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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Soundboards Since 1988	1
Changing of the Guards	5
Unplugged Video	7
Handy Dandy and Ronald Reagan	9
A Recent Show: Two Views	10
Everything is Broken	12
Dylan's Approach	13
Inauguration Revisited	14
Submitting/Subscribing	16

SOUNDBOARDS SINCE 1988: A SURVEY

Despite the fact that soundboard recordings are often plagued with technical glitches, most of us still greet them with great excitement and play them quite frequently, simply because we find the sound quality of soundboards to be vastly superior to the sound quality of audience tapes.

The following list may well not be comprehensive or totally accurate, so I urge people to write in with additions, corrections, etc.

The @ symbol is used for a song played acoustically.

Note: I'm using "soundboard" here to refer to any non-audience recording: soundboard, line recording, PA tape, whatever. I have no idea what the distinctions are among these different terms.

1. 7/2/88. Mansfield (Great Woods), MA. 14 of 15 songs. *Subterranean/Peggy-O/Had a Dream About You, Baby/Thin Man/Stuck Inside/Tangled Blue/Tambourine@/Love Minus Zero@/Ain't Me Babe@/Silvio/Watchtower/Times are Changin'@/Maggie's/Rolling Stone*

This tape features the best and worst that soundboards have to offer. On the down side: *Subterranean*, *Silvio*, and the first half of *Peggy-O* are utterly ruined by wow-and-flutter. Much of *Watchtower* suffers from a slightly less annoying form of w&f, before better sound returns for G.E. Smith's final, glorious solo. *I Shall Be Released* is missing entirely.

Yet despite these serious flaws, this tape is essential. The joyful, inventive band interplay that so many of us loved about the '88 tour is here in full evidence. Dylan's guitar is mixed very low, so we only hear G.E., Kenny Aaronson, and Christopher Parker, all of whom play off of one another and Dylan's vocals ferociously, particularly on the near-debuts *Peggy-O* and *Had a Dream*. This mix, with Dylan's guitar essentially inaudible, is precisely the mix that we in the audience heard at most of the '88 shows, and stands in stark contrast to the muddier mixes that have prevailed from '89 onward, mixes that have often kept the lead guitarist (Smith or John Jackson) from receiving a full hearing.

Despite the aforementioned sound problems on its first four verses, *Peggy-O* is not to be missed. Dylan forgets some of the lyrics (though he manages to sing nonsense such as "innitario" with apparent feeling), so he decides to repeat the first verse at the end of the song, cutting off Smith's solo and singing with real passion. G.E. returns with a lovely solo to send the song out. Meanwhile, with their creative runs and forays, Parker and Aaronson function as much more than a rhythm section.

Most of the warhorses are performed with vigor and verve. On *Tangled*, Dylan sings with wild relish: "Tangled up in buh-looooooooo-ah-yeah." G.E.'s first and third solos aren't much, but the solo following the "bird that flew" verse is indeed a careening flight, complete with gliding soft-water landing.

Great Woods is a suburban amphitheater that fits about 15,000 people (several thousand seats under a roof plus a huge lawn). This show was nearly sold out.

2. 9/4/88, Bristol (Lake Compounce), CT. 17 of 17 songs. *Subterranean/I Don't Believe You/Tom Thumb's Blues/Thin Man/Had a Dream About You, Baby/Simple Twist/Highway 61/Ramona@/Rank Strangers@/Don't Think Twice@/Heaven's Door@/Silvio/I Shall Be Released/Rolling Stone/Ain't Me Babe@/Masters of War/Maggie's Farm.*

Absolutely superb sound quality throughout; I'm unclear on the details, but I think the source of this tape may have been a radio broadcast.

Tom Thumb is a major highlight for me, with great band interplay (listen to Aaronson), and a final soaring G.E. solo that comments on both his earlier solo and on the song as a whole.

Allow me a bit of sacrilege: I prefer G.E.'s work here to Robbie Robertson's justifiably famous '66 work on the same song.

Some people feel that the quality of the later '88 shows dropped off significantly from the earlier '88 shows. I disagree. The musicianship is just as exciting, in my opinion. Dylan does shout the lyrics a bit more frequently than earlier in the year, but that can be effective in its own way, and he's still singing with passion. Smith's guitar work is unfailingly inventive and intriguing.

This tape has some interesting off-mike stuff, such as G.E. and Bob discussing whether to play "I Don't Believe You" or "I Want You." Bob opts for the former, and promptly forgets most of the first verse.

Dream, which follows an aborted first try at *Fate*, benefits greatly from the increased sound clarity of a soundboard. Improvised (I assume) lyrics to this usually indecipherable song become clear, and pregnant couplets emerge, such as, "I see your soldiers laying dead / None of them had a halo around their head."

Rank Strangers is quite moving and features, on the second refrain, a strange harmony from, I assume, G.E. *Rolling Stone* is less stately and more vicious than most '88 versions, aided by Smith's assaulting solo.

This show took place at an amusement park. Rain poured through Timbuk 3's opening set, but cleared for Dylan's set.

3. 10/19/88, New York City (Radio City Music Hall). 17.5 of 19 songs. *Subterranean/I'll Remember You/John Brown/Mobile/Simple Twist/115th Dream/Highway 61/Gates of Eden@/God on Our Side@/One Too Many Mornings@/Barbara Allen@/Silvio/In the Garden/Rolling Stone/Waggoner's Lad@/Hattie Carroll@/Heaven's Door (part @)/Watchtower (cuts after one verse)*

Sound quality not up to Bristol; Dylan's voice is clear, but the instruments are a tad muted. The result is that some of the acoustic set sounds almost a cappella. Also, either Dylan had a cold that night or his voice was just shot from his most concentrated spate of touring in several years. (Or both). This makes for some very hoarse, nasal singing, which I find off-putting at times but perversely transcendent when Dylan accentuates this putatively annoying effect at the climax of *Rolling Stone* ("conceaaaaahhhh, how duh it feea-aah?"). I always enjoy *Barbara Allen* and *Waggoner's*, so it's nice to have them on the same tape. *Waggoner/Hattie/Heaven's* form almost a suite, the songs flowing into one another without pause. This creates an interesting effect when the final verse of *Hattie*, which damns the legal system, is followed immediately by "Mama take this badge off of me / I can't use it any more." *God on Our Side* contains the Vietnam verse that Dylan ignores (along with several other verses) on the *Unplugged* version.

