radio City Music Hall in New York; 1995's MTV Unplugged live album; 1997's Grammy-winning *Time Out of Mind*; *The Gorge* concert poster featuring Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and Van Morrison, 1998; with Pope John Paul II in Bologna, Italy, 1997

The 1990s were a transformative decade for Bob Dylan, then, when it all could have gone so badly for him. He finished up the 20th century with renewed enthusiasm, delivering 110 dates worldwide in 1998, some with his near-contemporary Van Morrison, and a further run through North America and Europe in '99. The fact that promoters, booking agents and (crucially) hundreds of thousands of fans were keen to witness him delivering his message, year and year, continued to speak volumes about his appeal and his work ethic.

What would the 2000s hold for this pre-eminent artist of the 1960s, an era vastly different in cultural terms? While none of us could have made an accurate prediction, the fact that Dylan had ended the century on such triumphant terms boded very well indeed. 





# Minstrel of the NEW MILLENNIUM

**FAR FROM SLOWING DOWN AS HIS SIXTIES APPROACHED,  
DYLAN STEPPED UP BOTH THE PACE AND HIS PRODUCTIVITY**

WORDS Joel McIver

**W**here Bob Dylan's 1980s had been peppered with dubious aesthetic choices and his

1990s was a decade of two creative halves, the first decade of the 21st century seems – now that we have the benefit of hindsight – to have been one of the most productive stretches of his career.

As well as keeping up his Never Ending Tour schedule, which (lest we forget) demanded a rigorous 100 or so worldwide dates from him every year, plus the exhausting travel that this required, Dylan also released four studio albums, nine EPs and an astonishing 22 live and compilation albums. As if that wasn't enough, he appeared in 17 cinema and TV movies and documentaries of various kinds, and wrote a bestselling, 75,000-word autobiography. That's a huge amount of activity to pack into a single decade.

Crucially, his new material met with both critical

appreciation and commercial success. Like many artists of Dylan's generation – Paul McCartney, the Rolling Stones, Paul Simon, James Taylor, you

**OPPOSITE** *Dylan performing at the 2009 Rothbury Music Festival in Michigan*

have been happy to do exactly that, but with less time spent in airport lounges and more spent on the sofa, but there was no stopping Dylan at this point in

his career. In fact, we now know that he hasn't exactly slowed down in the 2010s and '20s either, but that's jumping ahead a bit.

After playing a gruelling 112 concerts in North America and Europe in the year 2000,

## THE DECADE SAW DYLAN RELEASE FOUR ALBUMS, NINE EPs, A BESTSELLING AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MORE

know the roster by now – it would have been all too easy for him to coast along at 50 percent effort, enjoying the hard-earned rewards of 40-plus years on the road. I suggest that you or I would

**BELOW** *Bob onscreen at the 2001 Academy Awards after winning the Oscar for Best Original Song for Things Have Changed*

Dylan scooped an Oscar for Best Original Song after contributing the track *Things Have Changed* to the soundtrack of the film *Wonder Boys*, a dark comedy starring Michael Douglas that critics enjoyed but which failed

commercially, as is so often the way. His greater achievement at this point was the album *"Love and Theft"*, the double quotes in the title echoing those of David Bowie's 1977 album *"Heroes"*, which – also like the Bowie album – returned his music to a comfortably commercial style, as well as critical popularity.

An aspect of the new album to which fans











and commentators responded was its wide range of musical styles, as well as Dylan's ease and confidence when delivering those styles. This was at least partly due to his decision to record the album with his Never Ending Tour road band, a supremely tight and intuitive group for obvious reasons, but also to his apparently effortless ability to inhabit different musical traditions. There was energetic rockabilly in there, as well as slick jazz, country ballads and even lounge music in the grooves, a versatile approach noted by the Grammys committee, which rewarded it with Best Contemporary Folk album, despite that rather limiting term.

"Nobody that I know, knows as much about American music as Bob Dylan," said the Never Ending Tour drummer David Kemper. "He has spent so much time trying to understand, and

collecting these songs – it was like a never-stopping resource. He was always coming up with these songs or artists that I had never heard of. And then when we went in and recorded "Love and Theft" it was like, 'Oh my God, he's been teaching us this music' – not literally these songs, but

## "NOBODY THAT I KNOW, KNOWS AS MUCH ABOUT AMERICAN MUSIC AS BOB"

— DAVID KEMPER —

these styles. And as a band, we're familiar with every one of these. That's why we could cut a song a day... and the album was done."

It helped that Dylan seemed happier than usual to promote the new album. He even took part in a press conference in Rome and appeared in a short TV commercial that included

**ABOVE LEFT** With Carlos Santana at the 42nd Annual Grammy Awards, February 2000

"Love and Theft"'s first song, *Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum*. The album's release date of September 11, 2001, didn't cast the shadow over it that some might

have feared: indeed, more attention was paid to the slick pencil moustache that Dylan was sporting on its cover than its unfortunate timing, and indeed to Johnny Cash's surprise (but welcome) statement in the *New York Times*

that "Love and Theft" was Dylan's best ever album.

Even the discovery of several similarities between the lyrics on the new album and the words of a 1989 novel called *Confessions of a Yakuza* by the Japanese writer Junichi Saga couldn't slow Dylan down in 2001. Saga chose to regard these similarities as

**ABOVE RIGHT** From top: Live at the 2006 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival; on stage at the Waterloo Concert Field in Stanhope, New Jersey, July 2000





**Bob Dylan, slapstick comedy artist? Almost – Dylan pitched a knockabout comedy TV show to the HBO network around the year 2000, although it never came to pass**

**ABOVE** Left: Bob with Ryan Adams and Sir Elton John Right: Live at the Newport Folk Festival, 2002

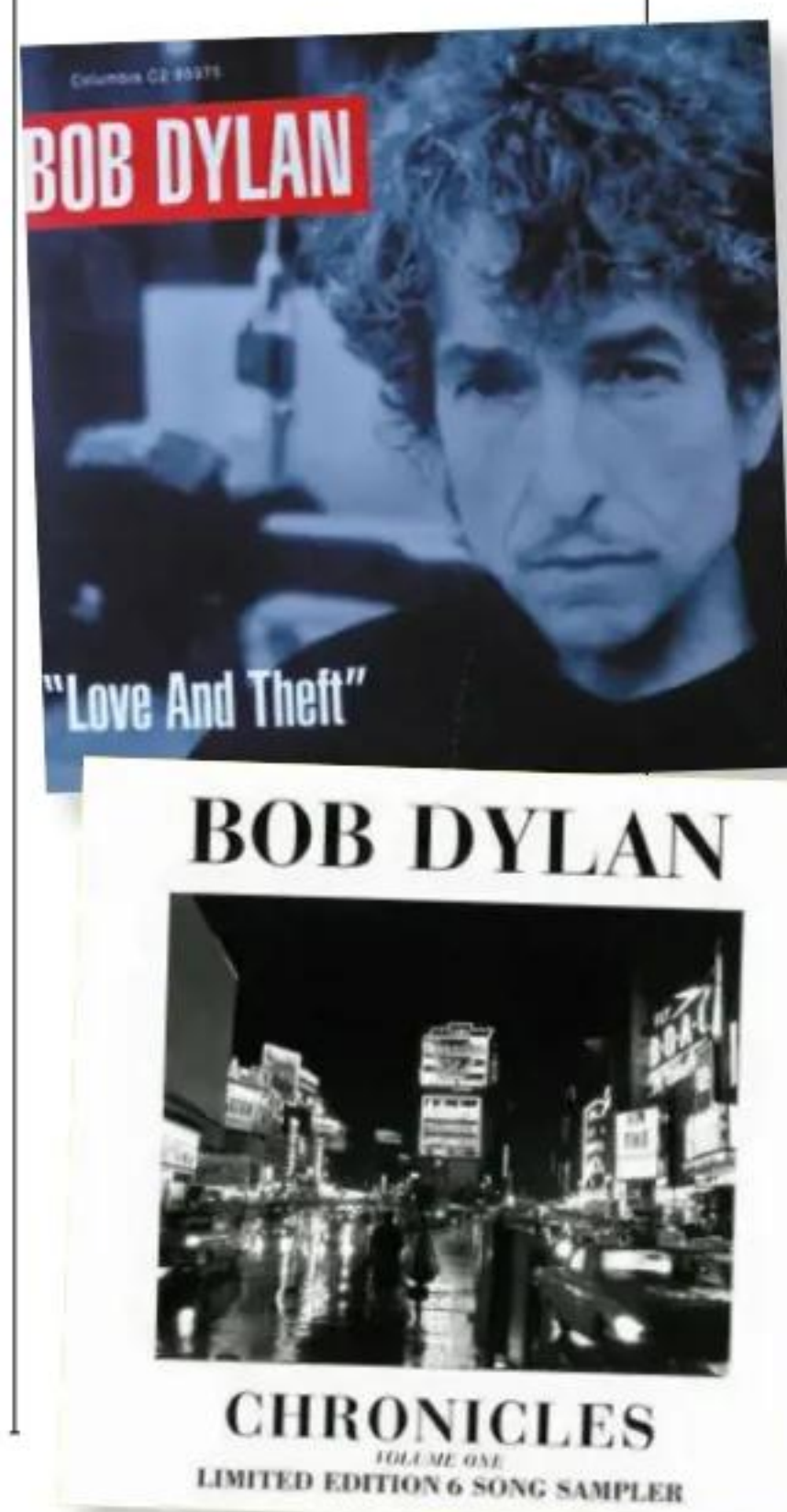


an honour rather than an insult, and the veteran critic Robert Christgau defused the situation further when he wrote, fairly accurately, that “All pop music is love and theft, and in 40 years of records whose sources have inspired volumes of scholastic exegesis, Dylan has never embraced that truth so warmly.”

What a start to the new decade – and Dylan kept the momentum up, delivering 106 gigs in Asia, Oceania, North America and Europe in 2001 and 107 more in 2002, taking the newfound energy and versatility of “*Love and Theft*” to the masses, club by club and festival by festival.

As this was happening, he was planning a retrospective project called *Gotta Serve Somebody: The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan*, an indie album of tributes to his older, Christian material recorded from 1979 to 1981, interpreted by a range of musicians and including a new duet with Mavis Staples on the song *Gonna Change My Way of Thinking*. The collection came out in 2003 and scooped two Grammy nominations for Best Traditional Soul Album and Best Pop Collaboration With Vocals:

**BELOW** 2001’s “*Love and Theft*”; *Chronicles: Volume One* six-song sample CD



a companion documentary was also released on DVD.

The same year, a film was released called *Masked and Anonymous* in which Dylan acted the role of a rock singer called Jack Fate. If that sounds unpromising, your instincts serve you well: although the supporting cast included talent of the calibre of Jeff Bridges, Val Kilmer, John Goodman, Penélope Cruz and Ed Harris, and Dylan himself did a reasonably competent job in a slightly catatonic way, *Masked and Anonymous* is second only to 1987’s appalling

*Hearts of Fire* in the canon of Bad Bob Films.

Happier times awaited on the road, Dylan’s real creative home, where he played 98 shows in 2003 and 111 in ’04, breaking up the road miles by appearing in a TV ad for Victoria’s Secret – yes, the lingerie brand – and also performing the rather more significant task of writing his autobiography, or at least its first instalment. *Chronicles: Volume One* was published by Simon & Schuster in October ’04, supposedly without a ghostwriter or editor, and proved to be a remarkable read, with its author swerving expectations with ➡



an unusual focus and sequence of chapters. This refusal to adhere to the usual rock-memoir format was refreshing, with buyers sending it to the *New York Times* bestseller list and keeping it there for 19 weeks.

Dylan told *Rolling Stone* how pleased he was with the book's success, saying: "Most people who write about music, they have no idea what it feels like to play it. But with the book I wrote, I thought, 'The people who are writing reviews of this book, man, they know what the hell they're talking about'. The reviews of this book, some of 'em almost made me cry – in a good way. I'd never felt that from a music critic ever."

He had no need to worry: at this point in his career, and for the most part ever since, the critical establishment has been firmly on his side. This is partly because he hasn't done any more screen acting, but also because the quality of his output has remained high.

After another busy year on the road, with 113 shows performed in 2005, Dylan treated us to the excellent documentary *No Direction Home*, directed by none other than Martin Scorsese. Released on PBS in the US and the BBC in the UK as well as on DVD, the doc was accompanied by a soundtrack album (the seventh in his ongoing Bootleg Series of live recordings) and focused on his rise to fame in the 1960s, then as now the period of his career which fascinates most people. The inclusion of the moment on 17 May, 1966 when an irked fan shouts "Judas!" during a set at Manchester's Free Trade Hall is worth the purchase alone, mostly

because of Dylan's sarcastic but relaxed reaction.

The train kept a-rolling, with 99 dates performed in North America and Europe in 2006 between commitments to a podcast that ran for the next three years. On episodes of *Theme Time Radio Hour*, hosted online by XM Satellite Radio, Dylan played songs that tied in with a weekly theme, interspersed with light-hearted banter and jokes, commentary on the music and live interaction with listeners. He recorded the shows in many different locations, and later revealed that many of the listener calls and emails that he included were, in fact, made up.

Another new album, *Modern Times*, was released in August 2006 and was a decent

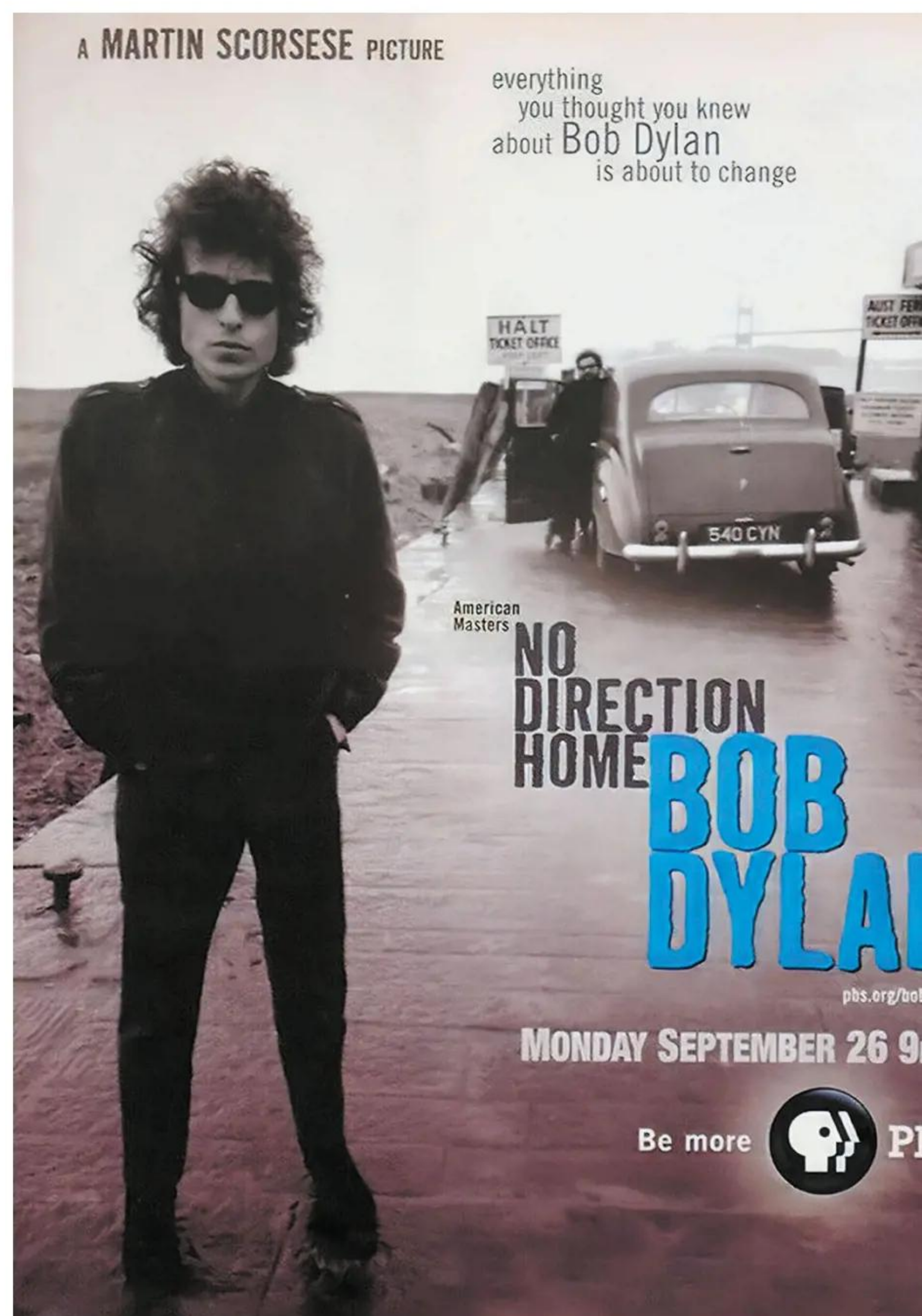
effort, although perhaps without the energetic thrust of "Love and Theft".

It became a US No. 1, Dylan's first since 1976, and won two Grammy awards

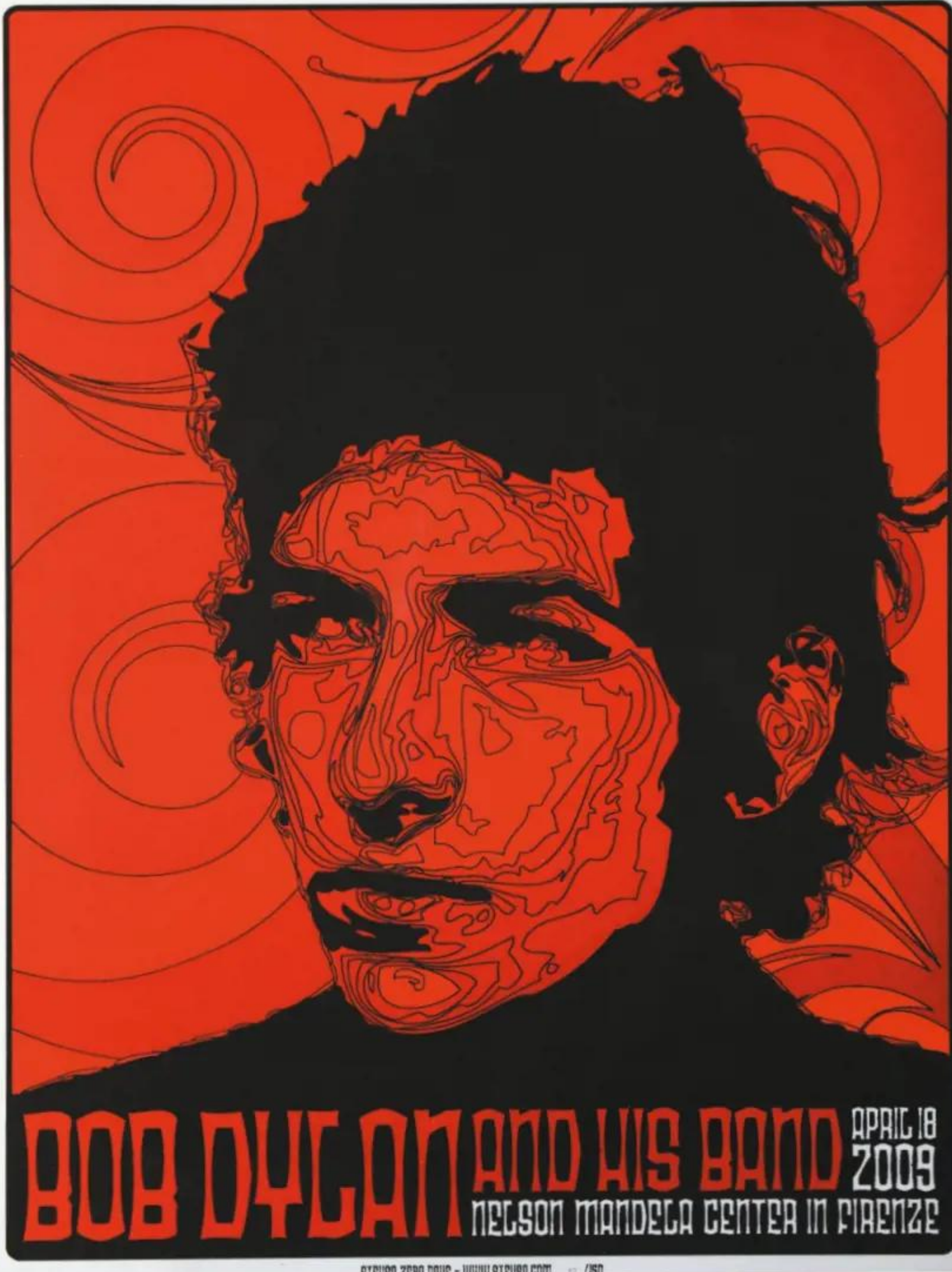
for Best Contemporary Folk Album and Best Solo Rock Vocal Performance for the song *Someday Baby*. The next couple of years passed swiftly, perhaps because he was so busy, playing 98 shows in 2007 as well as doing press for a triple-CD best-of called *Dylan* and, perhaps curiously, partnering with the automotive-industrial complex by appearing in advertising for a model of Cadillac car, the Escalade. Two more busy years followed, with 97 gigs in 2008 and the same number in '09.