4. 12/4/88, Bridge School Benefit, California. 6 of 6 songs. All acoustic. *San Francisco Bay Blues/Pretty Boy Floyd/With God on Our Side/Girl of the North Country/Gates of Eden/Forever Young*

This tape is just Bob and G.E. The first two songs are an especial treat: rarely performed and intensely sung. The tape as a whole contains some remarkable guitar trade-offs between G.E. and Bob, particularly on the warhorse *North Country*, which resultantly comes alive again for me. *Gates* is cut on my tape, but I don't think that it's cut on all tapes. Again, *God on Our Side* contains the Vietnam verse.

5. 1/25/90, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 17.5 of 21 songs. *Subterranean/Lay Lady Lay/Watchtower/Mobile/Highway 61/Big Girl Now/Seeing the Real You/Takes a Lot to Laugh/Hollis Brown/Maggie's/Tambourine Man@/Too Many Mornings@/Hattie Carroll@/Blowin'@/Broken/Political/Anybody Seen My Love?/In the Garden (cuts)*

Beginning in 1989, Dylan's electric guitar was thrust to the front of the mix at most shows. Also, on certain oft-played songs (e.g., *Maggie's, Watchtower*), G.E. became less inventive with a good percentage of his fills and solos. Instead of engaging in flights of fancy on the between-line fills, he often played only the basic chords or melodies. I have no idea why all of this took place, but less exciting, less intriguing concerts often resulted, in my opinion. I can enjoy Dylan's guitar playing, but not when it consistently drowns out or takes the place of Smith's or Jackson's work.

On this tape Smith remains a tremendously exciting player on about 80% of the songs. *Anybody Seen My Love?* and *Hollis Brown* are good examples here, with G.E. providing the seven shots on the latter. Dylan's singing on

Anybody Seen My Love? is superb.

Sound quality on *Subterranean* is a mess, with vocals completely disappearing for some stretches. After that, though, sound quality is excellent throughout the tape, though a bit trebly.

This is the last Smith-era soundboard currently available. It's also the first soundboard with Tony Garnier on bass.

6. 6/29/91, Ringe, Denmark. 17 of 18 songs. *Lay Lady Lay/Watchtower/Shelter/Serve Somebody/Wiggle/Rainy Day/4th St./Barbara Allen@/Dylan's Dream@/Hattie Carroll@/Ain't Me Babe@/Long Black Coat/Broken/Lenny Bruce/Highway 61/What Good Am I?/Thin Man*

The first soundboard to feature the Ian Wallace/Tony Garnier/John Jackson lineup. Most fans preferred the 1988-1990 lineups and performances. These early-to-mid '91 shows, in particular, often took a while to get going. Jackson especially seemed to often play it boringly safe throughout much of the first set. The exceptions here are his sterling work on *Watchtower* and *Serve Somebody*.

Dylan, for the first seven months of '91, often sang even more impressionistically than usual, a tactic that was intriguing but sometimes frustrating. Certainly, someone who doesn't know the original lyrics to the songs will abhor much of this tape, because Dylan, who always explores the tension between the sound of the words and their signified meanings, leans much more towards the sound part of the equation here. Enunciation is pretty much out the window. On this tape, William Zanzinger kills "Herr Pottie Carroll."

Those listeners who know the original lyrics, however, are treated to an amplified version of Dylan's constant strategy of deconstructing said lyrics. For me, all of this makes for some boring performances--e.g., *Rainy Day*--but also some transcendent ones. By all accounts (including Dylan's), a heavy wind was blowing in Ringe that June day, and its effects accentuated the already quavery, moaning style that Dylan was employing at the time. *4th Street* thus becomes extremely moving, not a snarling hate song, but rather a moaning mourning song.

Another neat aspect of the shows at this time was Dylan's occasional use of the hand-held harmonica. This provided him with greater musical dexterity/flexibility and a much richer, fuller sound, since the harmonica was attached to the mike. Thus, *Thin Man* builds to a wild, wailing climax that carries the show out in high chaotic style.

Sound quality is a bit muddy throughout, but consistent: no drop-outs or cuts, except for the completely missing opening song, *New Morning*. Several interesting and not-so-interesting spoken introductions to the songs.

7. 7/20/91, Vienna, VA. 13 of 18 songs. *New Morning/I Don't Believe You/Watchtower/Shelter/Serve Somebody/Wiggle/I'll Remember You/Takes a Lot to Laugh/Barbara Allen@/Tambourine Man@/Baby Blue@/Ain't Me Babe@/Folsom Prison Blues.*

Three soundboards of Vienna shows have appeared over the past few years, their taping apparently facilitated by a mechanism at that venue intended to help the hearing-impaired to better hear the show. This tape has much in common with the Ringe concert of three weeks previous. Again, Jackson excels on *Watchtower* and *Serve Somebody*. I often play *I'll Remember You* and *Takes a Lot to Laugh* from this tape, the latter song featuring snarling interplay between Dylan's voice and Jackson's guitar. Dylan struggles with the words to *Folsom*, but it's still an interesting rendition.

Sound quality is a bit superior to Ringe, but unfortunately the tape ends after *Folsom*.

8. 10/30/91, Tulsa, OK. 17.5 of 18 songs. *New Morning (part)/Lay Lady Lay/Watchtower/Early Morning Rain/I'll Remember You/Serve Somebody/Twist of Fate/I'll Be Your Baby Tonight/Trail of Buffalo@/TambourineMan@/AnswerMe@/Ain't Me Babe@/Every Grain of Sand/Broken/Long Black Coat/Maggie's/What Good Am I?/Thin Man (last few seconds missing)*

This tape is my favorite of the '91 soundboards, mainly because of the last six songs.

The first part of the tape is impressive as well. The little bit of *New Morning* that we hear features much more coherent singing than on the earlier '91 versions. *Early Morning Rain* starts beautifully, with Dylan delivering a fascinating interpretation on the first couple of verses, before the band begin to meander on a bit much. Dylan concludes, "That was one of my real old songs there. That's so old it wasn't even written by me." *Answer Me* blows me

away; as with most of his cover versions, Dylan sings it with great commitment, but he also manages to remember most of the lyrics this time. He invests the song with a great sadness. *Trail of the Buffalo* is very clearly and intensely sung. Jackson goes berserk at the end of *Watchtower*, imitating the wildcat's growl before launching into a frenzied final solo. One of the great things about these soundboards is the chance to hear Jackson's development from a fairly cautious support player into a confident, risk-taking full partner whose playing often amplifies the lyrics in interesting fashion.

What makes this tape a hidden treasure, though, is the appearance of Steve Ripley--who played with Dylan for a few months in 1981--for five of the final six songs (based on my close listening, I believe he is missing on *What Good Am I*). Ripley and Jackson improvise together remarkably effectively (e.g., on *Maggie's*), trading solos and fills freely. Ripley's sinewy style complements well the chord-blocking approach that Jackson was still over-wedded to at that time. To my ears, *every* song on which Ripley plays benefits. He does great work both on the songs that he played in 1981 and on the newer songs. Dylan, for his part, responds with superb, focused vocals, even on songs on which he usually spouts gibberish (e.g., *Broken*). In fact, for whatever reason, this guest shot is infinitely more effective than the concert guest shots of big names like Ron Wood and Eric Clapton.

9. 9/8/93, Vienna, VA. 13 of 13 songs. *You're Gonna Quit Me@/Mobile/Watchtower/4th Street/Born in Time/Silvio/Black Jack Davey@/Hattie Carroll@/Spanish Leather@/God Knows/Maggie's/Series/Ain't Me Babe*

This is the first of the soundboards to feature the Garnier/Jackson/Winston Watson/Bucky Baxter lineup. So far, no soundboards have emerged from '92.

This concert is famous for two reasons. First, it features the concert debut of *Series of Dreams*. Secondly, for the final song, Dylan begins *Spanish Leather*. The crowd yells to him that he's already played it. After one verse, Dylan says, "I know. Thanks. It's the same chords," and then launches seamlessly into *Ain't Me Babe*.

Sound quality is pretty good throughout, a bit bass-heavy. The tape does not suffer from the aggravating drop-offs that plague the September 9 tape.

This concert and the next night's were part of the Santana tour. This tour was largely a drag for many Dylan fans who attended because of the shortened Dylan sets, the largely inattentive crowds, and the (in my opinion) boring bill-mates Santana and Wailing Souls. Dylan and the band were doing some interesting things, however, and these soundboards provide the opportunity to hear the performances without living the hassles.

Around this time, *Series of Dreams* began popping up on cue sheets and at rehearsals, though it hadn't been performed in a concert yet. Thus, after the acoustic set, a woman begins to scream for *Series of Dreams*, hoping to witness a debut. Dylan, in classically perverse fashion, mumbles, "Oh. They got that. They already heard that. They already got that. Yeah." And he proceeds to play *God Knows* instead. The lesson seeming to be, be careful what you wish for. Then he gives us *Series* as an encore after all, causing the aforementioned woman to emit wails from the soul.

I, for one, adore this performance of *Series*. Watson and Baxter really shine, the latter coaxing weird hallucinatory whines out of his pedal steel without reverting to synthesized effects. Dylan does something that I always find inspiring. He begins to struggle with both lyrics and melody midway through and then says the hell with it, I'm just going to sing the words I remember as loudly as I can and graft them onto an improvised, simplified melody. Thus, he sort of wrings passion out of the messy performance, as he rediscovers a song he wrote several years ago. "And in*tooo*, the path *yooooouu*, are *hurrrrlled*."

10. 9/9/93, Vienna, VA. 12 of 12 songs. *You're Gonna Quit Me@/Mobile/Watchtower/Big Girl Now/Shelter/Thin Man/Black Jack@/Gates of Eden@/Don't Think Twice@/God Knows/Maggie's/Shooting Star*

Based on sound quality, I'd take September 8 over this show anytime. Severe sound drop-outs plague several songs and almost ruin *Big Girl*. The latter is a particular shame, because from what we can hear, Dylan is delivering guitar work that's much more intriguing than usual.

Yet somehow, Dylan and the band manage to cut through the sound problems to deliver stunning performances of warhorses

Watchtower and *Maggie's*. These songs are invested with such new life that I find myself playing this tape quite frequently just to hear them. At a show later that week in New York, Dylan introduced *Watchtower* as being a song about pain, and we really hear that pain here, with the three guitarists (Baxter on pedal steel) combining to create a hellish, wailing din. And Dylan works himself and the band into such an insane frenzy on *Maggie's* that he becomes lightheaded and screams, "ain't gonnanana work on Maggie's farm no more."

One thing that's disappointing about the 1993 soundboards is that the jamming on the acoustic songs isn't always very interesting, largely as a result of Baxter's lack of creativity with the mandolin.

11. 8/14/94, Saugerties, NY (Woodstock II). 12 of 12 songs. *Jokerman/Just Like a Woman/Watchtower/Takes a Lot to Laugh/Don't Think Twice@/Masters@/Baby Blue@/God Knows/Released/Highway 61/Rainy Day/Ain't Me Babe@*

I won't say anything about this tape because I assume that most people are already extremely familiar with it.

12. 8/16/94, Lewiston, NY. 13.5 of 14 songs. *Jokerman (most)/If Not for You/Watchtower/I Don't Believe You/Tangled/I'll Be Your Baby Tonight/Mama You Been on My Mind@/Masters of War@/Hattie Carroll@/God Knows/Long Black Coat/Maggie's/Thin Man/Girl from North Country*

Sound quality on this tape is, to my ears, first-rate, with the only flaws being some minor crackles here and there. However, I have idiosyncratic tastes in sound, so beware. To give you an idea of my standards: I prefer the right-side equalizers to be all the way up and the left-side all the way down.