In fact, Dylan became embedded in the establishment to a certain extent around this time, appearing in a Pepsi commercial during what is

During the filming of *No Direction Home*, director Martin Scorsese never met Dylan, or even discussed the project with him. How it got done – and done so well – is a miracle







**LEFT** Clockwise from top left: Martin Scorsese's Dylan doc *No Direction Home*; a concert poster for a show in Florence, Italy; Rage Against The Machine's Zack de la Rocha performing in L.A. for *Like A Complete Unknown: A Concert Celebrating the Music of Bob Dylan in 2008*; Dylan's paintings *Favela Villa Broncos* (left) and *Favela Villa Candido*, on display at the National Gallery of Denmark

## DYLAN HAD RETAINED HIS PLACE IN THE HEARTS OF HIS FOLLOWERS, FIVE DECADES ON

probably America's most-hyped annual event – the annual Super Bowl. Fans were divided by his performance in the ad, a rendition of *Forever Young* that he shared with the inescapable rapper Will.i.am. Still, Dylan crammed a lot of release activity in before the end of the decade, not least his 33rd studio album, *Together Through Life*, and a seasonal collection called *Christmas in the Heart*, released in April and October 2009, respectively.

The former album, written in collaboration with Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter, Mike Campbell of Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers and Los Lobos' David Hidalgo, was obviously the deeper work of the two. "Hunter is an old buddy, we could probably

write a hundred songs together if we thought it was important or the right reasons were there," said Dylan, adding rather tartly: "We both write a different type of song than what passes today for songwriting."

Still, *Christmas in the Heart* was a decent-sized hit too, topping the Billboard Holiday Album chart and making number 23 on the mainstream chart, quite an achievement for a supposedly unserious Christmas album. Evidently Dylan had retained his place in the hearts and minds of his followers, five decades and counting since he had first entered the limelight – even in the digital era. Could he hold on to that hard-won affection as the 2010s beckoned? 

## SOMETHING BORROWED

HOW DYLAN SPARKED CONTROVERSY WITH THE LYRICS OF *MODERN TIMES*



*Modern Times* is a worthy, if inessential, album in the Dylan canon, but it's mostly remembered these days for the many "borrowed" lyrics and arrangements in its songs, even though its liner notes state "All songs written by Bob Dylan". Examples include the use of Muddy Waters' arrangement of Hambone Willie Newbern's *Rollin' and Tumblin'*, the use of the melody of Bing Crosby's *Where the Blue of the Night (Meets the Gold of the Day)* in *When the Deal Goes Down*, and another melody in *Beyond the Horizon* nabbed from a 1935 song called *Red Sails in the Sunset*.

Elsewhere, as an article in the *New York Times* noted in late 2006, "at least 10" lines and phrases used on *Modern Times* also appeared in the work of a Civil War poet called Henry Timrod. Around the same time, *The Nelson Mail* wrote that lines by the first-century Roman poet Ovid had appeared in the album, although no-one seriously considered this as plagiarism given the age of the source. Indeed, Dylan himself has always been open about the influence of many established bodies of work on his lyrics, regarding himself – accurately, in legal terms – as another in a long line of blues and folk musicians who borrow liberally from earlier works.









CHAPTER

# 5

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## FOLKLORE FIGURE

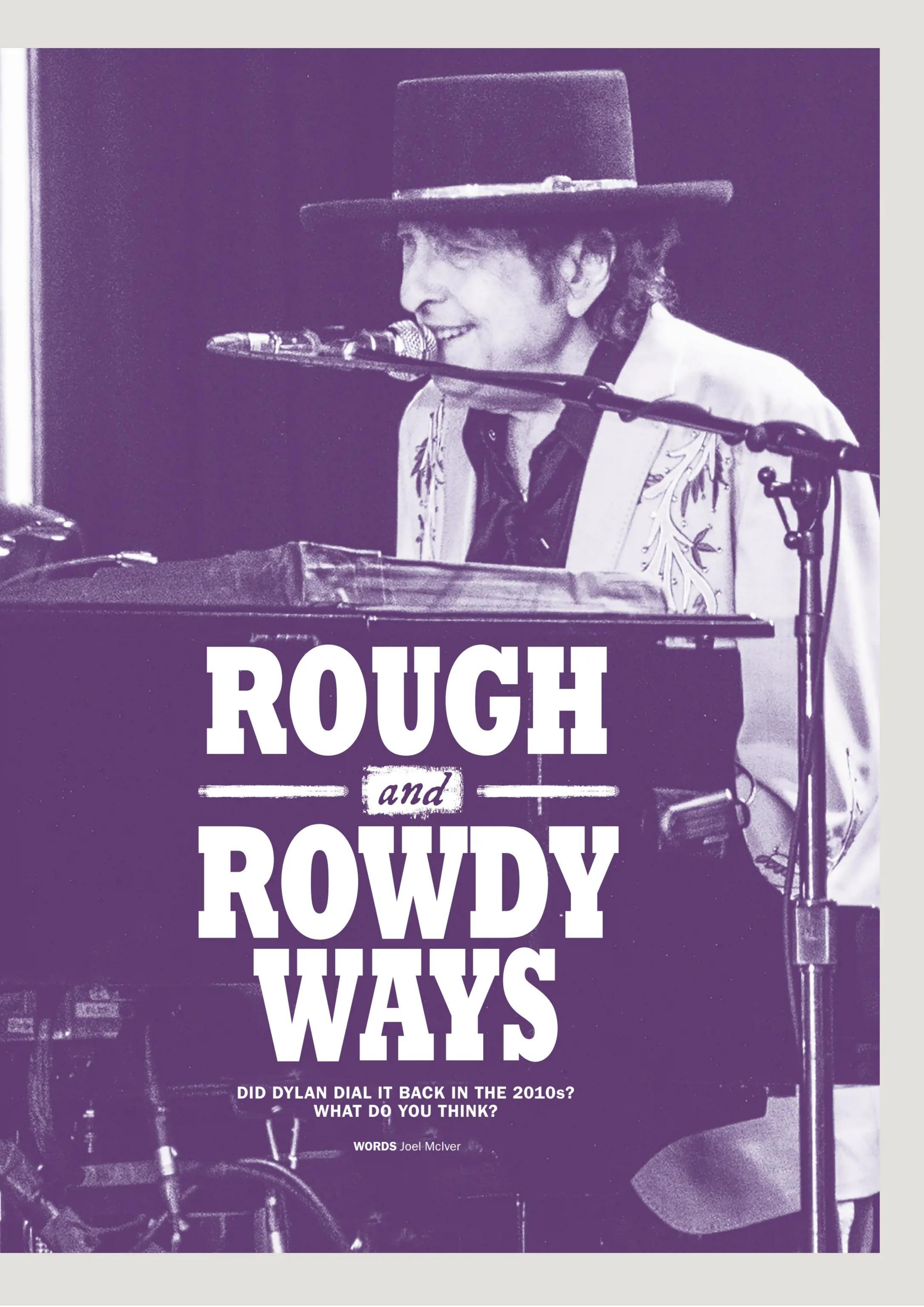
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- 96. **Rough And Rowdy Ways**
- 102. **An Evolving Enigma**
- 106. **A Nobel Man**
- 110. **Another Side Of Bob Dylan**
- 120. **The Songs They Are A-Changin'**
- 126. **Dylan In The Movies**







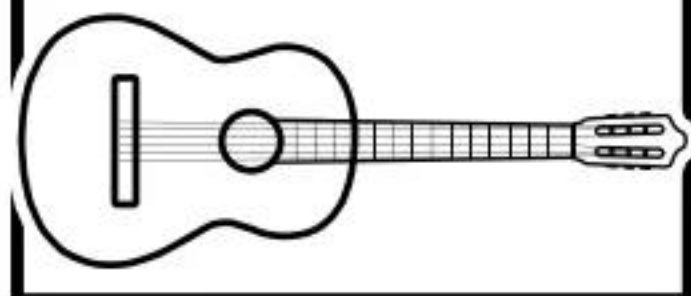


# ROUGH *and* ROWDY WAYS

DID DYLAN DIAL IT BACK IN THE 2010s?  
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WORDS Joel McIver





**W**ith his seventies fast approaching, Bob Dylan and his record company evidently decided to push on while the going was good, continuing to book dates for the Never Ending Tour and ramping up a whole platform of new and reissue releases. In fact, the period from 2010 to date is one of Dylan's most prolific, in all senses.

The background to what follows is one of intense road activity, as it had been for some decades. After completing 102 shows in 2010, Dylan eased off very slightly, playing 'only' 89 shows in 2011, 86 in 2012 and then an average of 83 per year until the end of 2019 – when the pandemic forced him off the road.

Back in the saddle in 2021 for his current jaunt, the Rough And Rowdy Ways Tour, he has completed around 250 shows over the last four years – and bear in mind that as we speak, he is 84 years old.

If you've ever quailed at the thought of packing a suitcase, booking hotels and dealing with the airport hassle on your annual holiday, imagine doing that 80-plus times a year, every year, for half a century – in your mid-eighties. What's more, touring isn't even a holiday: singing and performing for 90-plus minutes,

say four times a week, is no picnic.

Let's spin through the release schedule that accompanied all the touring before we dig into the bigger picture of what Bob Dylan's third act means, as well as the pivotal event of 2016 that repositioned him as the world's greatest writer.

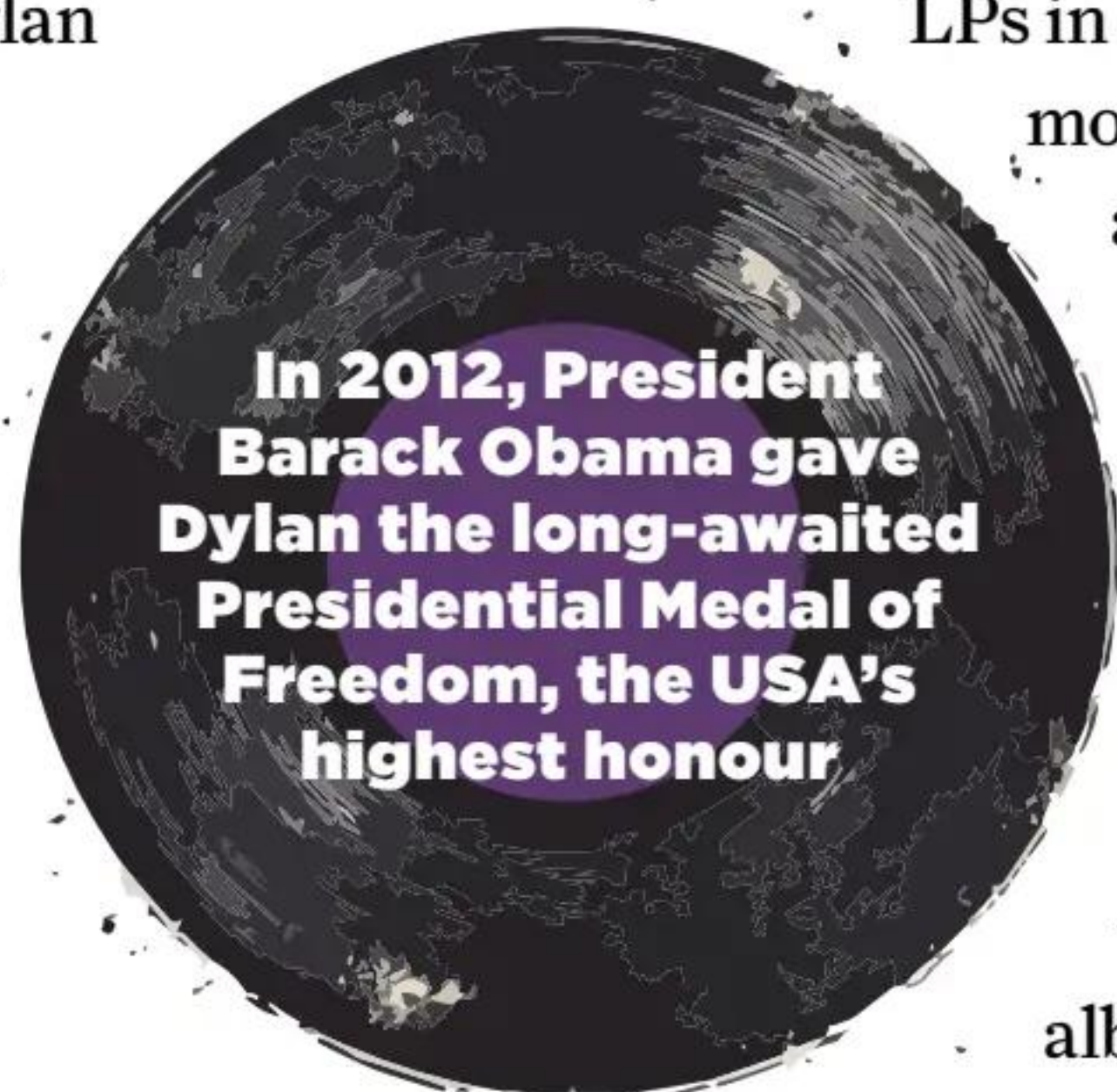
We'll look at the reissues first: in 2010 he released Vol. 9 of the ongoing *Bootleg Series*, *The Witmark Demos*, recorded between 1962 and 1964, and an eight-album box set of his 1962-67

LPs in their original mono mixes, for anyone who regards a stereo as having one too many speakers. The following year we were treated to a live album called *In Concert – Brandeis*

*University* 1963, and two years later still, the tenth *Bootleg Series* instalment, *Another Self Portrait* (1969-1971), which included live audio of Dylan and the Band at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1969.

A monster, 42-album box set of all his previous studio albums, plus live stuff, appeared in late 2013, titled *The Complete Album Collection*, with a mysterious Vol. One tacked on the end to imply that there was more where that came from. The 11th *Bootleg* collection, the 138-track *The Basement Tapes Complete*, came in 2014, winning the Grammy

**In 2012, President Barack Obama gave Dylan the long-awaited Presidential Medal of Freedom, the USA's highest honour**



**ABOVE** 2012's *Tempest* and 2015's *Shadows in the Night*

**OPPOSITE** President Barack Obama presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Dylan during a ceremony in the White House, 29 May, 2012

**BELOW** Dylan headlining the Feis Festival in London's Finsbury Park, June 2011

Award for Best Historical Album. *The Bootleg Series Vol. 12: The Cutting Edge 1965-1966* appeared in 2015 in various formats, one of them an 18-CD behemoth, and *The 1966 Live Recordings* followed in 2016.

The Grammy Awards Hall of Fame took note of all this catalogue activity around this time and paid appropriate tribute, inducting 1975's *Blood on the Tracks* and *The Basement Tapes*. The former was complemented by the release of *Bootleg Series Vol. 14: More Blood, More Tracks* shortly afterwards, preceded by Vol. 13: *Trouble No More 1979-1981* and later by Bob Dylan (featuring Johnny Cash) – *Travelin' Thru, 1967-1969*.

The endless repackage campaigns came up to date with 1970, a three-CD set of recordings from the *Self-Portrait* and *New Morning* sessions, and *The Bootleg Series Vol. 16: Springtime in New York 1980-1985*, both in 2021; *The Bootleg Series Vol. 17: Fragments – Time Out of*



**AFTER COMPLETING 102 SHOWS IN 2010, DYLAN EASED OFF SLIGHTLY, PLAYING 'ONLY' 89 SHOWS IN 2011**





*Mind Sessions* (1996-1997) and *The Complete Budokan 1978* in 2023; and a 27-CD box set of 417 previously-unreleased live tracks called *The 1974 Live Recordings* in 2024.

You may think that collecting every single one of these reissues is unusual, but there are lifetime Dylanologists who do just that – and why not? With a studio and live heritage as rich and longstanding as Dylan’s, there are many, many different ways to enjoy his catalogue.

Talking of the studio, in the period we cover here he has released five studio albums, the first being 2012’s *Tempest*, a well-received album which contained an ambitious, 14-minute song about the RMS Titanic disaster of a century before. The next three – 2015’s *Shadows in the Night*, 2016’s *Fallen Angels* and 2017’s *Triplicate* – are best treated as a trilogy, as they’re covers albums of songs from the Great American Songbook by composers such as Frank Sinatra, Harold Arlen, Sammy Cahn and Johnny Mercer.

On the release of *Triplicate*, Dylan dismissed the ‘covers album’ idea, saying on his website

“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.” He had previously said: “I don’t see myself as covering these songs in any way. They’ve been covered enough. Buried, as a matter [of] fact. What me and my band are basically doing is uncovering them. Lifting them out of the grave and bringing them into the light of day.”

While Dylan’s execution of these cover versions (sorry, Bob) was generally regarded as competent, certain critics thought that three collections of the stuff was too much, especially as *Triplicate* was that rare essay in hubris, a triple album. As *Uncut* wrote politely, “For all its easy charms, *Triplicate* labours its point to the brink of overkill. After five albums’ worth of croon toons, this feels like a fat full stop on a fascinating chapter.”

This made his most recent studio album, *Rough and Rowdy* ➡

## NOBEL INTENTIONS

### RECEIVING THE ULTIMATE HONOUR



When Dylan received his Nobel Prize in 2016, the awarding committee wrote: “Earlier today, the Swedish Academy met with Bob Dylan for a private ceremony, with no media present, in Stockholm, during which Dylan received his gold medal and diploma. Twelve members of the Academy were present. Spirits were high. Champagne was had. Quite a bit of time was spent looking closely at the gold medal, in particular the beautifully crafted back: an image of a young man sitting under a laurel tree who listens to the Muse. Taken from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the inscription reads: ‘*Inventas vitam iuvat excoluisse per artes*’, loosely translated as ‘And they who bettered life on earth by their newly found mastery.’”





Ways, all the more welcome, not least because it was released at November 2020, probably the worst point in the COVID-19 years as a vaccine had not yet appeared, eight months after the first lockdowns. Its 17-minute treatise on the assassination of John F. Kennedy, *Murder Most Foul*, took Dylan's fans where they most wanted to be – into a political and cultural analysis. *Rough and Rowdy Ways* set a new record for Dylan, making him the oldest musician in UK chart history to hit number 1 with an album of (key wording here) “new, original material”.

With Dylan's 2011-2025 recorded output covered and his relentless touring noted, what else has he been up to in recent years? Rather a lot, as it turns out, with three universities in Mainz, Vienna and Bristol organising symposia to celebrate his 70th birthday in 2011; a popular book called *The Lyrics: Since 1962* published in 2014, whose limited edition cost \$5,000 per copy;

**ABOVE** Brazilian artist Eduardo Kobra and his team painted a huge mural of Dylan on the side of a building in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2015

**RIGHT** Bob Dylan's *Point Blank* exhibition at Castle Fine Art in Nottingham, England, 2025



and a somewhat less popular appearance the same year in a TV and internet commercial for Chrysler, the car manufacturer, in which the former antagonist of the establishment verbally endorsed the automotive-industrial complex.

Aired during that year's Super Bowl, the ad featured Dylan reading the words “Detroit made cars, and cars made America... So let Germany brew your beer, let Switzerland make your watch, let Asia assemble your phone. We will build your car”, to widespread consternation. Had he sold out?

Car ad or no car ad, Dylan was awarded perhaps the ultimate

recognition in 2016 when the Nobel Prize committee announced on 3 October that year that they would be awarding him the none-more-prestigious Prize in Literature, for “having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition”. Perhaps stunned by this, Dylan didn't speak on the subject for a while before telling the press that the honour was “amazing, incredible. Who ever dreams about something like that?”

A requirement of the Nobel Prize – which comes with a wedge of eight million Swedish kronor (\$900,000) – is that its



recipient must deliver a lecture, which in Dylan's case appeared online on 5 June 2017. In part, he wrote: "Our songs are alive in the land of the living. But songs are unlike literature. They're meant to be sung, not read. The words in Shakespeare's plays were meant to be acted on the stage. Just as lyrics in songs are meant to be sung, not read on a page. And I hope some of you get the chance to listen to these lyrics the way they were intended to be heard: in concert or on record or however people are listening to songs these days. I return once again to Homer, who says, 'Sing in me, oh Muse, and through me tell the story'."

The choice was controversial, of course, with supporters of Dylan as honoree including Leonard Cohen, Stephen King, Salman Rushdie, and a Harvard University classics professor called Richard F. Thomas, who wrote a book titled *Why Bob Dylan Matters*. Meanwhile, the writers Rabi Alameddine, Pierre Assouline, Karl Ove Knausgård,

Will Self and Irvine Welsh were against the choice, with the last of these writing "I'm a Dylan fan, but this is an ill-conceived nostalgia award wrenched from the rancid prostates of senile, gibbering hippies," with typical restraint.

This sums up Dylan's position, as we come up to date. His most recent works – Martin Scorsese's *Rolling Thunder Revue* biopic (2019), a livestreamed gig called *Shadow Kingdom* and the book *The Philosophy of Modern Song* (both 2021) – are a combination of old and new, of fiery anti-establishment and comfortable mid-establishment. His decision to sell his song copyrights to Universal Music Publishing Group for at least \$300m in 2020 confirms the latter position: perhaps his work is done, and he

no longer needs to rage against the dying of the light?