For my money, the acoustic set here is a real improvement over the '93 acoustic sets. Dylan takes real care with his singing as he covers a wide range of subjects in three songs: a broken relationship, general political corruption, and a specific instance of political corruption. Most everyone says that they've been touched by *Masters* the last couple of years, and the other two songs are suffused with delicate sadness, courtesy of Dylan's exquisite vocal performances. Of the electric songs, *Jokerman* sees Jackson doing some very interesting guitar work that seems to be a musical commentary on Knopfler's original work on this song. *Long Black Coat* has suddenly taken on great power with great string work from the law firm of Baxter and Jackson.

--Laura K.

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CHANGING OF THE GUARDS

"Changing of the Guards" (1978, *Street Legal*) is Dylan's most honest song of self-examination. In it, he brutally assesses the underside of his artistic and financial success. He emerges disgusted with both himself and his audience. Not until the end of the song does the listener receive even a hint that there may be a path out of this hateful mire. Perhaps the song itself constitutes that path's first necessary step, i.e., a clear-eyed, personal, moral inventory.

The band ride into my headphones from the distance as music slowly forms and rises out of nothingness. "Sixteen years!" shouts Dylan. He has been recording for sixteen years. "Sixteen banners united over the field." He has released sixteen original studio albums (not counting *Dylan*, of course) to this point: sixteen banners, sixteen core artistic statements to the public. And Dylan claims that they're "united": from the angry shouts of *Times Are A-Changin'* to the country meditations of *Nashville Skyline* to the American kaleidoscope of *Desire*. Dylan's telling me that all of these "banners" are the product of the same spiritual search, and that considering the whole can teach me more than considering only selected, danceable parts. This assertion of artistic integrity, especially when utilized as the first line of an album, is a statement of great bravado.

Yet that bravado is shattered even as it is being asserted. The imagery of the assertion is dark and foreboding: placing "banners" in apposition to "field" suggests war. The confidence of the opening assertion is further undermined by "While the good shepherd grieves." A shepherding religious figure grieves over what Dylan has accomplished; thus, Dylan's artistic achievement is apparently nothing to be proud of, after all. The verse's concluding line drives this sobering point home: "Desperate men, desperate women divided, spreading their wings 'neath the falling leaves." Here, Dylan calls up a terribly sad image of

lovers leaving one another in the autumn of life, which is precisely what was happening in his own life, age 37, in 1978. The assertion of artistic pride that opened the song seems totally hollow now; yes, he can point to such an achievement, but what does it mean to him if he's failed to nurture a loving relationship in his own life?

"Fortune calls." He uses the present tense; it's still 1978, and the promise of financial and critical success calls him back to the record-making scene, regardless of the failure of his romantic life and regardless of the disapprobation of the religious figure. Suddenly, though, Dylan switches to past tense with "I stepped forth from the shadows to the marketplace." I'm still thinking about the present (1978) because of the preceding line, so I can only conclude that Dylan is placing his record-making past and his record-making present in apposition, and he's concluding that it's *all* hellish, a hellish, immoral way to make a living. It's a "marketplace" peopled by "merchants and thieves, hungry for power," and his "last deal gone down." Dylan is subjecting himself to a withering self-critique: "What the hell kind of a life have I led? What kind of a spiritual search can one lead in such a cynical, shallow business?" I, the listener, am equally implicated. Why have I been searching for inspiration and a soulmate in a medium that is devoted almost entirely to profit and superficiality?

Suddenly, an intrusion: "She's smelling sweet like the meadows where she was born, on midsummer's eve." This image is also superficial, in that it focuses on smell; however, by introducing a whiff of nature ("meadows") at the end of a verse that has described the worst aspects of modern industrial America, Dylan suggests that a deeper meaning *is* accessible. Lest we get too carried away by the image, though, Dylan hits us with one last phrase: "near the tower." The tower is again a military image, like "banners" and "field" before it. We can't escape entirely. Escape isn't enough, anyway. We have seven more verses to live through. We must confront our sins and transcend them somehow.

"I rode past destruction in the ditches with the stitches still mending 'neath a heart-shaped tattoo." The "stitches" line seems self-pitying, but the "heart-shaped tattoo" is another self-damning image of superficiality. Dylan is saying that his heart is fake, it's nothing more than a tattoo. This verse is followed by another image of self-obsession: "the palace of mirrors." Clearly, Dylan is further evaluating his past here and concluding that he's committed a myriad of sins and wasted much of his life. The only question is, will he find any way to redeem this life? A woman inquires as to "what measures he now will be taking." He commits one more sin ("pulling her down"), and then makes a stab at redemption.

> Gentlemen, he said,
> I don't need your organization, I've shined your shoes,
> I've moved your mountains and marked your cards
> But Eden is burning, either get ready for elimination
> Or else your hearts must have the courage for the changing of the guards.

The verse begins with one final assertion of artistic triumph. He reminds us (the "gentlemen") that he has changed and inspired lives ("I've moved your mountains and marked your cards"). But this achievement seems utterly hollow and phony in light of the rest of the song. So Dylan concludes that a much greater reality ("Eden") than he must exist, but it's burning. He will no longer be the leader, the mountain-mover. He will no longer sell his soul to the "organization." He will search for the burning Eden. He will redeem his soul, answer the "angel's whispers." Meanwhile, we, the audience, are left with "the changing of the guards." "The changing of the guards" suggests either that we find another guru (Springsteen, perhaps) or, more likely find a whole new mode of inspiration. Perhaps each of us should search for her/his own Eden.

At this point, the song appears to be over. Its pattern has been steady: two verses, sax break, two verses, sax break, two verses, sax break, two verses, sax break. Dylan concludes the eighth verse by finally mentioning the title of the song. By all conventional standards, the song should end here as the sax fades out, leaving us with ambiguity: Dylan's not going to play the leader, we have to have the courage of the changing of the guards. Confusing. Frustrating.