A brief look at Dylan's legacy makes this position reasonably tenable, we think. The plaudits laid at his feet need no reintroduction, but we'll do one anyway. He was included in the

*Time* 100: The Most Important

People of the Century

list in 1999; several

books have been

written about

his music, as far

back as 1972; the

*Encyclopædia*

*Britannica* wrote

that he is "hailed


as the Shakespeare

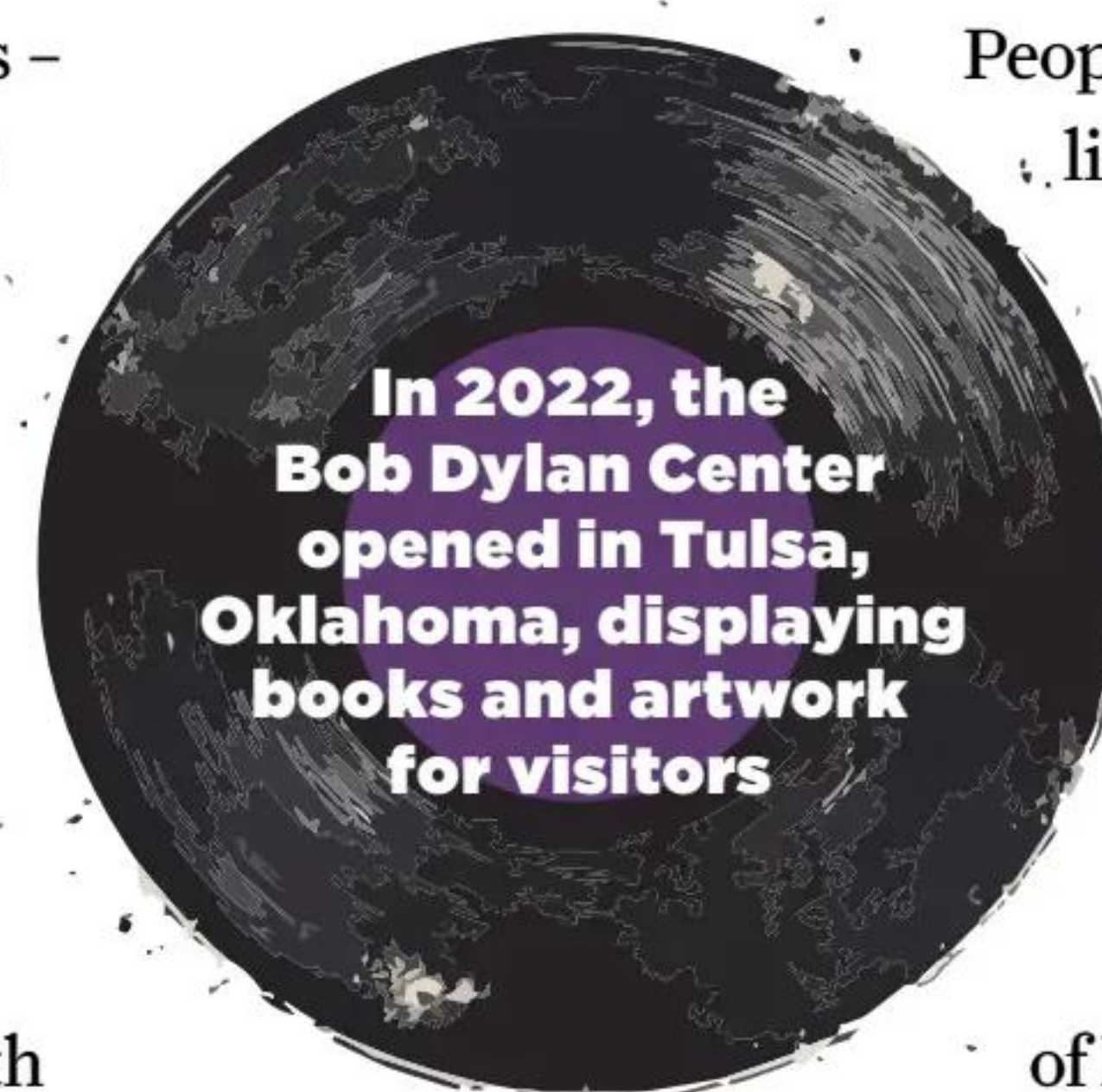
of his generation";

some of his lyrical

phrases, including "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows" and "The times they are a-changin'" appear in Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*; and musicians such as Patti Smith, Joe Strummer, Bono, Nick Cave, Bruce Springsteen, David Bowie, Bryan Ferry, Leonard Cohen, Johnny Cash and Tom Waits have acknowledged his primacy.

The films *I'm Not There* (2007) and *A Complete Unknown* (2024) have kept Dylan's voice and music in today's cultural mainstream, just as a previous generation benefited from all those late-60s covers of his songs by Jimi Hendrix, who essentially made them his own. Even artists who didn't cover Dylan back then sounded just like him in one way or another, in the confessional, intimate tone of their songs – Donovan, the Velvet Underground, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, even the Beatles in their post-1965 acoustic mode.

Dylan's influence lingers long – and is, like the man himself, not going away any time soon (hopefully). Go and see him on the Never Ending Tour while the opportunity remains. 



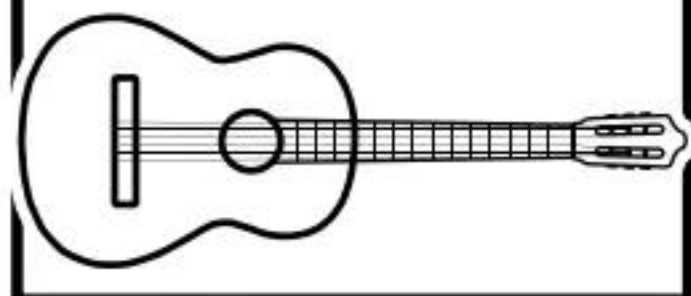
#### BELOW

Photographer Lisa Law at the grand opening of the Bob Dylan Center on 5 May, 2022 in Tulsa, Oklahoma

## THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA WROTE THAT DYLAN IS "THE SHAKESPEARE OF HIS GENERATION"







# An Evolving ENIGMA

HOW BOB DYLAN'S PERSONAL STYLE AND AESTHETIC HAS TRANSFORMED OVER TIME

WORDS Joel McIver

**W**hen most of us think of Bob Dylan, we don't immediately think of him as a style icon: we usually consider his lyrics, songwriting or political convictions first. That's an omission on our parts, however: when we take a look back at how his look has changed over the decades, it becomes evident that his aesthetic reflects and symbolises his era just as much as that of any given movie star.

Aided, we can assume, by good management advice and some very talented photographers, Dylan has given images to the celebrity canon which will endure long after he has left the building.

When he first arrived in New York in 1961, there was no counterculture to speak of, the establishment-baiting hip-swinging of Elvis Presley aside. The Beatles and their parent-annoying mop-top haircuts were still two years away, and young men tended to

dress like their fathers – which, in the young Robert Zimmerman's case, meant button-down shirts and Woody Guthrie-style work jeans. His hair was, if not exactly cropped, then carefully tamed and brushed, with no sign of the famous curls to come.

The transformation was coming, though. By 1963's *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, our man had settled into the role of budding folk-rock star, showing us striped T-shirts and a haircut that was breaking free of its former orthodoxy. By 1964, he'd taken a cue from the British Invasion and found himself some Cuban heels, adding a long, belted

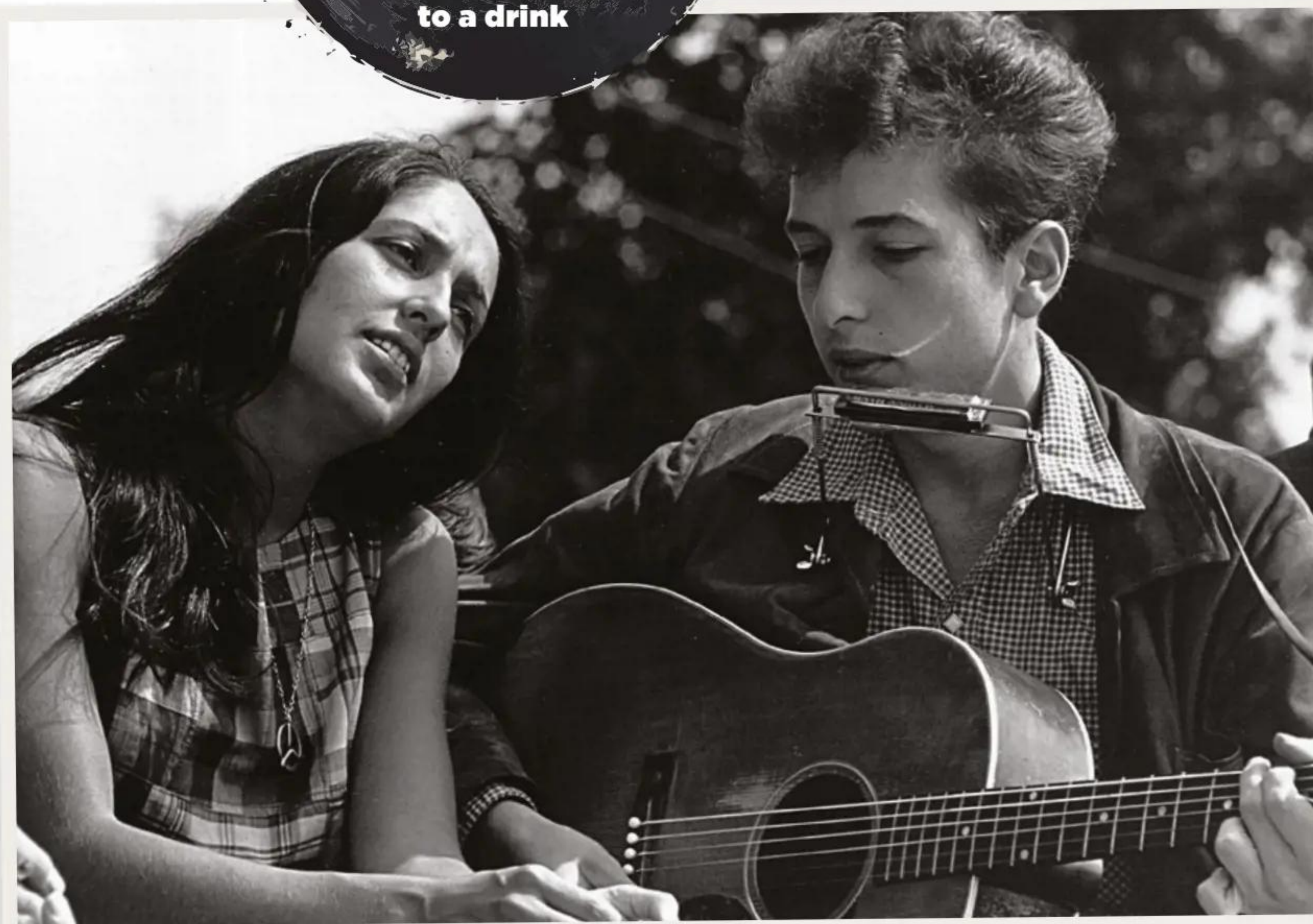
coat for a decidedly Parisian touch. Once he went electric in '65 and recovered from the brutal motorbike crash of '66, all bets seemed to be off, sartorially speaking, and Dylan embarked on a 10-year style odyssey.

Circa *Blonde on Blonde*, Dylan had slipped on his first pair of Ray-Bans (did he ever take them off?) and acquired a frilly polka-dot shirt that somehow avoided Austin Powers-like overkill: a more appropriate comparison would be Harry Styles, who rocked a satin pussy-bow blouse circa 2017 that everyone ➔

**RIGHT** One of the most recognisable looks for Dylan is this simple but iconic shades-plus-polka-dots aesthetic, snapped as he arrived in Sweden in the late '60s, with over 20 staff in tow, we're told

**BELOW** In 1963, as seen here with Joan Baez, Dylan was still rocking the youthful preppy look – a polite jacket and collared shirt, with his hair neatly under control

Elton John once saw a dishevelled Dylan in the grounds of an opulent party that he threw in LA in the 80s and asked loudly why the gardener was helping himself to a drink











apparently loved. By now, 'the hair' was here in the form of a mass of curls that no-one would dare to try and manage, and which gave its owner a messianic vibe that fitted nicely with his commercial profile.

This was Peak Dylan Style.

That said, his 1970s were just as interesting in style terms, if a touch more restrained. Bellbottom jeans started to hang around Dylan's footwear, usually cowboy boots or suede slip-ons of some kind: he even flirted with sandals at times. Oxford shirts, necklaces, leather jackets and a cheeky moustache or two came and went. He didn't

always nail it – the whiteface makeup he sported in some of the Rolling Thunder Revue shows in '75 comes to mind – but by and large, he got through the decade unscathed.

The same can't quite be said about the 1980s, a decade in which everyone contractually had to look stupid at some point. Often wearing black, and frequently with more than a dash of eyeliner, Dylan

presumably took his inspiration from the post-punk and goth tribes coming out of the UK and Europe. While that looked cool, he blew it completely around 1985 to '88, when he bought himself

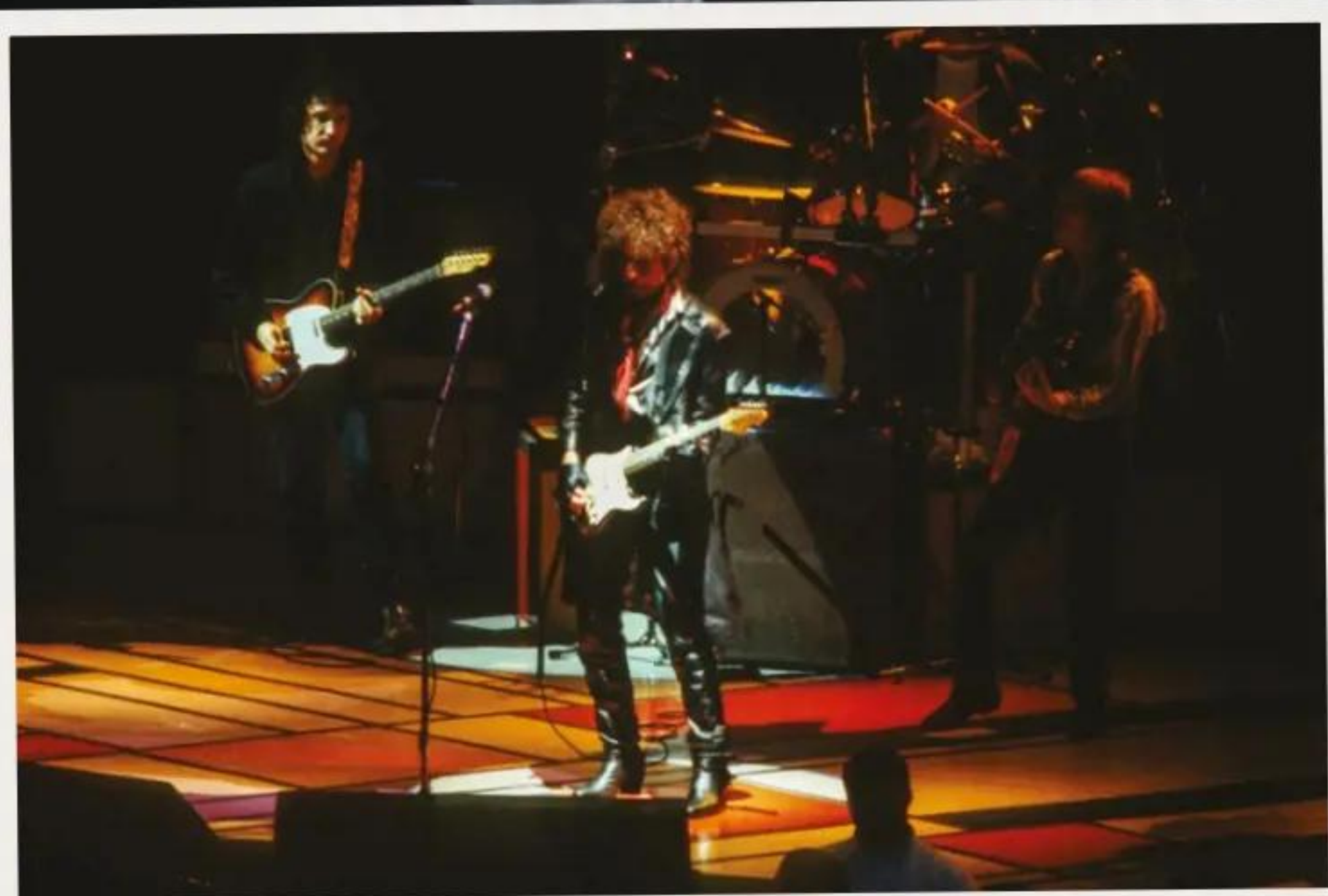
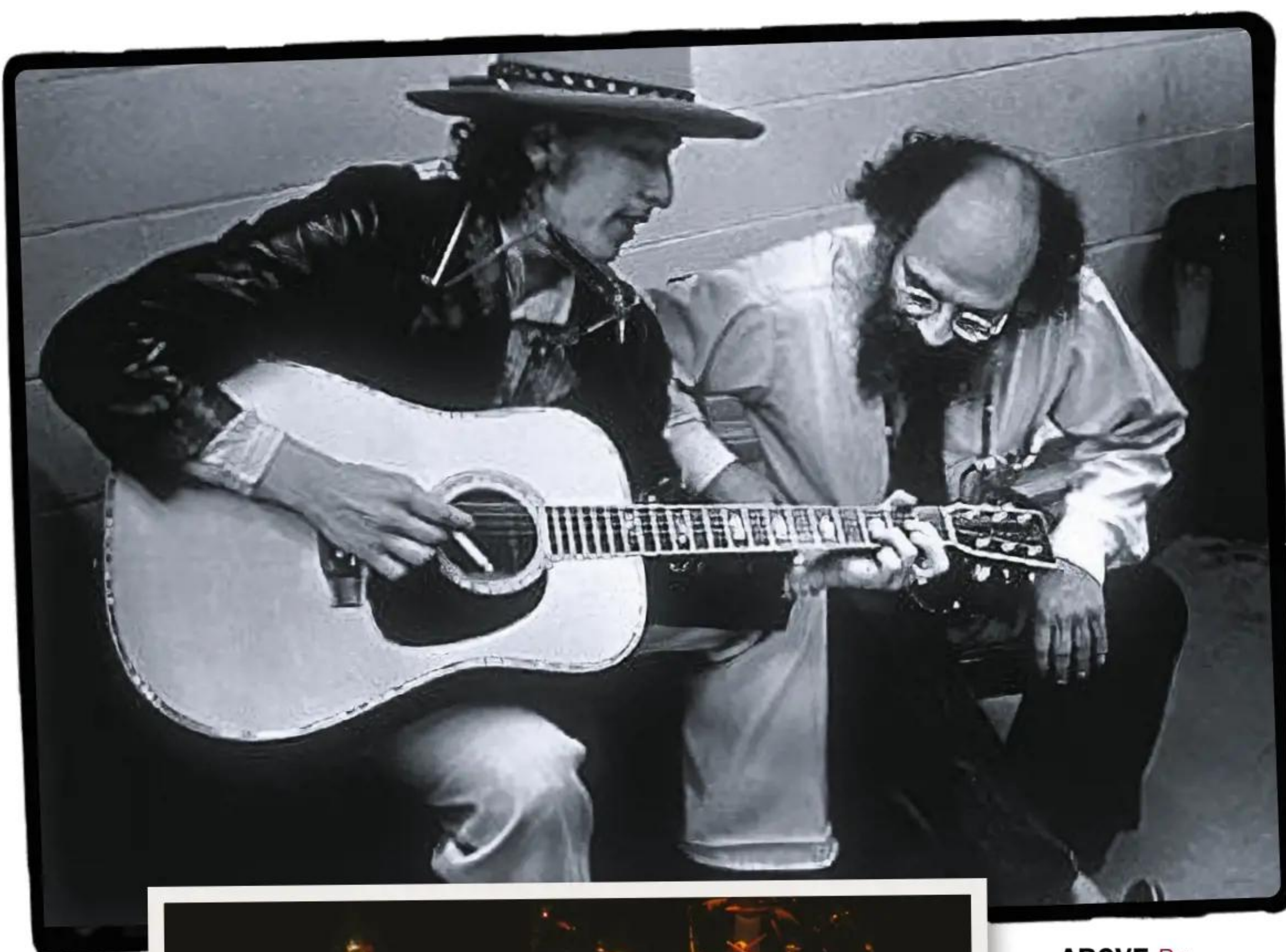
**Dylan's original pair of sunglasses are thought to have been first-generation Ray-Bans, made from black cellulose acetate**

**ABOVE** Look into my eyes: Dylan goes goth in 1984 with a dab of manly eyeliner. It worked, too, giving him a touch of androgyny post the Me Decade

**RIGHT** This classic 1969 getup reveals that when Dylan got his look right, he was among the coolest cats on the planet. Even the grim environs of Heathrow Airport couldn't spoil this shot







**ABOVE** By 1975, Dylan had expanded his accessories range to include scarves and hats, as seen in this shot of him with writer Allen Ginsberg


**LEFT** Even Bob couldn't get it right all the time, suffering from 80s trends as much as everyone else did

## 'THE HAIR' GAVE ITS OWNER A MESSIANIC VIBE THAT FITTED NICELY WITH HIS PROFILE

a bunch of leather trousers (there are even rumours of spandex...) as Hollywood metal blossomed and he started hanging round with Guns N' Roses and whatnot.

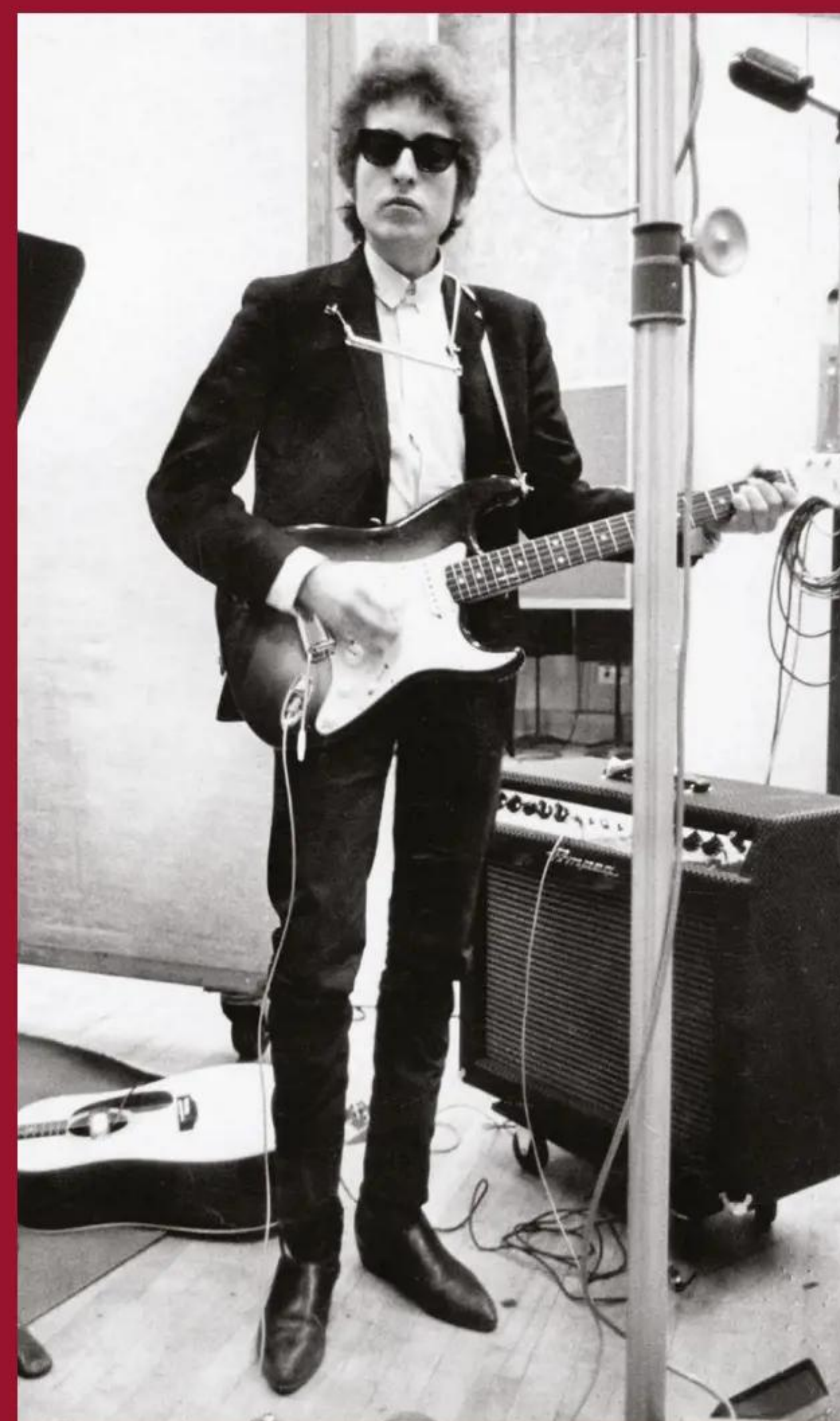
Fortunately, Dylan took the commercially safe route after the mid-1990s, when his musical output was mostly back on track and he'd found his niche once again. By this stage he'd embraced the part-time cowboy look (jeans, boots, a bootlace tie, many cowboy hats) and looked perfectly adequate doing so, even if he didn't stand out particularly from the other artists of his generation who were wearing the same gear. Still, the amazing pencil moustache he grew for

*Love and Theft* in 2001 gave him a Southern Gothic, Gomez Addams-style look that elevated him out of all that, and his choice of a straight-brimmed hat from then on has given him an almost Victorian aesthetic. The polka dots made their way back into his wardrobe, too.

Don't write him off, clothes-wise, even though he's in his eighties. Remember, in 2003 Dylan showed up to the Sundance Film Festival in a blue beanie cap, a plaid shirt, a black leather jacket and – get this – blonde hair, either bleached or in the form of a wig. And that's from a man aged 62 at the time. Truly the clothes maketh the man. 

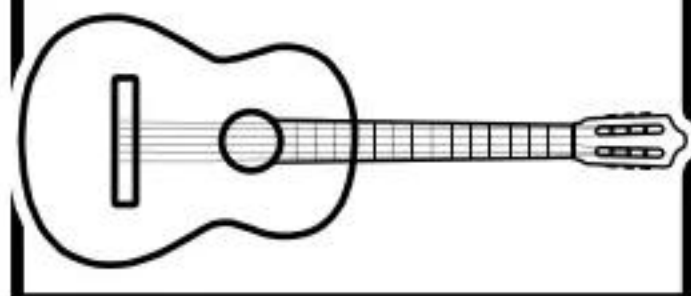
## MODERN TIMES

WHEN DYLAN WENT MOD



Never mind the punks or the teddy boys, the coolest British youth uniform of all time was mod (from 'modern'), a mid-1960s style cult and philosophy that revolved around classical dandyism, European minimalism and a penchant for Vespas, Gitanes and street violence in the form of sharpened umbrella tips. The Who and The Kinks were the biggest exponents of the original mod look circa 1965, an aesthetic that Bob Dylan would almost certainly have taken on board when his own transformation from folkie to rock star took place around the same time. Check out any image of him from this specific time and you'll notice the tailored suits, skin-tight trousers and pointy Italian shoes that crossed the Atlantic with the British Invasion. Add some nifty Ray-Bans and you have a look to die for, although not literally: as far as we know the sharpened umbrellas remained in Britain.





# A NOBEL MAN

BOB DYLAN'S 2016 NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE SAW THE SINGER-SONGWRITER HONOURED AMONGST THE GREAT MEN OF LETTERS – BUT NOT EVERYONE WAS APPLAUDING...

WORDS Henry Yates

For an artist of Bob Dylan's stature, one more award (amongst the hundreds banked since 1963's Grammy-nominated debut album) hardly seems the stuff of global headlines. But on 13 October, 2016 came the news that thrilled fans – and infuriated a vocal minority – as it raced around the world.

Dylan, it was announced by the Nobel committee, had won that year's Prize in Literature "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition". And while the singer-songwriter himself didn't publicly respond for several days, it wasn't due to apathy but sheer disbelief. "Amazing, incredible – whoever dreams about something like that?" he finally told *USA Today* journalist Edna Gundersen.

To many of his disciples, Dylan had always been a poet as much as a musical performer, his lyrics perhaps even more fundamental to his songs than the brittle chord patterns or gloriously ravaged vocals. And what lyrics they were. Try the idealistic peacenik questioning of 1962's *Blowin' in*

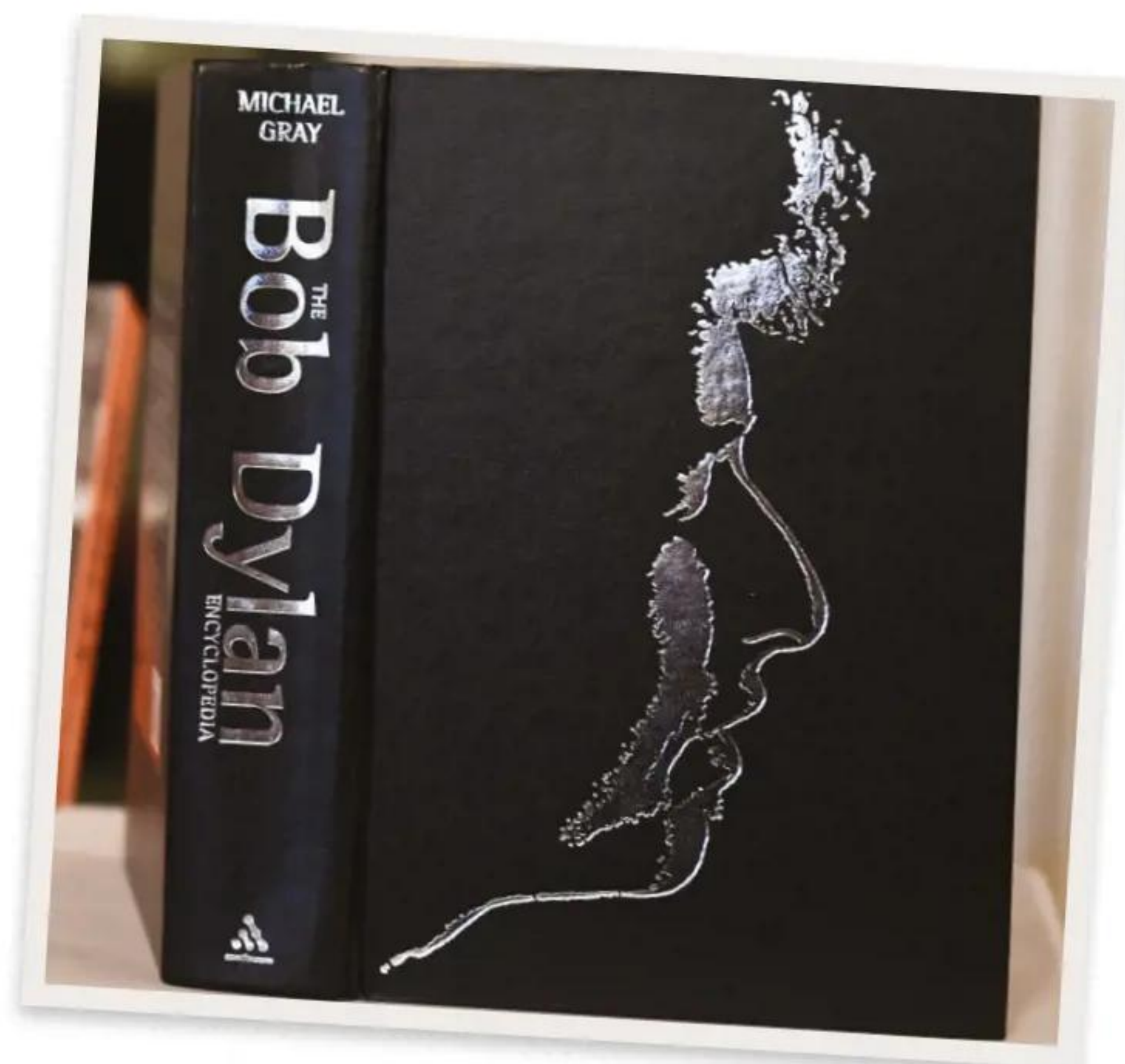
*the Wind* ("Yes and how many times must the cannonballs fly/ Before they're forever banned?"). Revisit the generational call-to-arms of 1964's *The Times They Are A-Changin'* ("There's a battle outside and it is ragin'/It'll soon shake your windows and rattle your walls").

Or, for Dylan at full stretch, strap in for 1965's epic *Desolation Row*, which chronicles the prostitutes, sailors, fortune-tellers and assorted lowlives of a city's

underbelly for 11-plus perfectly observed minutes ("Here comes the blind commissioner, they've got him in a trance/One hand is tied to the tight-rope walker, the other is in his pants...").

No doubt, these couplets – and thousands more – were on the committee's mind as they invited Dylan to that December's Nobel Banquet in Stockholm. At such short notice, the singer-songwriter couldn't attend (US ambassador to Sweden, Azita Raji, delivered his speech while Patti Smith performed 1963's *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*). But true to Nobel protocol – which requires prize-winners to deliver a written lecture within six months of the

Among the literary heavyweights to applaud Dylan's Nobel Prize win were Stephen King, Joyce Carol Oates and US poet laureate Billy Collins



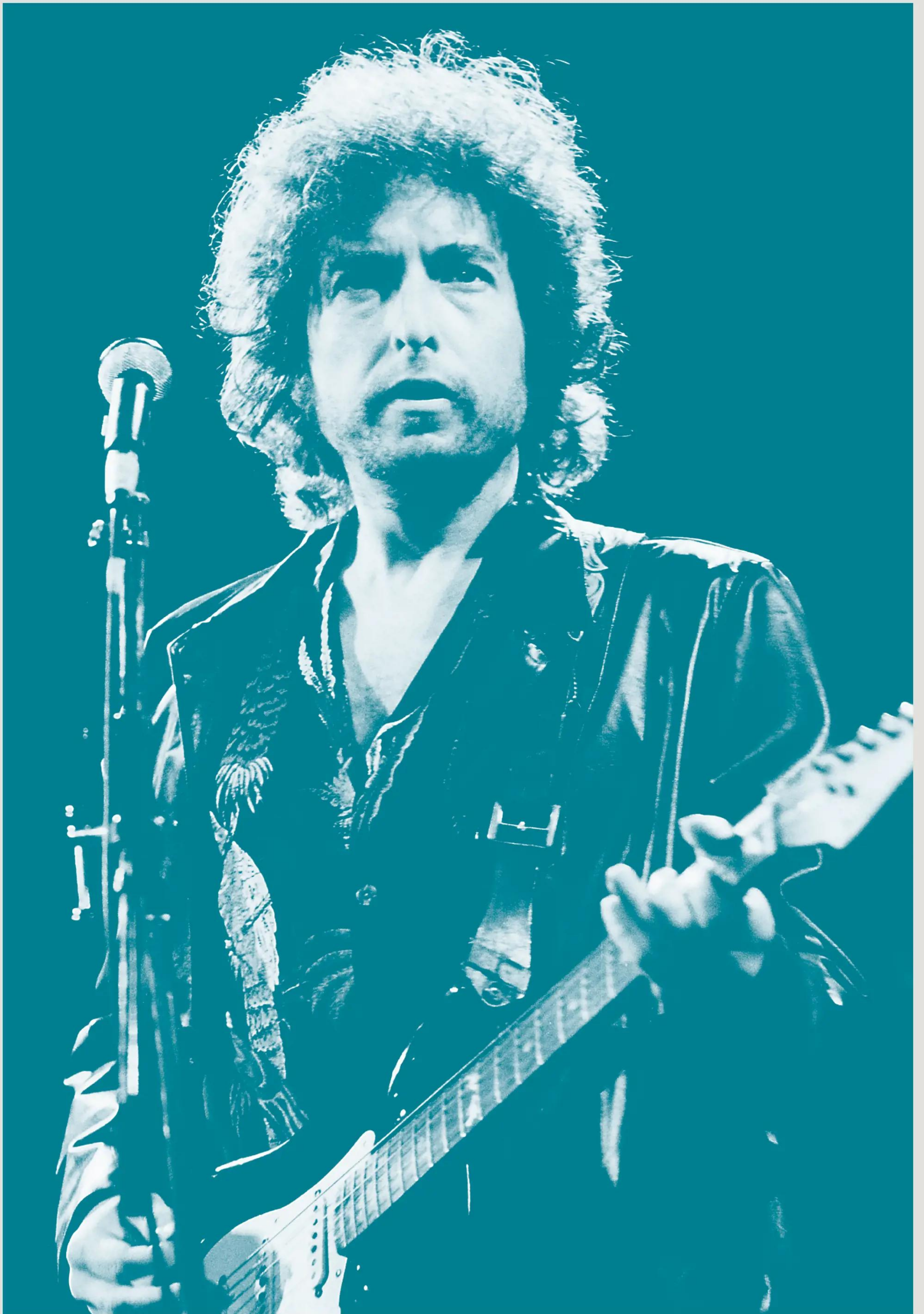
ABOVE Michael Gray's *The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* is one of many written works on the iconic singer-songwriter

ceremony – June 2017 saw Dylan post a thoughtful and fiercely intelligent discourse online.

While citing his own favourite literary works – among them Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Homer's *Odyssey* – Dylan stressed the importance of words existing in their intended context. "Our songs are alive in the land of the living," he wrote. "But songs are unlike literature. They're meant to be sung, not read. The words in Shakespeare's plays were meant to be acted on the stage. Just as lyrics in songs are meant to be sung, not read on a page. And I hope some of you get the chance to listen to these lyrics the way they were intended to be heard: in concert or on record or however people listen to songs these days."

But those same words would come back to bite Dylan. True, the singer-songwriter's win in the Literature category was ➡












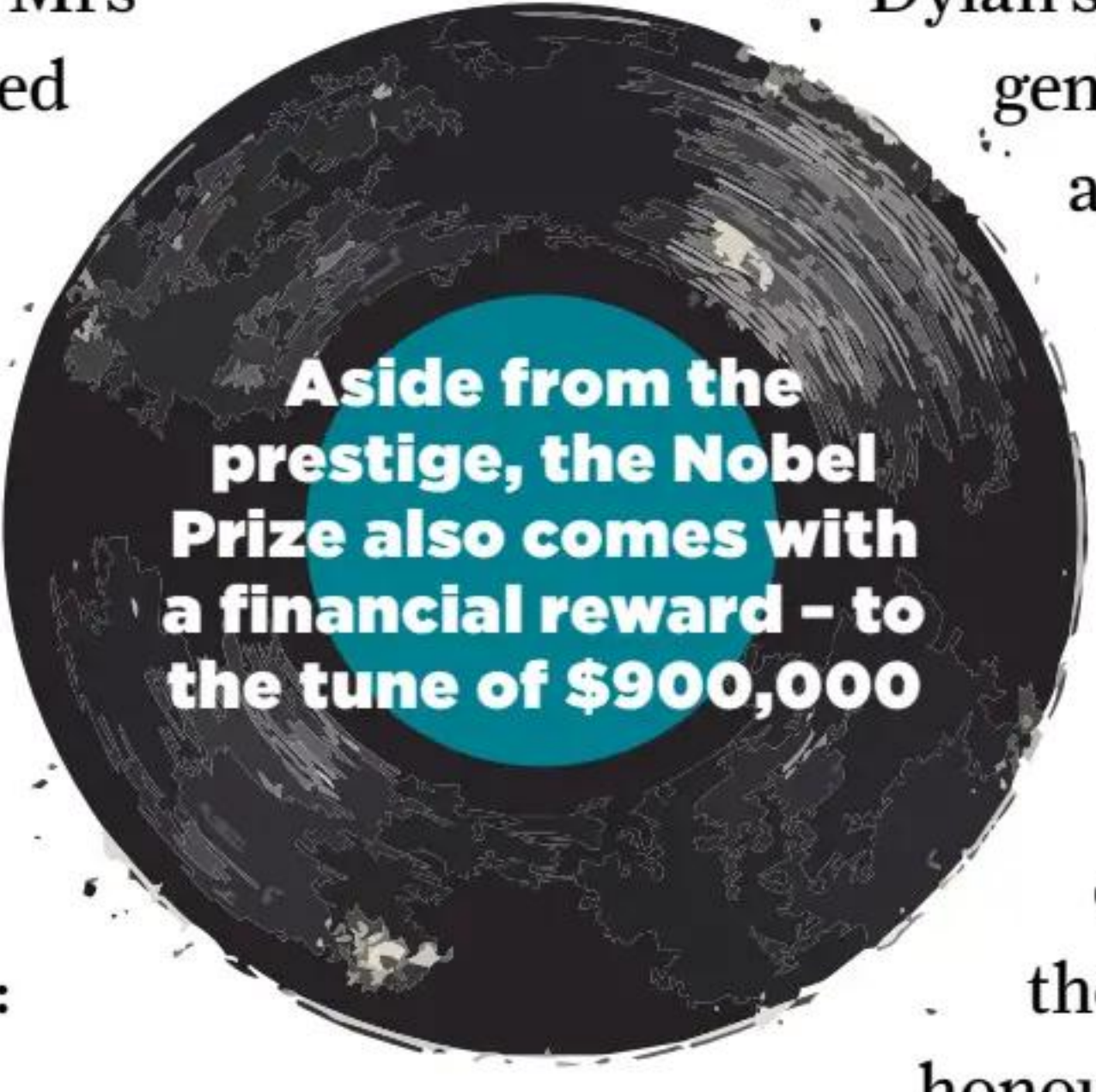
not quite without precedent (in 1913, Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore claimed the same prize with musical pieces amongst his oeuvre). But in October 2016, several notables from the world of letters erupted with fury that a figure who could be loosely described as a 'rock star' had hijacked their realm.

"Bob Dylan winning a Nobel in Literature is like Mrs Fields being awarded three Michelin stars," sniped US novelist Rabih Alameddine – while *Trainspotting* author Irvine Welsh went even further, remarking: "I'm a Dylan fan, but this is an ill-conceived nostalgia award wrenched from the rancid prostates of senile, gibbering hippies..."

Other public figures criticised the decision from a different angle, claiming the Nobel Prize was a pointless gimmick, not above Dylan's pay grade but, in fact, beneath him. Canadian

songwriter Leonard Cohen believed that honouring his old friend was "like pinning a medal on Mount Everest for being the highest", while British novelist Will Self believed "it cheapens Dylan to be associated at all with a prize founded on an explosives and armaments fortune".