Suddenly, Dylan bursts back in. "PEACE WILL COME!" Great! A positive vision. "With tranquility and splendor on the wheels of fire!" What? Wheels of fire are Old Testament images

from Daniel and Ezekiel, so this is a bit off-putting to all but Old Testament-believers. It's a very specific type of peace, and I'm frightened that maybe we won't all have access to it. Still, "wheels of fire" is also a familiar Dylan image, so we're grounded a bit. Then, "cruel death surrenders with its pale ghost retreating." Maybe there's an afterlife. Maybe there's something more. Maybe we'll get a hint of it in the final verse.

Whack, whack! There is no final verse. Having surprised us by continuing on after "the changing of the guards," Dylan surprises us again by suspending the tenth verse and moving instead to a chimey guitar as the singers moan in the background. The final turn in this song is a turn to wordlessness.

This is the clearest picture we have of Dylan searching and truly making an inventory of his own wasted life. He searches within this song for a way out of this life. Maybe he found it in 1979. Maybe the song helped him get there. It's helped me a bit along the way.
--Chris Stearns

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UNPLUGGED: THE VIDEO

Like many Dylan fans, I watched this video with the anxiety peculiar to seeing Dylan perform for a wide audience. We all know what it's like to have to explain to one's so-called friends exactly what one sees in that old guy. Therefore, if my reflections seem unduly concerned with what the audience must be thinking, please cut me a little slack. I'm trying, à la Dylan, not to give a damn, but I haven't attained his high standard.

I was a bit disappointed by the song selection, what with *Dignity* and *Shooting Star* the only songs less than twenty years old and what with the heavy dose of "greatest hits," as much as that term ever applies to Dylan's songs. Then I thought, "maybe it's best, with a wide, non-Dylan-fan audience, to go with a lot of familiar songs." Then I chided myself for accusing Dylan of such calculating ways, and besides, I thought, wouldn't he be better off, from a PR standpoint, playing things the audience has never heard so that they can't whine about how he ruined a great song? No, chimed in another mental voice, everyone would complain about how deliberately obscure he is if he didn't at least give them "Watchtower" and "Rolling Stone." "Yeah," said voice #1, "that's why he should do it. He needs to upset their expectations." "Maybe he's upsetting *your* expectations, huh, you ever think of that? Maybe you need to listen to *Times They are A-Changin'* one more time, in a new way." Before I descended into complete schizophrenia, I changed the subject, but my tentative conclusion is this: Dylan's got some 500 great songs out there, and I'd sure like to hear more of them.

It's always great to get a new video, especially a professional one, but MTV's rapid-fire cutting and dizzying panning made me long for a good old-fashioned bootleg. I'd rather see Dylan from the knees down and grainy beyond recognition than watch MTV camerapeople try to entertain me with their fancy cutting (they apparently think the music isn't enough to hold my attention). Every time I was watching an interaction amongst the band members or getting into the tension building in Dylan's face, the idiots cut away. The only positive aspect of the production was that they spared us the usual incessant audience shots.

I wondered if the cubist paintings were Dylan's choice. In any case, they're appropriate for this ever-shifting artist.

I'm so glad this band's getting some recording time with Dylan. He'll probably never make an album with them, such being his perverse nature in recent years, but they've had a few opportunities to shine beyond regular touring, which is more than previous Neverending Tour combos got: Willie Nelson's "Big Six-O," Letterman, Woodstock, and now this. The matching suits on Jackson and Garnier always make me laugh. Do these guys go shopping together?

Tombstone Blues: The end of the last verse is one of those great occurrences that are probably mistakes but that get transformed into new, exciting lines: "Stop this weeping, this useless pain of your useless and pointless knowledge." It left me thinking about what useless pain might be, and how it might be inflicted by the possession of too much useless and pointless knowledge. *Shooting Star* can never go wrong for me, but this one is really evocative, especially the line "guess it's too late now to say the things to you . . ." The harmonica tune is simple, but I loved the way it grew right out of the last line, and I thought it

was all too brief.

All Along the Watchtower: There's an ominous buildup on the organ at "two riders were approaching." Dylan glances over that way as if he notices it too, though whether in approval or disapproval I can't say. For all I know, he's not looking towards O'Brien at all but at Jackson, or at some movement in the audience, for that matter.

The Times They Are A-Changin' is a song I'll admit to having forwarded through on occasion when listening to bootlegs, but Dylan does put a lot of feeling into it here, right from a low, compassionate "wherever you roam" that made me think about how people do roam aimlessly through this shifting, confusing world, and how the narrator cares about them and wants to bring them together, to a tender last verse, "cast," "last," and "past" fading off into the air. How can you hear this song as an oldie when just by singing it in 1994--singing it afresh, not in imitation of other performances, least of all the one that made *Greatest Hits Vol. 1*--Dylan is declaring that it wasn't just the 60's that were a time of change and turmoil, but that the same call goes out to us today? The nostalgia that MTV loves to promote in presentations like Woodstock '94 can't easily withstand this rebuke. This song, performed to this audience at this time, seems to say watch out, you comfortably alienated American self-identified Gen-Xers, because you might be on top right now, but the loser now will be later to win.

As on almost every line of almost every song in this performance, Dylan's voice is charged with emotion throughout *John Brown.* I particularly noticed that he sounds as if he's on the verge of tears on "when my enemy came close," "I was just a puppet in a play" and "when the string it finally broke." Appropriately, *Desolation Row* follows this performance. Dylan actually *did* break into tears while singing *Desolation Row* in Australia in 1992. On *Unplugged*, he's with every character, feeling their pain so much that it hurts to watch. It's as if he's actually peeking through a little dirty window at Cinderella sweeping up, and worrying about what's going to happen to Romeo and Casanova, so intense is the pity in his voice. When he sings "I had to rearrange their faces" it seems he must have done it because they're too much to bear unless they're disguised. He gives the last verse desperate intensity by hitting the same high note again and again: "Don't send me *no* more letters, *no, I Not* unless you *mail* them from *Des*olation *Row*."

Rainy Day doesn't do much, but *Love Minus Zero* is a real treat, especially since it wasn't included in the original MTV broadcast. It sounds richer, not barer, for the lack of O'Brien and Watson. The four who remain sound like one instrument. I don't know why this was left off the American cassette/CD release, but speculating upon such Dylanic conundrums can only drive a person crazy.