Singer? Songwriter? Poet? Performer? It's a testament to Dylan's free-roaming genius that such a febrile debate exists over the categorisation of his art. Ultimately, whether or not the Nobel committee bent the rules by honouring a man holding not a pen but a guitar, they picked the best one out there. "We live in a time of great lyricist-songwriters," Salman Rushdie told *The Guardian*. "But Dylan towers over everyone. The frontiers of literature keep widening, and it's exciting that the Nobel Prize recognises that..." 

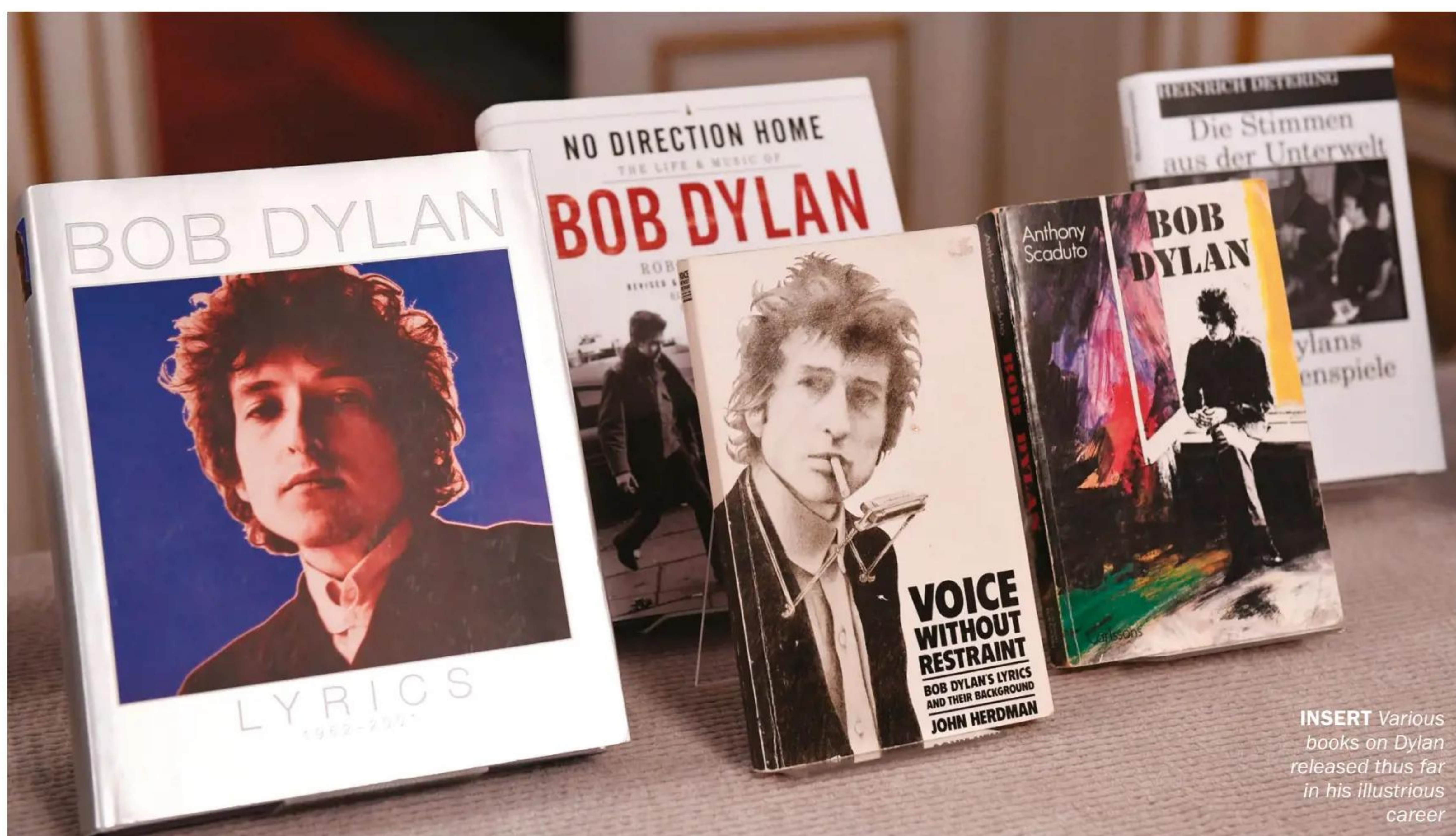


**Aside from the prestige, the Nobel Prize also comes with a financial reward – to the tune of \$900,000**

## AND THE WINNER IS...

### A SHORT HISTORY OF BOB DYLAN'S AWARDS

The Nobel Prize in Literature is far from the first – or last – honour bestowed upon Bob Dylan. The singer-songwriter's first brush with a major music award came back in 1963, when his self-titled debut album was nominated at that year's Grammys for Best Folk Recording. It didn't win, but the Grammy Board has since made up for lost time, with Dylan banking a total of 10 gongs (including three for 1997's restorative *Time Out Of Mind*). That's just the start of the silverware avalanche. Dylan's almost countless accolades span from the Medal of Freedom (presented to him by President Barack Obama in 2012) to France's *Officier de la Légion d'honneur* (Officer of the Legion of Honour). Inevitably, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988, while he even segued smoothly into the digital age with a 2014 Webby Award for Best Online Film & Video Editing.



**INSERT** Various books on Dylan released thus far in his illustrious career

IMAGES Getty





# BOB DYLAN

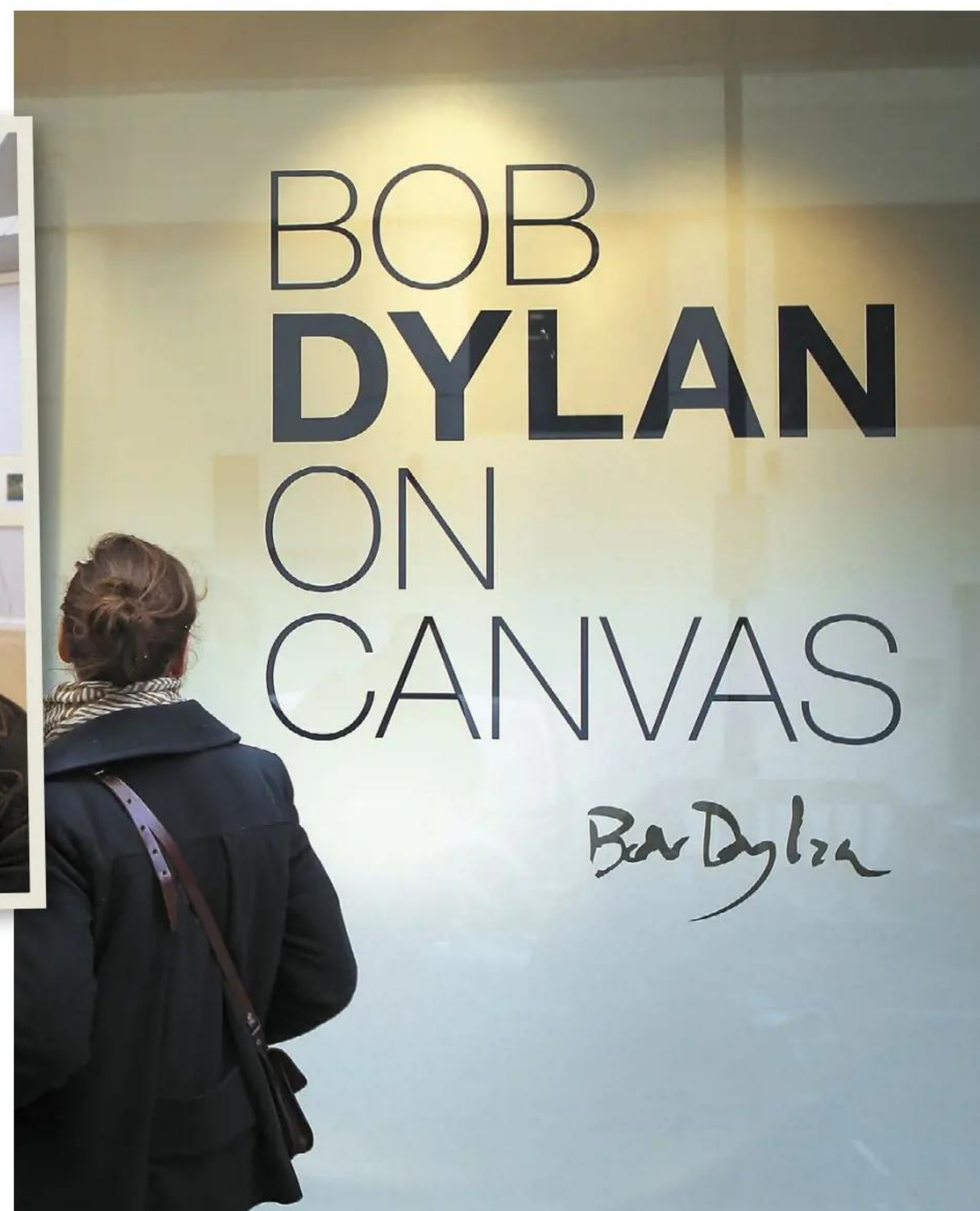
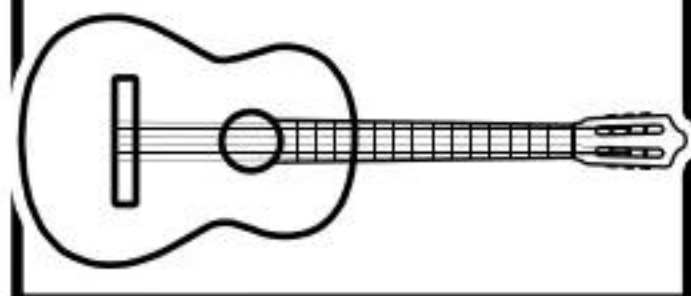
WE ALL KNOW BOB DYLAN AS A MUSICIAN... BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT HE HAS ALSO ENJOYED A LONG AND SUCCESSFUL CAREER AS A VISUAL ARTIST?

WORDS Joel McIver









**T**he late-1960s was the era of the polymath musician, with Paul McCartney, Joni Mitchell, Miles Davis and other stellar creative types indulging in a spot of visual art alongside their songwriting, and Bob Dylan was prominent among them. We first witnessed his ability at the easel with the cover paintings for The Band's *Music from Big Pink* album (1968) and his own *Self-Portrait* (1970), images in a naive style that divided opinion at the time and continue to do so, like all modern art.

However, the concept of Dylan as a fully-fledged visual artist – rather than a part-time dilettante who didn't take it particularly seriously, like his contemporary John Lennon – did not become tangible until the publication of a book in 1973 called *Writings and Drawings*. Now out of print,

the original edition is now highly collectable, although its role has been superseded to an extent by the many books of artwork which Dylan has released since then.

After this early venture, Dylan went on to study art in 1974, when he took painting classes with the Abstract Expressionist tutor Norman Rabin in a studio above New York's Carnegie Hall. As he later explained, a key lesson learned from Rabin was of "the past, present and future being in the same room" simultaneously, through the prism of art. Laymen will spot elements of Cubism in Dylan's work: more educated art fans will also point at French Impressionism (light depicted through brushstrokes) and German Expressionism (all those crazy angles).

Although Dylan painted the cover art for 1974's *Planet Waves* album, he didn't revisit his sideline as an artist for

**ABOVE (Left)** One of Dylan's paintings from the series *Dreamgirls* on display at Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz in Germany, 2007; *The Bob Dylan on Canvas* exhibition debuted his first-ever paintings on canvas at the Halcyon Gallery in London, 2010

another 20 years, when Random House published a collection of drawings called *Drawn Blank*. Indeed, the public had to wait another 13 years to see the artworks up close and personal, when an exhibition called *The Drawn Blank Series* opened in 2007 at the Kunstsammlungen gallery in Chemnitz, Germany. It featured over 200 watercolours and gouaches and was accompanied by a third book, slightly retitled *Bob Dylan: The Drawn Blank Series*.

The Chemnitz artworks were not originals as such: they were reworked versions of original sketches by Dylan that, he explained, had been intended to inspire paintings. Critics and the public noted this slight cop-out, but there was no significant protest, and indeed, Dylan didn't seem particularly bothered if his works were well received on this occasion. It emerged that the exhibition had only taken place thanks to the enthusiasm of the Kunstsammlungen director: as Dylan remarked, "If not for this

**AS DYLAN EXPLAINED, A KEY LESSON FROM RABIN WAS OF "THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE BEING IN THE SAME ROOM" SIMULTANEOUSLY, THROUGH THE PRISM OF ART**





interest, I don't know if I even would have revisited them."

Things soon changed in that respect, as international galleries noted the success of the Chemnitz event and began putting on their own exhibitions. The next event took place in 2010 at the National Gallery of Denmark, which placed 40 acrylic paintings on display. There was serious money involved at this stage, thanks to Dylan's status as a heritage artist and the growing affluence of his now middle-aged fans.

In 2010, The Band's Facebook page broke the news that the painting from the cover of *Music from Big Pink*, then 42 years in the rear-view mirror, was on sale, reportedly for \$18 million. "Bob still owns the painting and is selling it. He's doing an art show with the Gagosian gallery," ran the post.

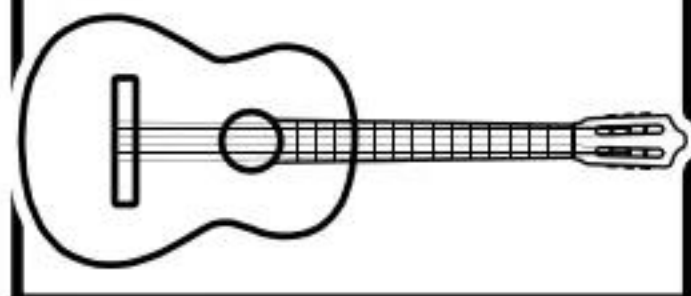
This big-name art dealership has galleries all over the



**ABOVE** Director of the Chemnitz Art Collections museum, Ingrid Moessinger, presenting Dylan's watercolour painting *Woman in Red Lion Pub* in 2007; an entry in the *Sunburned* series on display in Chemnitz; 1968's *Music from Big Pink*, painted for The Band; 1974's *Planet Waves*

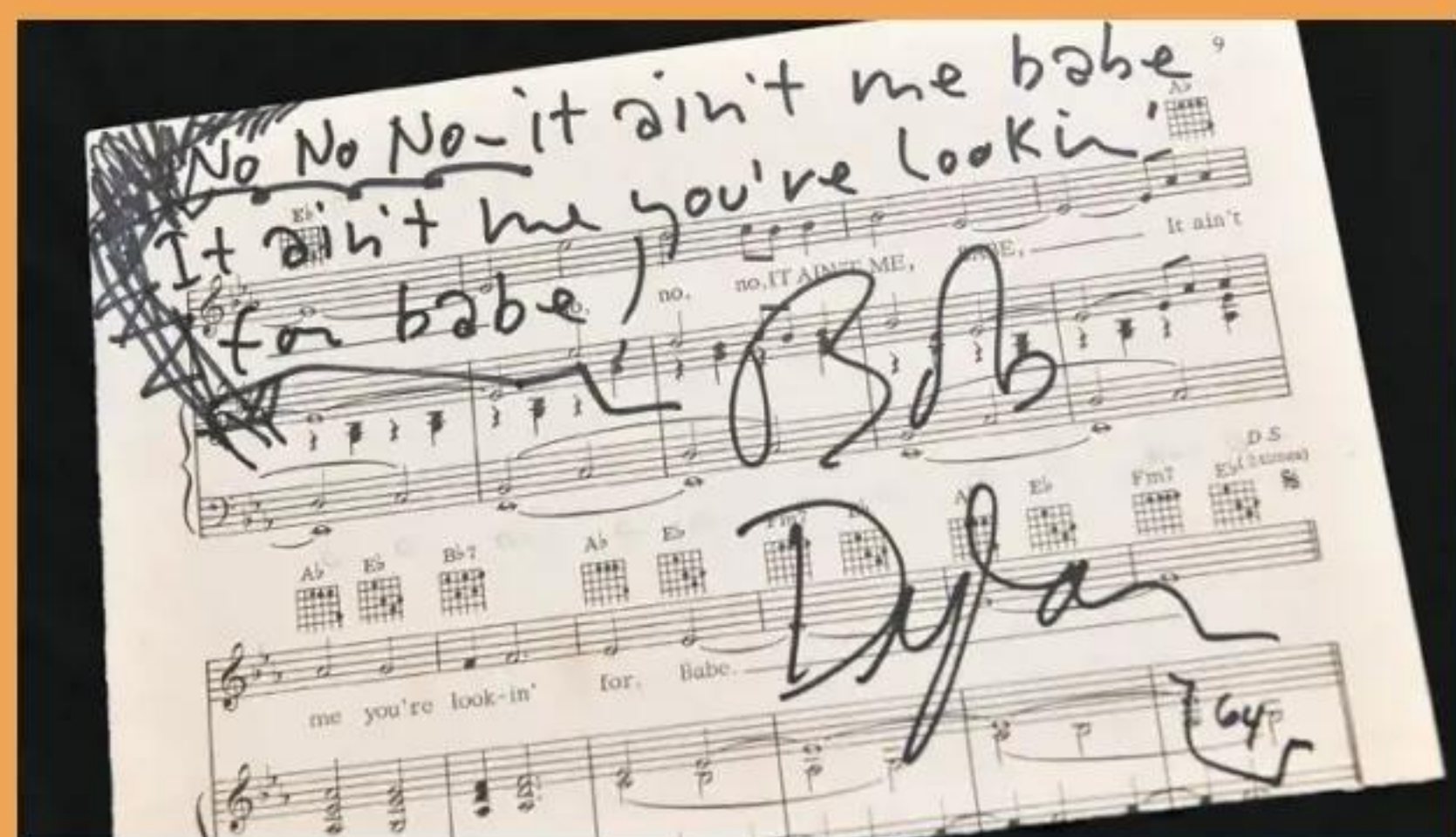






## SIGN OF THE TIMES

USE AN AUTOPEN AT YOUR PERIL...

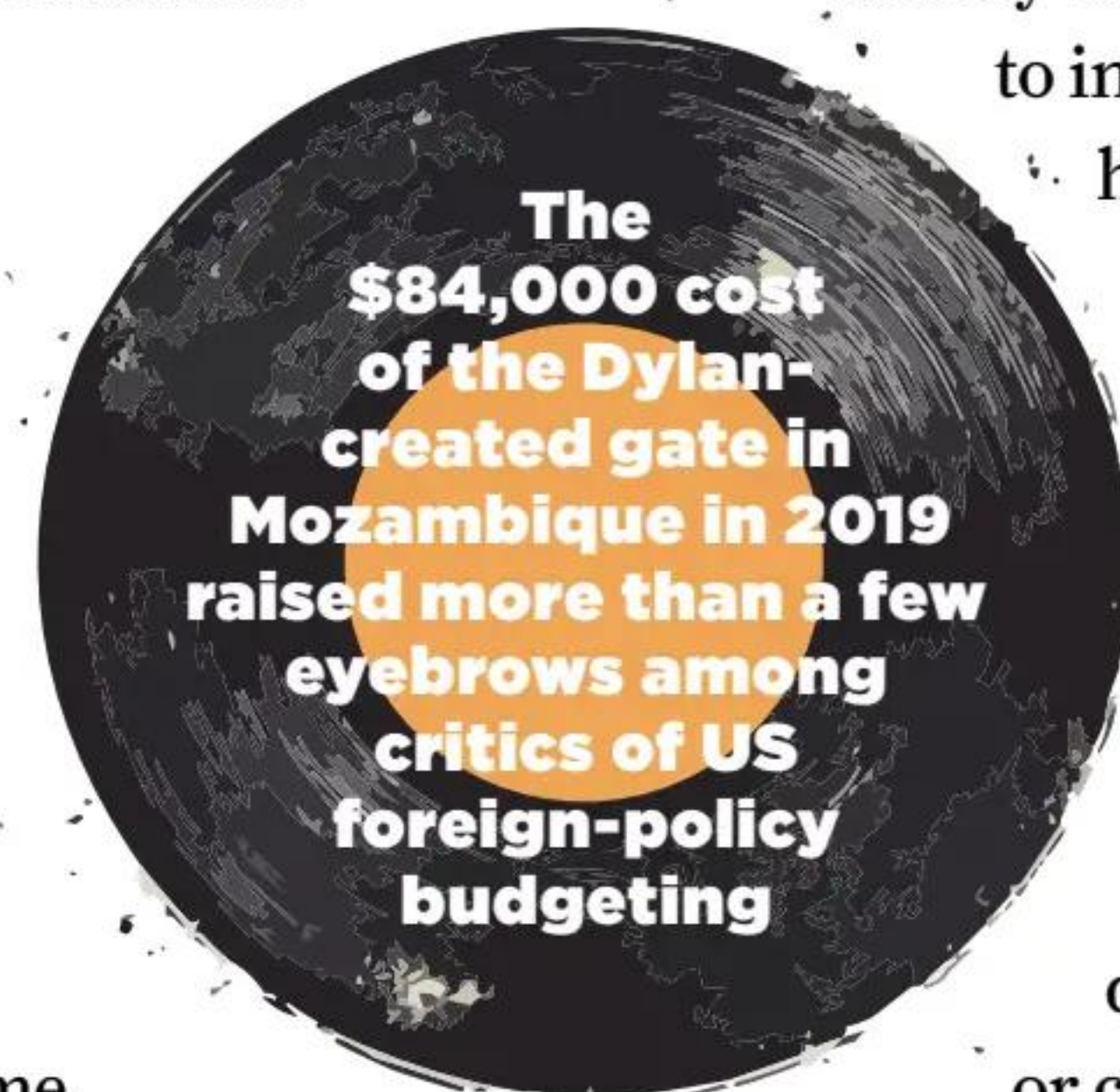


Does an artist always sign their work? In Dylan's case, yes and no. In early 2023, he apologised to buyers of his limited-edition book, *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, for using a device called an autopen to mechanically sign the \$600, "hand-signed" volumes rather than the traditional method. The publisher, Simon & Schuster, insisted at first that the signatures were legitimate, but eventually bowed under pressure and offered refunds to each of the 900 buyers. Dylan, or one of his team, wrote on social media: "To my fans and followers, I've been made aware that there's some controversy about signatures on some of my recent artwork prints and on a limited-edition of *The Philosophy of Modern Song*. I've hand-signed each and every art print over the years, and there's never been a problem. However, in 2019 I had a bad case of vertigo and it continued into the pandemic years... With contractual deadlines looming, the idea of using an autopen was suggested to me, along with the assurance that this kind of thing is done 'all the time' in the art and literary worlds. Using a machine was an error in judgment and I want to rectify it immediately. I'm working with Simon & Schuster and my gallery partners to do just that."

world and became closely associated with Dylan's work over the next few years. Their first exhibition of his work, *The Asia Series*, took place in September 2011 at Gagosian's Madison Avenue gallery, focusing on his paintings of subjects in the Far East. This event did cause some controversy, with the New York Times reporting that some of the paintings were identical in composition to historical photographs, taken in China and elsewhere, by famous photographers such as Dmitri Kessel and Henri Cartier-Bresson.