Dignity seems like a good juncture at which to discuss Brendan O'Brien. I like the little rollicking Irish tune he adds to this song, and I like the way he changes and adds to it in this concert. Throughout the concert, in fact, I have no complaints about the addition of the organ; O'Brien, true to the best qualities of Dylan band members, seems to be listening to the words, to Dylan's tone, and to the rest of the band and responds spontaneously. Some of the obviously planned bits add a lot to the songs, too; I especially like the spooky, pebble-falling-into-a-deep-well sound on *Desolation Row*. I'm glad he hasn't joined the band, though, because I like the sound they've got and an organ on every tune would probably be a bit much. I did hope that having added an organ, albeit only for a couple of days, Dylan would be inspired to bring it out at a few concerts and play it himself. I haven't heard him play keyboards since May 1991.

Knockin' on Heaven's Door: OK, I'm obsessing about the audience, but I can't help it. One of the chief pleasures of listening to this amazing version is that all the Guns-n-Roses-trained ears in the audience are hearing a truly subtle, layered performance. This song is so simple when you just see the words on paper, but it clearly means a lot to Dylan, and I've had more than one religious experience listening to it, including this version, which ties the 2/25/86 rendition (also, lucky me, captured on video in *Hard to Handle*) for my personal favorite *Heaven's Door.* Here, Dylan's voice goes growly on "I just can't fire them anymore," the narrator grudgingly admitting that he's been on the wrong path and can't do it anymore. The "long black feeling" is just that in this verse, vague and hard to trace, but it returns after the solo and now he knows what it is, it's a long black train and it's bearing down on him. In this, the final verse, the strain in his voice from "and I feel like" on to the end of the song

betrays all the desperation of asking for grace, knowing you don't deserve to get into heaven but pleading and hoping and waiting to see if God will have mercy on you anyway.

Dylan treats us to all four verses of *Like A Rolling Stone,* and they display the incredible range that he has brought to this song over the years. Each chorus has a different tone: the first scornful, the second sad, the third sung as if he sincerely wants to know how she feels, the fourth leaving us with the problem, as the final line rises into a question. We can hear how he gets from one feeling to the next, too. He begins verse two snarling, but by the end he sounds sympathetic--"you said you'd never compromise" is sung as if he knows how hard it is to have to give up one's ideals, however twisted they might have been--and verse three opens more sad than angry. On lines like "you never understood," Dylan sounds positively wistful.

Dylan *earns* his release on this song. On the first two choruses, he swallows "how does it feel," the most recognizable line in the song. You can feel the audience deflate. When he finally lets loose on the third chorus, four minutes into the song, the effect is much more powerful than it would be if he sang "feeeeel" every time.

MTV, or whoever makes these decisions, doesn't preserve the false start of *Rolling Stone* on the audiotape, which is too bad. If this album and concert are, by design or just by their nature, a sort of diplomatic mission to new young fans, an introduction to Dylan, what better illustration of his spontaneity and humor than this little interlude? Although come to think of it, maybe if he'd just plowed through despite being out of tune and out of time with the band, that would have been even more typical.

With God on Our Side makes a much more interesting closer than the overplayed *It Ain't Me Babe*. The tones in this song shift from sadness to apprehension to anger to disgust; the latter stands out in the words "chemical duuust." Baxter provides a ticking sound in that verse, which adds subliminally to the terror (I didn't pick up on it until my 6th or 7th listen). Something exciting that emerged from the "unplugged concept" (which the band didn't really stick to, as two of the six members *were* plugged in) was Garnier's playing the double bass exclusively. I was disappointed that he didn't bow it more, as I think the occasions on which he's done so have been among the most emotional and compelling of his performances, e.g. on *Baby Blue* at Woodstock. So I was gratified when finally, on the encore, he brought out the bow.

Our next task is to convince Dylan to release one of his regular concerts on video. Just your basic mid-March Merrillville, Merano, or Madison concert, nothing fancy. That's where the greatest magic lies, as far as I'm concerned.
--Cindy Levin

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HANDY DANDY AND RONALD REAGAN

"Handy Dandy" appeared on *Under the Red Sky* in 1990. For me, the song is about Ronald Reagan, with a strong emphasis on the manner in which Reagan sugarcoated his massive military build-up and resulting domestic social devastation. With Reagan, everything went down "just like sugar and candy." The public and media were charmed by him and failed to become outraged with him. Dylan damns that failure in this song.

The most explicit references to Reagan occur in verse four. "Handy Dandy, sitting with a girl named Nancy in a garden feeling kind of lazy / He says, 'You want a gun? I'll give you one,' she says, 'Boy, you're talking crazy.'" Reagan was married to Nancy; the White House is famous for its Rose Garden and associated Rose Garden Strategy; Nancy owned a pearl-handled revolver. Therefore, one can deduce that Dylan is obtusely referring to Reagan. Dylan's use of the gun detail is interesting. If he had chosen to use a better-known detail, such as Nancy's astrology obsession or her obscenely expensive wardrobe, then the effect would be less subtle and, in the long run, less powerful.

Once the listener makes the Reagan connection in verse four, the rest of the extended metaphor falls into place. Consider verse one:

> Handy Dandy, controversy surrounds him
> He been around the world and back again
> Something in the moonlight still hounds him
> Handy Dandy, just like sugar and candy

The first two lines comprise an accurate factual

description of Reagan. I suppose that the third line humanizes Reagan, just as Neil Young humanized Nixon in *Campaigner*, by positing that a person whom some of us regard as an unfeeling monster actually possesses his share of demons and anxieties. But mainly, the line suggests that Reagan feels guilt for the things that he has done in his life. "Something in the moonlight," a manifestation of a greater power, "hounds" him. He can't completely convince himself that what he's doing is morally sound. However, Reagan always strove to conceal moral ambiguities from the public, so the verse concludes, "just like sugar and candy," a line which evokes something that goes down easily.