A Dylan expert called Michael Gray wrote on his blog, *Bob*

*Dylan Encyclopedia*, about the photographic inspiration of one of his subject's paintings, remarking: "The most striking thing is that Dylan has not merely used a photograph to inspire a painting: he has taken the photographer's shot composition and copied it exactly. He hasn't painted the group from any kind of different angle, or changed what he puts along the top edge, or either side edge, or the bottom edge of the picture. He's replicated everything as closely as possible... it's not a very imaginative approach to painting. It may not be plagiarism, but it's surely copying rather a lot."







A press representative for the Gagosian Gallery replied, “While the composition of some of Bob Dylan’s paintings is based on a variety of sources, including archival, historic images, the paintings’ vibrancy and freshness come from the colours and textures found in everyday scenes he observed during his travels”, and pointed out that Dylan had previously written: “I paint mostly from real life. It has to start with that. Real people, real street scenes, behind the curtain scenes, live models, paintings, photographs, staged setups, architecture, grids, graphic design.” Later, the Magnum photo agency confirmed that Dylan had licensed the

**ABOVE** Dylan’s painting *Two Sisters* on display at the Halcyon Gallery in London, 2010

**OPPOSITE** Gallery viewers attend Dylan’s *Drawn Blank Series* exhibition opening reception at The Ross Art Group in New York City on 8 May, 2014

reproduction rights for the images in question.

A second Gagosian exhibition of Dylan works called *Revisionist Art* took place in late 2012, and two more followed in 2013, the first a sequence of images called the *New Orleans Series* in Milan and the second a group of 12 portraits called *Face Value* at the National Portrait Gallery in London.

“Who’d have thought to come up with that title for an exhibition of portraits?” snickered the *Guardian* and *Spectator* critic Fisun Güner, adding: “Dylan has been painting and drawing for most of his life, and these 12 pastel portraits might be described as naive – but then,

much of what’s produced by contemporary professional artists might also be described as naive... Dylan really isn’t a bad artist – I’ll stick my neck out and say that, occasionally, he’s even quite a good one. These portraits are more than competent [and] have something, even if that something just shows an accomplished hobbyist.”

Güner’s review points at the general consensus of views of Dylan’s art: critics tend to regard it as interesting rather than essential, and well-executed in parts, accompanied by a degree of uncertainty as to whether it’s qualitatively good or not. To an extent this has been useful for the artist himself, because ➡





debate continues to take place about his work, which is not easy to categorise or dismiss: there's also a conversation to be had about whether Dylan's fame as a musician is responsible

for the attention paid to a mere hobby.

Still, at least some of the naysayers were silenced when, in 2013, Dylan surprised more than a few observers by revealing

**ABOVE** A print called *Train Tracks* on display in New York, 2013

a collection of intricately-engineered sculptures, or 'ironworks' as they were more accurately named, a series of welded industrial pieces that stemmed from his interest in repurposing metals.

"I've been around iron all my life, ever since I was a kid," he explained. "I was born and raised in iron ore country, where you could breathe it and smell it every day." Of his particular affinity for crafting iron gates, he said: "[They] appeal to me because

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**"AT TIMES, THE BACKGROUND AND FOREGROUND CONVERGE... A SIMPLE HOT-DOG STAND CAN HAVE CLASSICAL FEATURES, AND I VIEW IT AS SUCH"**

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**ABOVE** Clockwise from top left: Dylan's metalwork sculpture, *Portal*, at the MGM National Harbor in Washington, D.C., 2016; Ironwork double gates displayed at the Halcyon Gallery, London for his *Mood Swings* exhibition, 2013; An Ironwork also from the Halcyon Gallery *Mood Swings* exhibition; Rail Car at Château La Coste in France, 2022

of the negative space they allow. They can be closed but at the same time they allow the seasons and breezes to enter and flow. They can shut you out or shut you in. And in some ways there is no difference."

In 2016, a large metal arch created by Dylan was installed at the MGM National Harbor in Maryland, not as a temporary exhibit but as a working entry point. The sculpture was made of repurposed metal objects such as tools and machine parts, reflecting his interest in Americana, it seemed. Four years later, a permanent sculpture called *Rail Car*, a wrought-iron train carriage set on rails, was installed at Château La Coste in Provence, France, and later still



a gate was placed at the American embassy in Mozambique in East Africa.

Dylan's

ironworks enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, plenty of critical support. "As a lyricist, Bob Dylan is a master of collage," wrote the *Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art*. "Eventually, Dylan's metal sculptures became complex collages themselves. In these works, antique farm machinery and decorative pieces from building facades interact in similar ways to his songwriting inventions. The elements are simultaneously recognisable as themselves and yet transformed into something new."

In late 2016, London's Halcyon Gallery put on an exhibition of Dylan works called *The Beaten Path*, based on rural and urban settings across America. Sean Wilentz of the *Asia Times* wrote enthusiastically: "*Endless Highways*, the monumental centrepiece to the exhibition, features layer upon layer of meaning... This is a road that has its ups and downs, valleys and peaks. It's a picture filled with moving... Bob Dylan is always becoming something else, that's the important thing about him. To try and pin him down with any kind of fixed identity is very tricky indeed."

Dylan himself wrote about *The Beaten Path*, and his text was excerpted in *Vanity Fair*, ➡





becoming a useful indicator of the philosophy behind the images. This was especially helpful given that he has, historically, not usually bothered to explain his motives as an artist. As he wrote: “For this series of paintings, the idea was to create pictures that would not be misinterpreted or misunderstood by me or anybody else... The common theme of these works having something to do with the American landscape – how you see it while crisscrossing the land and seeing it for what it’s worth. Staying out of the mainstream and traveling the back roads, free-born style.”

He added: “My idea is to compose works that create stability, working with generalised, universal and easily identifiable objects. I tried to create the two-dimensional image using a mathematical system. At times, the background and foreground converge... A simple hot-dog stand can have

classical features, and I view it as such. Whiplash curves, flying buttresses, pointed steeples, arches, and waves. They are all there, reflecting any time period, purposely trying to stay away from dramatic or theatrical lighting effects, bringing naturalism to the forefront.”

In his later career, Dylan’s art has attracted serious analysis, with the Gagosian Gallery claiming that his “drawings and paintings are marked by the same constant drive for renewal that characterises his legendary music. He often draws and paints while on tour, and his motifs bear corresponding impressions of different environments and people. A keen observer, Dylan is inspired by everyday phenomena in such a way that they appear fresh, new and mysterious.”

There’s deliberate intention and compositional skill behind Dylan’s images’ superficial naivety, then, regardless of what

**ABOVE** *The Retrospectrum exhibition at Today Art Museum in Beijing, 2020*

**OPPOSITE** *From left: Bob Dylan: 60 Years of Creating at the Halcyon Gallery, London, 2021; Dylan’s signature as on Woman in Red Lion Pub*

people may think of them, a fact that gallery owners have often noted. A second exhibition at the Halcyon Gallery took place in late 2018, this time of his handwritten lyrics, accompanied by drawings and titled *Mondo Scripto*. This event was the precursor to a larger exhibition at the Modern Art Museum in Shanghai in 2019: Dylan has only infrequently performed in China over his career, and the political and cultural implications of the event were obvious. Comprising over 250 works in various media, many of them previously seen at the *Drawn Blank* and *Mondo Scripto* exhibitions, in the Asia and New Orleans series, and in Dylan’s earlier books, the event was titled *Retrospectrum*.

The Frost Art Museum in Miami, Florida followed up with an exhibition in late 2021 called *Deep Focus*: a smaller version of the *Retrospectrum* collection, it focused on paintings that Dylan





had based on movie stills. The collection “moves into the cities of America and populates these places with humans of all kinds,” noted *ArtReview*. “Some are gathered round: four men in a card game inside; others playing dice outside; a jazz band. We see the last moments of a boxing match... There is a lot of alcohol and lots of smoking.”

The events kept coming, with European audiences seemingly just as interested in Dylan’s work as his American followers, quite a coup in countries with a significant heritage in fine art such as France, where he exhibited in 2022.

Asked why he was exhibiting in China, Dylan replied: “Shanghai is a city so rich in culture and history, I couldn’t be happier [to exhibit] there”

*Drawn Blank in Provence*, his first French exhibition, opened at the aforementioned Château La Coste, and the Maxxi Museum in Rome followed suit from late ’22 to the spring of 2023.

By any measure, Dylan has gifted his followers a large oeuvre of two- and three-dimensional works. Few critics and other observers like all of them, but that’s at least partly the point, not that he

is likely to care much at this stage. Note that as the number of exhibitions has increased, so the number of accompanying books has risen, with the most recent volume, *Bob Dylan: Point Blank* (2025) taking the collection to 10.

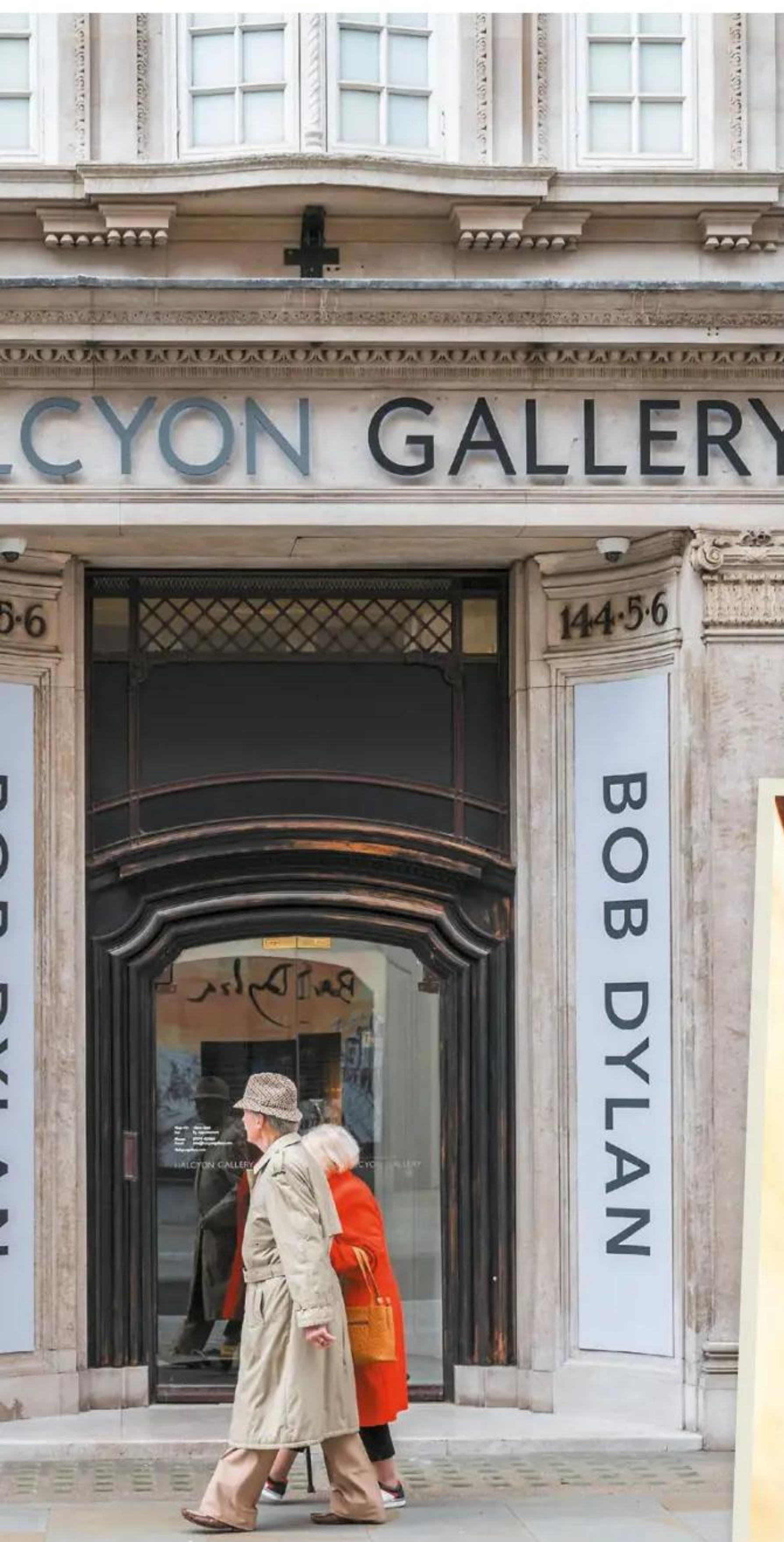
One critic, Charlie Finch at *Artnet*, drew an analogy with Dylan’s musical output, commenting astutely back in 2007: “Based on Bob’s career actions, [his works] should be disappointing *in toto* and exhilarating in specific points, like tokes on a joint on a rainy day. It will be the task of future generations to crawl out from under Dylan’s opus, in all its manifestations, and try to figure it out.” 📖

## CASHING IN

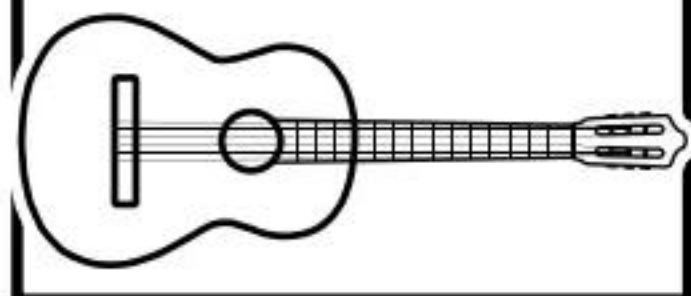
THE COST OF COLLECTING DYLAN’S DAUBS



So what does it cost to buy a piece of art by Bob Dylan? You might get away with a small print for £1,000 to £5,000, but some limited editions and original pieces can reach into the tens of thousands. A print called *Side Tracks*, 18 May 1976, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma went for a tasty £32,000 at Roseberys in London a while back, and a series of *Drawn Blank* prints cost someone £22,000. But all those cost peanuts compared to the painting on the cover of The Band’s *Music from Big Pink* (1968). As that group’s Robbie Robertson told *Rolling Stone* in 2011: “I asked Bob to paint the album cover. He said, ‘Yeah, let me see what I can come up with’. He went and painted that and I said, ‘Yeah, that’s pretty good – we’ll use that!’ Somebody just told me they’re asking [for] \$18 million for it.”







# A-CHANGIN'

THOUSANDS HAVE BITTEN OFF BOB DYLAN'S CATALOGUE, BUT ONLY A FEW COVERS OF HIS SONGS HAVE BECOME IMMORTAL. FROM THE BYRDS TO GUNS N' ROSES, VIA JIMI HENDRIX'S UNIMPEACHABLE *ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER*, WE LOOK AT THE COVERS WHERE THE STUDENTS ECLIPSED THE MASTER

WORDS Henry Yates



Il roads lead back to Bob Dylan. On countless albums since 1962, across any genre, you can find

that hallowed surname in the credits. Crunch the numbers – his catalogue of 600-plus songs is eclipsed by more than 6,000 covers – and you'll start to grasp why the Universal Music Group paid the 80-year-old songwriter a reported £225 million for his publishing rights in 2020. After all, to own Dylan's originals is not a goldmine to be sniffed at – but to profit from his branches and tributaries is practically a royalty statement with no end.

Even beyond his towering influence, that roll-call of cover versions ensures that Dylan, then and now, is everywhere: a common strand of DNA that courses through Guns N' Roses, Sonic Youth and the Grateful Dead, sprawls across the degrees of separation between XTC, Cheap Trick and Fairport Convention.

"My old songs, they've got something," Dylan told *Rolling Stone* in 2006. "I think my songs have been covered maybe not as much as *White Christmas* or

*Stardust*, but there's a list of over 5,000 recordings. That's a lot of people covering your songs. They must have something. If I was me, I'd cover my songs too."

Almost from the moment Dylan inked his first publishing deal – brokered in 1962 by Lou Levy of Leeds Music Publishing – the Dylan cover has been part of the furniture. Back then, in the early '60s, within three weeks of Dylan releasing his original *Blowin' in the Wind*, Peter, Paul And Mary had covered it, adding their own harmony-draped (if slightly twee) thumbprint.

Ever since, the production line has run in parallel with Dylan's career: fast-forward to 2021 and Chrissie Hynde found sufficient juice in his songbook to fuel her album *Standing in the Doorway*: Chrissie Hynde Sings Bob Dylan,

#### OPPOSITE

"If I was me, I'd cover my songs too..."

with the broken-down jangle of *Sweetheart Like You* arguably topping Dylan's original single from 1983's *Infidels*. "He's Bob Dylan," shrugged the Pretenders leader, simply, of her rationale for the project, as if covering the master was a formality that every artist must someday address.

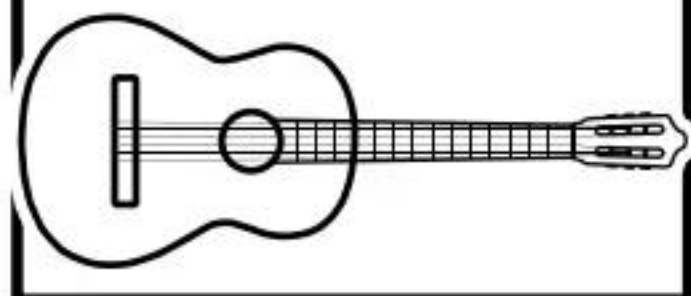
To drill deeper, though, what is it that brings pan-generational, genre-crossing musicians to Dylan's catalogue? One theory is that the veteran songwriter has amassed such a vast oeuvre, offering such shifting moods of material – and lyrics that can be waspish, lovelorn, satirical or sweet – that there's something for every stripe of band or artist to bite off and chew. As such, metallers Ministry were able to transform the cowpoke country-lilt seduction of *Lay, Lady,* ➡

"THERE'S OVER FIVE-THOUSAND RECORDINGS. THAT'S A LOT OF PEOPLE COVERING YOUR SONGS. THEY MUST HAVE SOMETHING"









## “THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER ARTISTS WHO HAVE RECORDED MY SONGS AND SHOWN ME THE WAY THE SONG SHOULD GO”

Lay into a caustic industrial crunk, while polemicists Rage Against the Machine forged fat funk-metal from the anti-commodification diatribe of *Maggie's Farm*.

“The riffs on *Maggie's Farm* were written as a cool Rage Against the Machine riff or jam, and it later had the Dylan lyrics applied to it,” Tom Morello said in *Speakeasy* (the guitarist also told *Forbes* magazine that he considered Dylan’s *The Times They Are A-Changin’* “the heaviest record I’d ever heard in my life”).

Another argument is that Dylan’s originals often feel more like roadmaps than final productions; half-daubed canvasses that leave cover artists a room for manoeuvre that, say, Queen’s *Bohemian Rhapsody* or Zeppelin’s *Kashmir* would not. Nor is Dylan such a vocal or instrumental force that his originals feel unassailable – as

they might with a Robert Plant or Eddie Van Halen – with Dylan admitting the germ of the song matters more than its execution. “I can’t say that I’ve made any great-sounding records,” he reflected to *USA Today* in 1997. “A lot of the older songs were just blueprints for what I’d play later on the stage... There have been other artists who have recorded my songs and shown me the way the song should go.”