Verse two:

> Handy Dandy, if every bone in his body
> was broken he would never admit it
> He got an all-girl orchestra and when he
> says
> "Strike up the band," they hit it
> Handy Dandy, Handy Dandy

The first line is a perfect metaphoric representation of Reagan's famed bravado. Hale into his eighties, miraculously recovering from a gunshot wound, etc. The all-girl orchestra might be Congress, which, for much of Reagan's eight-year tenure, was largely complicit in implementing Reagan's core program of massive military spending and upper-class tax cuts. The metaphor is well grounded; similarities exist between the physical shape of the Senate and House and the shape of a big-band orchestra. "Strike up the band" is the call for a vote. The "orchestra" might also be the voting public, which gave Reagan two overwhelming victories: they "hit it" when they were told to.

Bridge #1:

> You say, "What are you made of?"
> He says, "Can you repeat what you
> said?"
> You'll say, "What are you afraid of?"
> He'll say, "Nothing, neither live nor
> dead!"

These four lines constitute a Reagan-era press conference. Reagan invariably responded to difficult substantive questions ("what are you *made* of?") with "I don't recall," "Excuse me," "can you repeat that," or silence. Then he'd usually slide into the next question and regain his footing, as Dylan has him do here. Reagan responds to the second question with the sort of bravado expressed in line one of verse two, the sort that endeared him to the public and the press and dissipated scrutiny.

Verse three:

> Handy Dandy, he got a stick in his hand
> and a pocket full of money
> He says, "Oh, darling tell me the truth,
> how much time I got?"
> She says, "You got all the time in the
> world, honey."
> Handy Dandy, Handy Dandy

Teddy Roosevelt's famous line "Walk softly and carry a big stick" (parodied by Dylan in *Don't Look Back*) referred to maintaining a powerful U.S. military and using it against smaller countries whenever necessary. Thus, Dylan's use of "stick in his hand" applies perfectly to Reagan, who presided over the largest peacetime military build-up in the history of the world, and who was famous for smashing countries such as Grenada with a large stick. The "pocket full of money" is the money that Congress freely provided Reagan. These wildly unnecessary appropriations were largely responsible for creating the enormous deficit under which the U.S. now labors; Dylan's next two lines portray Reagan essentially asking either his wife or Congress, "how long can I get away with this," and receiving the reply "you got all the time in the world, honey."

Bridge #2:

> He got that clear crystal fountain
> He's got that soft silky skin
> He's got that fortress on the mountain
> With no doors or windows, so no
> thieves can break in

The "fortress on the mountain" can refer either to Reagan's palatial mountaintop home in Bel Air, California or to a revised version of Reagan's oft-invoked image of America as a "shining city on the hill." We, as complicit Americans, have allowed the shining city on the hill to morph into a fortress on the mountain under Reagan's deceptively benign appearance and affect, symbolized by the "soft silky skin."

Dylan has never performed *Handy Dandy* in concert.

--RH

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A RECENT SHOW: TWO VIEWS

6/16/95, Boston MA. Venue was Harborlights, an outdoor pavilion on a wharf. Attendance was a few thousand. *Crash on the*

Levee/I Want You/Watchtower/Just Like a Woman/Tom Thumb's Blues/Silvio/Tambourine Man@/Masters of War@/Don't Think Twice/Seeing the Real You/I Believe in You/5 Believers/Rolling Stone/Back Pages@/Rainy Day Women.

I enjoyed *Levee* very much. I don't think it's just a noisemaker. Dylan and band seemed focused and gritty. *I Want You*, which I don't always like, benefitted greatly from the slower tempo--Dylan's singing was clear and provocative. *Watchtower* I loved, as always; I think Jackson does great work on this song consistently. *Just Like a Woman* is **long** overdue for a new arrangement. This is the same one we've been hearing since '92, and I'm just not getting anything new from the song. So, as usual the beginning of the concert blew me away, but I was let down about fifteen minutes in.

Tom Thumb was a real treat, but I was beginning to fret about the oldies quotient. Thus, I greeted the opening chords of *Silvio* with a yelp (in Dylantime, *Silvio* qualifies as a relatively new song). The rendition of *Silvio* was the best I've heard in quite some time. Dylan sang several of the verses (instead of just one or two) and really leaned into the defiant final verse, which I always think is about death. He's going to die soon ("going down to the valley") and will sing his song there, in death, judged only by the echo, i.e., his own conscience and standards. He doesn't reveal whether the echo decides if "he was right or wrong." The stop-and-start bit between Dylan and Jackson also helped bring a new sense of urgency to this much-played song.

Dylan sang both *Tambourine* and *Masters* without a guitar, just holding the mike and swaying gently, sometimes awkwardly. I really related to the awkwardness and was touched by the whole performance. *Don't Think Twice* usually bores me; it was a bit better seeing it live.

Seeing the Real You benefitted from a new arrangement, though I don't share Dylan's apparently strong affection for this song. *I Believe in You* was probably the night's highlight for me. This multilayered song, both simple and complex, almost always wrings a great performance out of both Dylan and band. It was fun to hear *5 Believers*, but I much prefer a closer with more improvisatory room, such as *Highway 61*.

I always like *Rolling Stone*, but it usually takes me several listens on a tape before I can be inspired by a particular version. *Back Pages* moved me, but *Rainy Day* left me with a horribly sour taste. I'm sick of this damn song. It's musically boring, and neither Dylan nor the band ever does anything interesting with it. I think it's a drag to be in the midst of a bunch of people who are shouting "everybody must get stoned" while waving their beer cups or joints. Yes, I know, there's more to the song than that, but it's impossible to get anything more when literally everyone around you is screaming gleefully about the profound joys of getting stoned. So I hit the exit early. Dylan should kill this song. The band should boycott it. I'm going to BOO it next time. I hope I'll be in the front row.

--Chris Stearns

I was at the same show. It was my first after a dry spell of almost two years, so I was giddy and willing to hear anything, even 18 renditions of *Maggie's Farm.* Instead I got a few gems, the kinds of songs you don't even hope for even if you know they've been played lately (e.g., *Levee*), and some I've heard a lot but can hear no matter how many times, like *Just Like a Woman.* I have my quarrel with Dylan over the arrangement, too--whenever a song stays the same for so many performances, I start to wonder if he's really listening anymore or if he's just coasting--but all such doubts were dispelled, as they always are with this song, by the singing. He was hearing something new in it, and so did I. Baxter's undulations alone made it worthwhile. But I'll take the songs in order.