It should be noted that the majority of Dylan covers are fodder: a means of bulking up a live set, conferring credibility (for younger artists), or putting product on shelves during a songwriting drought (for older ones). But it’s remarkable, too, how regularly Dylan has been bested by the covers that followed, twisting his templates and putting the heat under his raw materials.

Most would agree that the first stone-cold-classic Dylan cover arrived in April 1965. Roger

**ABOVE** (Left) The Byrds were responsible for the first stone-cold-classic Dylan cover in *Mr. Tambourine Man*; Guns N’ Roses – knocking on heaven’s door louder than anyone else

McGuinn of The Byrds had bought a 12-string Rickenbacker electric after seeing George Harrison play one in the Beatles film *A Hard Day’s Night*. But it was Dylan’s *Mr. Tambourine Man* that gave McGuinn his jump-off: just a month after Dylan’s release, The Byrds added a jingle-jangle intro riff and a tumble of harmonies to their version that instantly eclipsed the original’s prosaic strum. Even today, that opening flourish evokes the flower-fresh rising of the ’60s counterculture, perhaps better than any other instrumental break.

“To take a Dylan song and put electric guitars on it was not heard of at that point,” McGuinn told this writer. “*Mr. Tambourine Man* was probably the first electric folk [song]. But we had to shorten the song. It was about four minutes long in its original form – too long for radio – and it was also in 2/4 time. So we changed the time signature to 4/4 and shortened it down to one verse... Then I picked that little intro on the front with my Rickenbacker, and the same figure at the end. When we listened back to *Mr. Tambourine Man* in the studio, it sounded really wonderful, like: ‘Wow, did we do that?’”

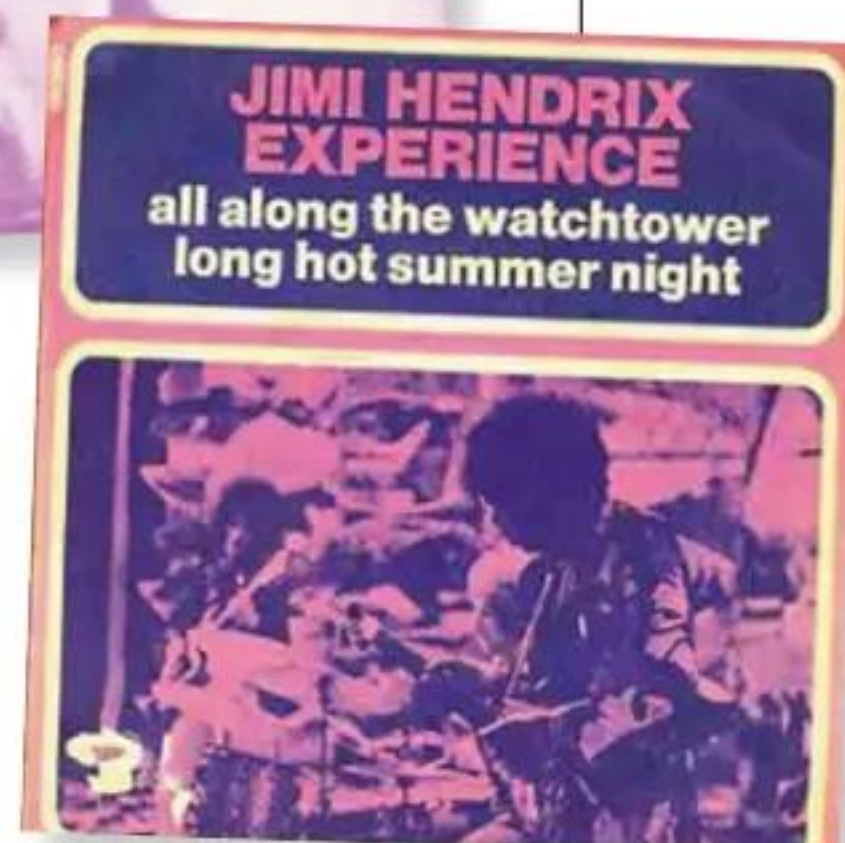
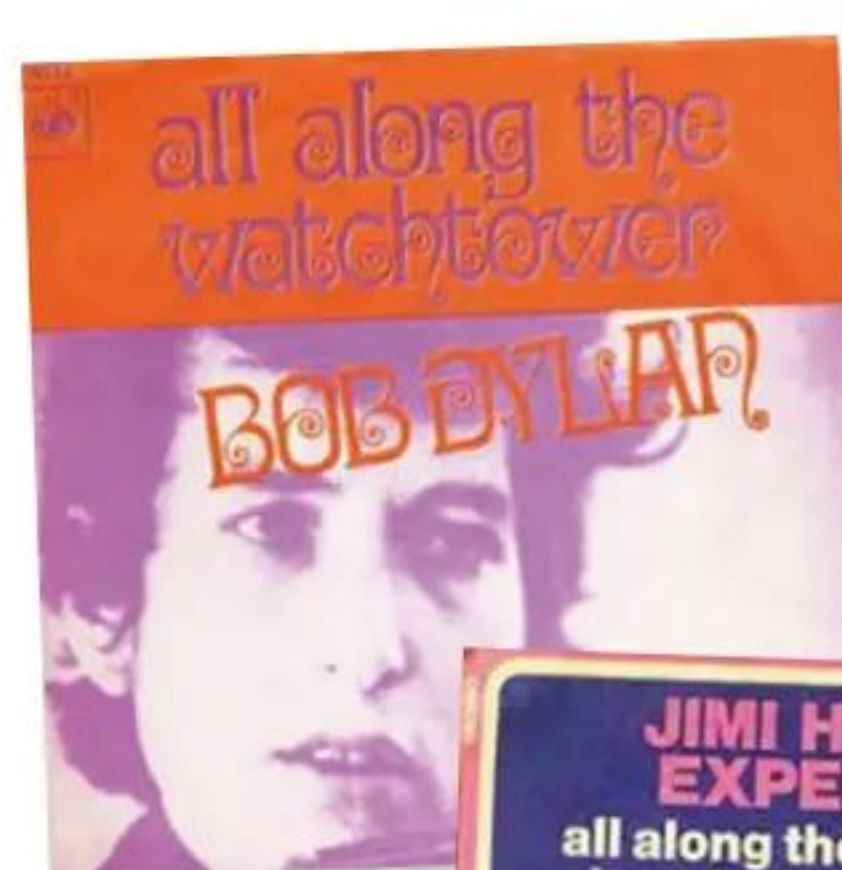




Across the pond in the same period, The Beatles were likewise unabashed Dylan acolytes. Lennon claimed his own songs like *I'm a Loser* and *You've Got to Hide Your Love Away* were open tributes; the unravelling Beatles jammed on Dylan songs such as *Like A Rolling Stone* and *I Want You* during their Let It Be sessions in January '69.

But it's surely the blissful swoop of *If Not for You*, on George Harrison's 1970 solo album *All Things Must Pass* – taught to Harrison just days earlier by Dylan – that stands as the sweetest recorded cover mustered between the four Beatles. The magnanimous Harrison would never have claimed as much, but by comparison his old friend's skin-and-bones forerunner suddenly sounded brittle and stunted.

Dylan's catalogue was not such virgin territory by the time



**ABOVE** The Jimi Hendrix Experience famously took *All Along the Watchtower* and made it their own

Guns N' Roses rose from the fleshpits of mid-1980s LA, and his gospel-draped *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* had already been retooled with a reggae chop by Eric Clapton in 1975. Yet neither Dylan nor Clapton could touch the factor that elevated the GN'R take on 1991's *Use Your Illusion II*: a molten Slash solo played on instinct. "It was an

amazing take," the guitarist wrote in his autobiography of the searing lead break. "I just ran in there with my girlfriend and some friends in tow, picked up the guitar and really let the solo sing. I turned the tone down on the bass pickup, I locked in and let it scream."

It wouldn't be the last time that Dylan would have his own songs wrenched away from him. Even a cursory excavation of more modern covers finds such spellbinding takes as Eddie Vedder's intense *Masters of War*

(at 1992's 30th Anniversary Concert Celebration of Dylan), Jeff Buckley's edge-of-tears *Just Like a Woman* and a dying Gregg Allman's hard-to-bear *Going, Going, Gone* – with that gut-punch lyric: "I'm closing the book on the pages and the text/ And I don't really care what happens next..."

In the post-millennium, Jack White has been arguably the most effective standard bearer, his White Stripes often pulling out a clatter-and-clang live reading of *Desire*'s fiddle-decorated highlight *Isis*, in their early years, and bringing a bleak spaghetti-western drama to *One More Cup of Coffee* on their self-titled debut album. The tip of the hat went both ways, too: in a heartening flash of synergy, White was later called upon to perform his own *Ball and Biscuit* with Dylan live in Detroit. "It's not lost on me that he played one of my songs, not the other way around," White guitarist told *Speakeasy*. ➡



And yet, almost unavoidably, it's a cover of *All Along the Watchtower* that looms over everything else. "It was a small song of mine that nobody paid any attention to," a veteran Dylan once shrugged. In the dying days of '67, Jimi Hendrix was dropping the needle, again and again, on this unloved corner of Dylan's new *John Wesley Harding* album, hearing something more in *All Along the Watchtower* than the rudimentary three-chord strum it seemed to others.

Famously, Hendrix was a Dylan fanatic. But he was something more as well; the guitarist felt a deep kinship that meant he considered the two songwriters' oeuvres to be entwined, *All Along the Watchtower* being another of the Dylan compositions so on his wavelength that "I feel like I wrote them myself," he once said. Hendrix had been spotted around town with a copy of *John Wesley Harding* under his arm, and had become fixated on the fourth track ("I remember Jimi said to me: 'That's the coolest song'," Traffic's Dave Mason told *Guitar World*).

Just a month after Dylan's original had come out, Jimi was ready to build his own *Watchtower*, albeit within the constraints of Olympic Studios' primitive four-track tape machine, and having squeezed out Noel Redding by choosing to play the bass himself. "That pissed off Noel no end," recalled engineer Eddie Kramer, "and off he would go to the pub."

Redding remembered the altercation differently: "That's

when we were having a few problems within the band already. I said I didn't like the tune, I prefer Dylan's version. I used to get to the studio at 6, and Hendrix wouldn't turn up until 3 in the morning. We were expected to sit around and wait for him. Which I wasn't prepared to do."

Experience drummer Mitch Mitchell might have been seen to scratch his head as Hendrix showed him how to turn around the intro beat. Likewise, across the studio floor, a guesting Mason – no slouch on guitar himself – struggled with a 12-string rhythm part that Kramer noted "always buggers people's minds up".

The session crawled on, clocking upwards of 27 takes. At least a couple of those misfires might have been attributed to Brian Jones, who fell through the door of Olympic, paralytically drunk, and commandeered the piano. "Jimi could never say no to his mates, and Brian was so sweet," Kramer groaned in *Sound on Sound*. "He came in and said: 'Oh, let me play.' It was take 21, and we could just hear 'clang, clang, clang, clang...' It was all bloody horrible and out of time. Jimi said: 'Uh, I don't think so.' Brian was gone after two takes. He practically fell on the floor in the control room. Dear Brian..."

But the gathering reels of recording tape were also testament to an interpretation that was evolving at rapid pace, from a lighter and bass-free early take with Hendrix on acoustic, to the glowering, heavily layered studio collage of legend.



ABOVE *The White Stripes* – covers going both ways

That summer, at New York's Record Plant, Hendrix went down the rabbit hole again for *Watchtower*'s vocal and percussion, benefitting from the quantum leap of the studio's 16-track technology. Perhaps he was never truly satisfied with *Watchtower*: "I think I hear it a little bit differently," he kept saying, according to engineer Tony Bongiovi, as overdubs came and went.

But Hendrix came back out with a masterpiece. The Dylan original had hinted at impending apocalypse, with its doomy imagery of growling wildcats, howling winds and sinister horsemen. Yet there is a limit to the foreboding that can be summoned with an acoustic and reedy harmonica. As Queen's Roger Taylor once told this writer: "The Dylan original wouldn't necessarily be the one I'd listen to... it's pretty plain."

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IN ANY RUN-DOWN OF DYLAN  
COVERS, HENDRIX'S *ALL ALONG  
THE WATCHTOWER* LOOMS  
OVER EVERYTHING ELSE

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Hendrix's interpretation left no doubt as to the intended mood. Opening with a staccato clang of guitar and drums, followed by his 'woop-woop-woop' string bends that evoked a car alarm, the sonic impression was of a world spinning off its axis into darkness, with a little of the same gathering-storm feel of the Stones' *Gimme Shelter*. Little wonder that decades later, when Tom Hanks' character patrols the jungle hellscape of Vietnam in *Forrest Gump*, it's Hendrix's version of *Watchtower* that soundtracks the scene.

Hendrix, by his own admission, couldn't match Dylan for lyrics ("I could never write the kind of words he does"). But nobody – then or now – could have touched what might be the career-best showcase of Jimi's guitar playing. Supported by a production bed that takes in everything from looping to backwards tape effects, the solos that punctuate the song remain extraordinary, Hendrix slipping from wah-wah-soaked flourishes, to haunted Hawaiian swoons, to the trilling single-note outro.

**BELOW** Hendrix's monumental cover of *All Along the Watchtower* was released a mere six months after Dylan's original

Kramer remembers Jimi using a Gibson Flying V, and studiously working out his path through the solo in advance. More spontaneous was the way he grabbed knives, beer bottles and, finally, a Zippo lighter for the slide work. "There were a lot of devices that he used," the engineer reflected in *Total Guitar*. "A Zippo was one of them, but he was known sometimes to use his rings."

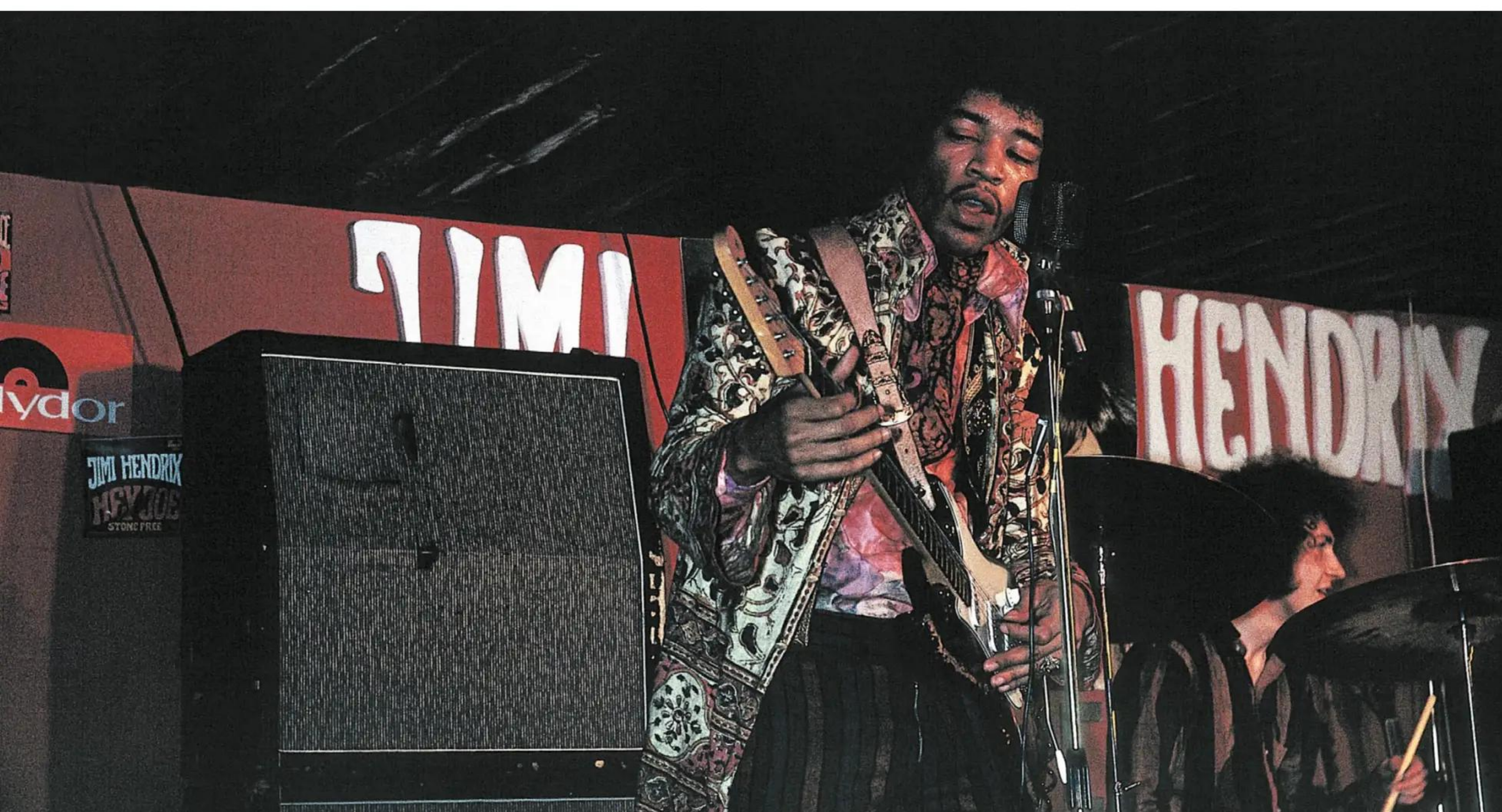
Upon its release in September 1968 as the lead-off single from *Electric Ladyland*, *All Along the Watchtower* was not so much a cover as a song rewritten from the ground up. To hear it was to almost forget the existence of Dylan's original, which now seemed the faintest of signposts. It reached number 5 in the UK. In the US, it reached number 20 and was Hendrix's breakthrough success in his homeland. To date, it has been streamed on Spotify almost 800 million times.

As for Dylan, he was gracious, scarcely believing what had come from his original. "It overwhelmed me, really," he

said. "He had such talent, he could find things inside a song and vigorously develop them. He found things that other people wouldn't think of finding in there. He probably improved upon it by the spaces he was using. I took licence from his version, actually, and continue to do it to this day."

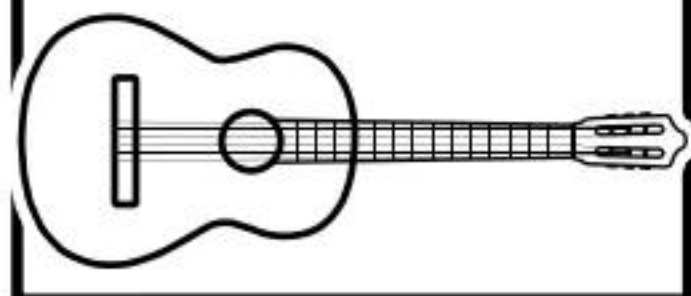
*Watchtower* might stand as the greatest Dylan cover to date, but the gauntlet is still there to be picked up – and perhaps music fans and record business bean-counters alike are banking on it. "I have no doubt that decades, even centuries from now, the words and music of Bob Dylan will continue to be sung, played and cherished everywhere," said Universal Music Group Chairman Sir Lucian Grange as he toasted that landmark publishing deal. And he was surely referring as much to the interpreters to come as to the originator himself.

As he forges into his eighties, there is a growing realisation that Bob Dylan is not immortal. His songbook, however, just might be. 



IMAGES Alamy, Getty





# DYLAN



ALIAS, RENALDO, BILLY, JACK... AND BOB

WORDS Owen Williams and Harvey Kubernik

**D**espite his reputation as an enigma, Bob Dylan has been filmed surprisingly often, although typically, he's generally on either mischievous or uncooperative form. In documentaries there's the sense that he's playing a character. But on the odd occasions that he's acted in other roles, he always still seems to be Bob Dylan. The line between fact and fiction is kept deliberately out of focus whenever he's in front of the camera.

Dylan's first appearance in a filmed project came as early as 1963 in *Madhouse on Castle Street*, a Sunday Night Play for the BBC of which no known copies survive. Five years later, Dylan placed his trust in the freewheeling documentary filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker. The result, *Dont Look Back* (1967; see p130), remains an indelible snapshot of Dylan at the height of his popularity. If not exactly a self-portrait, it still seems uniquely spontaneous and intimate. Ironically ignoring the advice of the title, Pennebaker excavated the footage 40 years later and assembled just over an hour of outtakes and previously

unreleased live performances for *65 Revisited* (2007): an intriguing footnote to the original. It's certainly far more accessible than Pennebaker and Dylan's first attempt at a follow-up, *Eat the Document* (1972), which was rejected as too avant-garde by the station that commissioned it and never shown.

Dylan appears in concert footage from the Newport Folk Festival in Murray Lerner's *Festival!* (1967), and Lerner subsequently put together *The Other Side of the Mirror* (2007) documenting Dylan's musical evolution over three Newport years. But since Pennebaker, the filmmaker who seems to have got closest to the "real" Dylan is Martin Scorsese, whose pair of epic documentaries – *No Direction Home* (2005) and *Rolling Thunder Revue* (2019) – chronicle Dylan's 1960s up to the bike crash and his 1970s touring bandwagon, respectively. The former finds Dylan on genuinely candid form, but the latter is a sneaky mix of the factual and the entirely made-up, with few indications of which parts are which. It's no more reliable than Dylan's own *Renaldo and Clara* (1978), the film he directed and starred in himself while



**ABOVE** Clockwise: Dylan as Jack Fate in *Masked and Anonymous*; Rupert Everett, Fiona and Bob on the set of *Hearts of Fire*; 1972's *Eat the Document*; Dylan's own *Renaldo and Clara*

on the Rolling Thunder tour. Inspired by the French New Wave, its four-hour mix of semi-improvised drama and concert footage bemused most critics and audiences. It's another one that's rarely been seen.

As a character actor, Dylan appeared in Sam Peckinpah's classic western *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973) playing Alias, an inscrutable newspaper reporter who's also handy with a knife. But he stuck to playing reclusive rock stars in both *Hearts of Fire* (1987) and *Masked and Anonymous* (2003). None of those performances, it's fair to say, troubled the awards circuit, unlike the two biopics, both of which were well reviewed and received particular acclaim for their Dylans. An uncanny





Timothée Chalamet starred in James Mangold's *A Complete Unknown* (2024), but it took six actors to share the lead in Todd Haynes' *I'm Not There* (2007), playing different facets of Dylan's legend. By leaning into the myth, it might be the "truest" of them all.

## 10 HEARTS OF FIRE 1987

*Straight acting role, straight-to-video*

A dramatic role for Dylan, but not much of a stretch, since he plays a former rock superstar who now shuns the limelight. The story puts his character, Billy Parker, in a love triangle with his female protege (80s rocker Fiona) and an up-and-coming younger and hunkier rival (Rupert Everett). This being the 1980s, there are a lot of mullets. Joe Eszterhas (*Basic Instinct*) wrote the final version of the screenplay and Richard Marquand (*Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*) was the director. But the film sank without trace and Dylan disowned it.

## 9 EAT THE DOCUMENT 1972

*On the road again*

This ill-fated follow-up to *Dont Look Back* was once again shot by D.A. Pennebaker and chronicled Dylan's 1966 European tour with The Hawks, the nascent version of The Band. Robbie Robertson, Johnny Cash and John Lennon all make appearances. Handheld and chaotic, the final edit was assembled by Dylan himself and rejected as "incomprehensible" by ABC Television, who'd commissioned it. The film was never broadcast or made commercially available (although it's been widely bootlegged), but Martin Scorsese used some of its footage in *No Direction Home*. ➡





## 8 RENALDO & CLARA 1978

*Dylan directs!*

A curious mash-up of drama, documentary and concert footage, Dylan wrote, directed and starred in *Renaldo and Clara* alongside Sara Dylan, Joan Baez, Sam Shepherd, Allen Ginsberg, Harry Dean Stanton and Rubin “Hurricane” Carter, as well as most of the acts on the Rolling Thunder Revue tour. Filmed in 1975, it was eventually released in 1978 in a four-hour version that tested the patience of even the staunchest Dylanite. A two-hour cut-down mostly focusing on the music briefly replaced the original until Dylan withdrew it from circulation completely.

## 7 A COMPLETE UNKNOWN 2024

*Visions of Timothée*

A much more standard and straight-laced biopic than *I’m Not There*, James Mangold’s *A Complete Unknown* can be taken as a companion piece to *Walk the Line*, his prior film about Johnny Cash. Narratively it covers the same ground as the Scorsese documentary *No Direction Home*, from Dylan’s early Woody Guthrie-channeling, Pete Seeger-supported Greenwich Village years to going electric and disappearing into his own myth. Timothée Chalamet’s studied performance as Dylan was widely praised and the film was nominated for almost

BELOW Timothée Chalamet as Bob Dylan in James Mangold’s *A Complete Unknown*

every award available including BAFTAs and Oscars, though it won comparatively few.

## 6 MASKED AND ANONYMOUS 2003

*Curb your expectations*

An all-star cast including Jeff Bridges, John Goodman, Penélope Cruz, Jessica Lange and Luke Wilson queued up to appear with Dylan in this ambitious BBC-funded drama. Dylan plays Jack Fate, a legendary rock star who’s released from prison to perform a one-man benefit concert for a dystopian future America. He hatched and co-wrote the project with director Larry Charles (*Seinfeld*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*). Despite its pedigree, critics were unsure whether the film was a must-see curiosity or just a pretentious vanity project. Essentially it was both.

## 5 THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR 2007

*The folk and the furious*

A film of full-length live performances – and a bit of rehearsal time – shot over three years of the Newport Folk Festival, beginning in 1963 and climaxing with the infamous electric set of 1965.

Documentarian Murray Lerner had used some of the footage previously in *Festival!* (1967), but by isolating and focusing solely on Dylan, the later film showcases the musician’s startling transformation in those crucial 36 months from earnest folkie to combative iconoclast.



HE DEFIED EVERYONE  
TO CHANGE EVERYTHING.

# A A FILM BY JAMES MANGOLD COMPLETE UNKNOWN

TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET  
as BOB DYLAN  
EDWARD NORTON  
ELLE FANNING  
MONICA BARBARO  
BOYD HOLBROOK

Writer and director Larry Charles said that *Masked and Anonymous* was intended to be “as surreal and ambiguous” as one of Dylan’s songs





#### 4 PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID 1973

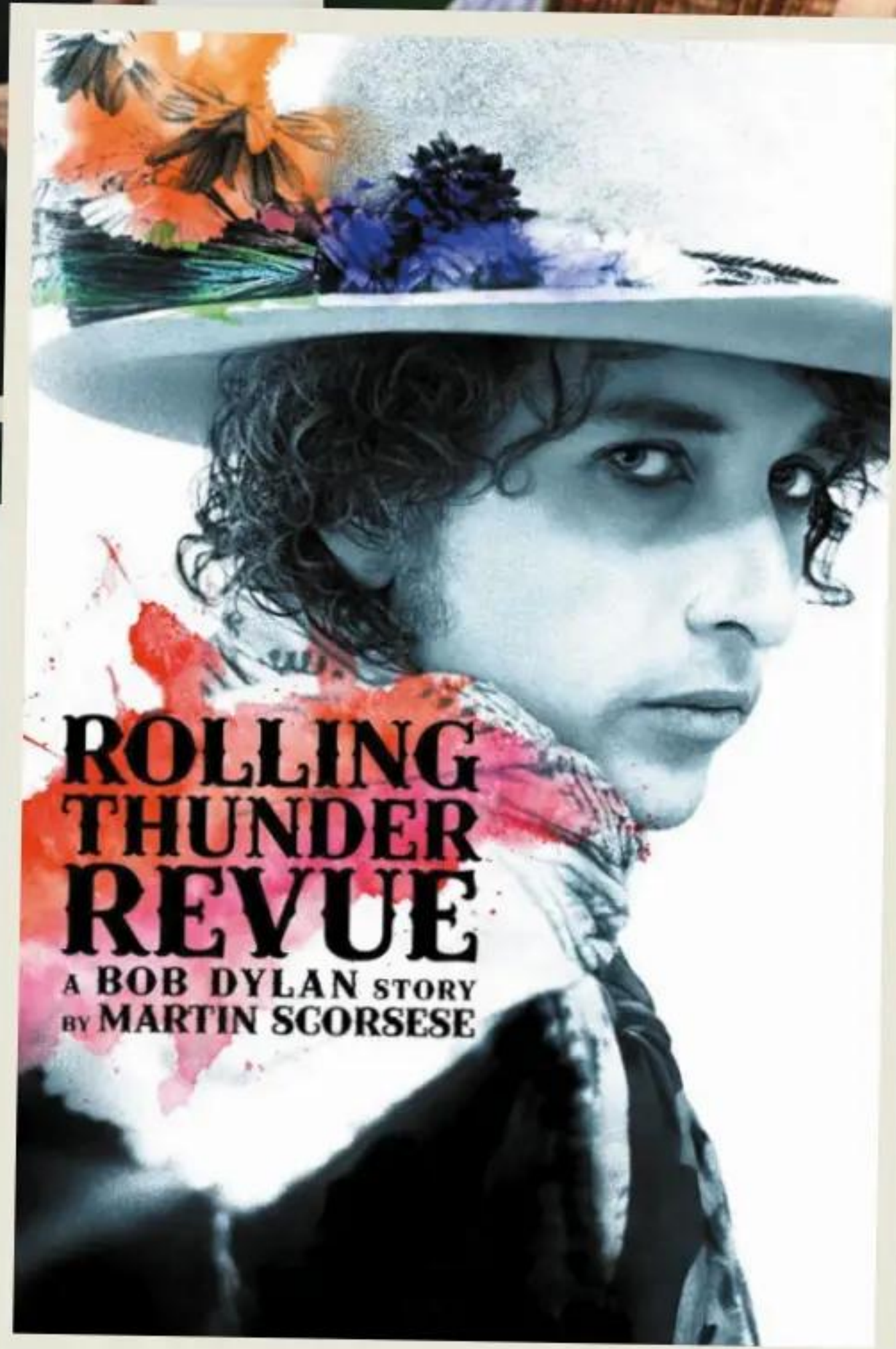
*Knockin' on Peckinpah's door*

Dylan's first and coolest film role, acting alongside his friend Kris Kristofferson in Sam Peckinpah's revisionist western. He doesn't play a huge part, but he gets lots of close-ups and knifes someone in the neck. He also provided the soundtrack, with *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* becoming one of his most-played hits.

#### 3 I'M NOT THERE 2007

*Todd Haynes prints the legend*

Todd Haynes' inventive biopic conjures six separate Dylans played by six different people, including the actress Cate Blanchett and the (in 2007) 14-year-old black actor Marcus Carl Franklin. He's portrayed as a young poet; a dustbowl-era hobo; a famous musician who abandons it all for the church;



**ABOVE** Clockwise from top left: Cate Blanchett as Dylan in Todd Haynes' *I'm Not There*; Bob as Alias in Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*; Martin Scorsese's *Rolling Thunder Revue*

an adulterous actor; a hero of the folk music scene who outrages his fans by adopting the electric guitar; and an outlaw in the Old West. Weirdly, the deliberate mythologising cuts through to the "truth" of Dylan more successfully than in some of the straight documentaries.

#### JOINT RANK 2 NO DIRECTION HOME 2005 & ROLLING THUNDER REVUE 2019

*Don't Look Back – with hindsight! Plus a "story"...*

Martin Scorsese delivered the most comprehensive overview of Dylan's 1960s in *No Direction*

### THE NETFLIX MARKETING FOR ROLLING THUNDER REVUE CALLED IT A "FEVER DREAM"

*Home*, a perfect companion piece to *Don't Look Back*. His second Dylan project, *Rolling Thunder Revue* appears at first glance to be another documentary... but turns out to be stranger than that. The marketing from streaming service Netflix, who commissioned and released it, referred to it as a "fever dream". Genuine documentary footage and commentary sits alongside talking heads who may or may not be telling the truth, such as the actress Sharon Stone, who shares her backstage memories of the tour despite not having been there. The reality-blurring spirit of *Renaldo and Clara* lives on... ➡





## DONT LOOK BACK 1967

*The definitive Dylan document*

One of the most influential rock movies ever made, Dylan's tour of England in 1965 was captured by director D.A. Pennebaker and released theatrically in 1967.

Shot in a 'cinéma-vérité' documentary style, Pennebaker's handheld camera method and 'fly-on-the-wall' technique captured concert performances and intimate moments, some of which helped create the Dylan myth: in particular his head-to-head with a *Time* magazine interviewer (*Time*: "Do you care about what you sing?" Dylan: "How can I answer that if you have the nerve to ask me?!"), or his mind games with the 'science student' ("What is your whole attitude toward life, toward people?" Dylan: "I don't like them..."). Over the last 40 years, *Dont Look Back* has influenced and informed all music documentaries that have followed Pennebaker's path.

The highly praised fly-on-the-wall documentary style of *Dont Look Back* has been widely copied since, but at the time it was a brave and original approach that

gave people glimpses of the real, articulate and confrontational Bob Dylan.

"Originally, when I made the film, I wanted to be sure it wasn't about music – that it was about Dylan," Pennebaker says. "Maybe it should have been more about music. Bobby Neuwirth [Dylan's close friend and road manager at the time] always thought that, and cautioned me: 'Look out'. But in a way, Dylan was what everybody wanted to know about; the music, they could get on the records".

*Dont Look Back* took you right to the heart of the action – or the lack of action. As important as the live segments and confrontations are the scenes of boredom; the endless travelling and waiting that every performer is subjected to.

"It was all really just off-the-wall," notes the director. "I liked the idea of a lot of people not getting it. And the people who did get it knowing there were people around them who didn't get it. They may go back and see the film again and get a whole other thing."

"We're bonded [in a partnership by *Dont Look Back*]," says Pennebaker. "And I'm not sure it's a bond that Dylan eagerly sought, because as he always said: 'It's a fantastic film, I'm just sorry it's about me.'" 



**TOP:** "The pumps don't work cos the vandals took the handles" – the opening scene was Dylan's idea

**ABOVE:** From top: Dylan faces down Time magazine's Horace Judson; Dylan with Alan Price of The

Animals and Joan Baez; with road manager Bobby Neuwirth – "my key figure in the film," says Pennebaker

IMAGES Corbis, Alamy, Getty



# THE STORY OF BOB DYLAN

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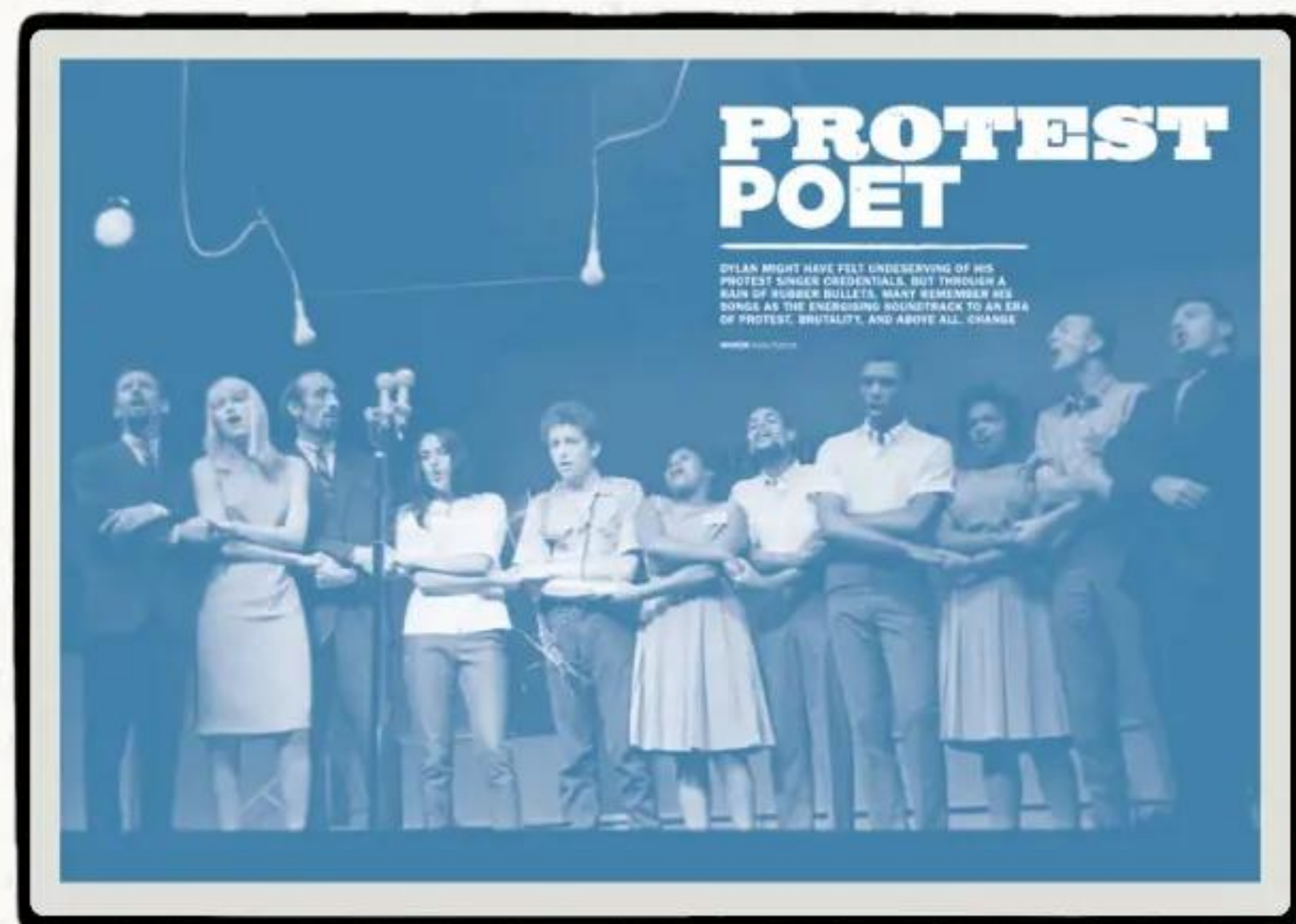
# THE STORY OF BOB DYLAN

INSIDE THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF AMERICA'S TRAIL-BLAZING TROUBADOUR



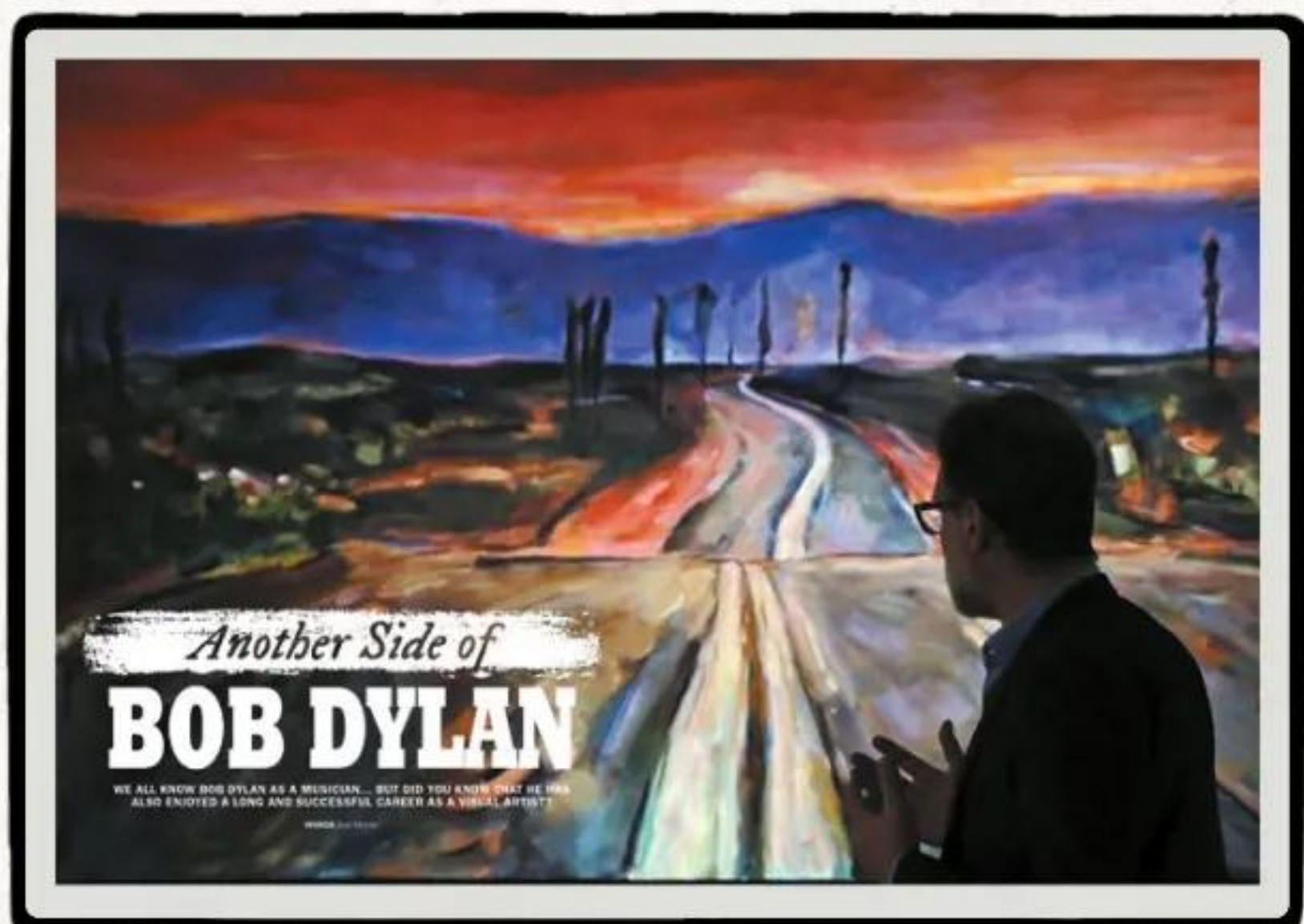
## THE MAN, THE MYTH

DYLAN'S EVOLUTION FROM FOLK PROPHET TO LIVING LEGEND AND THE MANY FACES IN-BETWEEN



## VOICE OF A GENERATION

DELVE INTO DYLAN'S ERA-DEFINING TRACKS, FROM *BLOWN' IN THE WIND* TO *THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'*



## VISIONARY VAGABOND

EXPLORE DYLAN'S OTHER CREATIVE PURSUITS, FROM LITERATURE AND FILM TO SCULPTURE AND PAINTING



## AN EVOLVING LEGACY

DYLAN'S SONGS HAVE TRANSCENDED GENRES AND GENERATIONS BY FINDING NEW VOICES