Levee was an exciting opener. Instead of closing with apocalypse, as he'll often do with *Highway 61*, for example, Dylan opened with it. *Tom Thumb's Blues* may have been spoiled for me forever by the Leysin performance, July 10, 1992. That performance brought out all of the hopeless sadness of the song--the solo winds down to almost nothing, and in the last verse Dylan's voice is so thin and muttery that the bravado of the last line rings completely hollow--and I guess I'm always hoping he'll somehow top it, as unfair as that hope may be.

The hand-held mike is hard to get used to. I tried to put visions of Tony Bennett out of my head, but it was difficult. I literally closed my eyes a couple of times to try to shake the Vegas crooner image and just hear the songs. It

helped; I could really hear why Dylan might choose this technique, since his voice seemed extra close and subtly shaded, as did the harmonica.

Don't Think Twice came alive for me in this performance. Too many hearings, or something, had made it into a plain old put-down song for a while (I don't know if that's why it bores Chris, but that's why it bores me), but that night some of complex feelings emerged once again from Dylan's phrasing: love and genuine disappointment mixed in with the anger and cynicism. *Seeing the Real You* can suffer from the same one-notedness, but the imagery is weird and dense, and Dylan gives the song a charge by spitting the sharp lines (*"ride* likeAnnie*Oak*ley") and putting a lot of passion into each refrain.

5 Believers doesn't do much for me. The band seemed into it, intense and happy, but I must agree with Chris that I felt a bit cheated when I realized that it was the closer.

I also have to agree with Chris about *Rainy Day Women*. I was hoping Dylan wouldn't do this song on this night of all nights, a one-day solo shot in the middle of a run of stints opening for the Dead. On my entire three-hour drive to Boston I was seeing Dead fans on the highway (I got so I could recognize a Phish bumper sticker at 100 yards) and thinking, great, I'm going to be surrounded by people who have come for the "atmosphere" and who will therefore talk through every song they don't know, namely all but two. Some of my best friends, I say without irony, are Deadheads, but as a class Deadheads are so absorbed with themselves, their drugs, and their participation in a cult phenomenon that they aren't the most fun people to be at a concert with, and they're not at all fun to listen to "everybody must get stoned" with. I suppose the problem is that they really mean it. I've probably just made a lot of enemies, but Dylan once said that his tour with the Grateful Dead was a huge mistake, and as a fan I agree.

One of the main things that stands out in my mind about this concert is the prominence of Dylan's guitar. He's really stepped up to co-lead guitar in the past few years, and the interplay between him and Jackson is both chaotic and coherent. It's like two people talking over one another and squeezing in their points and counterpoints, but somehow both being heard and hearing one another. Dylan's bands never get enough credit for the musical genius of being able to do this.
--Anne Zabel

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EVERYTHING IS BROKEN

When Dylan recorded *Oh Mercy* in March of 1989, he spent an uncharacteristically concentrated period of time in the studio (more than two straight weeks) and completed more than one usable take of several songs. The outtakes are in some cases significantly different than the versions that later appeared on *Mercy, Red Sky*, and on *Bootleg Series*. In the case of "Everything is Broken," the outtake and album versions have the same structure (2 verses - 1st bridge - 3rd verse - solo - 2nd bridge - 4th verse); the same melody, except for a slightly different last line of the verse; and many of the same lyrics. The major difference between the versions, to my ear, is that a personal relationship is at the heart of the outtake version, while it is merely peripheral to the album version. This difference in emphasis affects the theme of the song as a whole. I will not speculate on why Dylan chose to release the version that he did, but for me the effects of the two versions are very different and shed interesting light on one another's meanings.

Lines that in the album version seem to be addressed to, if anyone, the listening audience, are addressed in the outtake to a particular person. "Ain't no use jivin', ain't no use jokin'" becomes "Ain't no use runnin', honey, ain't no use jokin'"; "Take a deep breath, feel like you're chokin'" is now a warning to "baby." The change in the final line of each verse also incorporates this change of addressee. That the narrator has some history with an actual person being addressed in the song is confirmed in the first bridge: "I sent you roses once . . . ."

When I first heard the album version, it resonated with me primarily as an expression of a "world gone wrong." It's a deceptively simple, apparently repetitive depiction of that bleak mood in which everything indeed seems to be awry, from everyday objects (bottles and plates) to major events (broken treaties) to the human condition ("Streets are filled with broken hearts"). Things are falling apart all around our heads; when Dylan sings "Seem like every time you stop and turn around, something else has

just hit the ground," he isn't just talking about dishes.

The romantic relationship, in this context, is presented as just one of the countless things that are going wrong. It's specifically mentioned in only one couplet (the second bridge), and in fact, the lines imply that his dark world view is based not in fact but in his temporary depression at being without his lover. As a result, that bridge lightens the song for me. It implies that everything is *not* broken; everything just seems that way when you're lonely. (And then, too, it's not even certain that she's left him for good; maybe she's just "off some place" and will be back soon, when her business elsewhere is done.)

The outtake version immediately struck me as being more focused on a romance. At first this fact made the song seem less about the brokenness of the world in general (less so than the album version). After several hearings, though, the interwovenness of the two themes began to come through. The first bridge can be an example of how his romance, along with everything else, is going wrong, or it can be interpreted as his attempt to use the fact that nothing's working right as an excuse. In the first interpretation, "sent you roses someone else must have received" is sarcastic; he loved her and sent her roses, but she was so unmoved that they might just as well have never been delivered. In the second, he either never sent the roses, and is trying to tell her that they just must have been delivered to someone else by mistake (this would explain his defensiveness in the next verse: "Telling you the truth now"), or he did send them and they really did get misdelivered, in keeping with the chaotic state of affairs. Or, perhaps she did receive them but has not acknowledged them; in that case, Dylan is suggesting that the "someone else" is one of her other selves. Understanding is broken

In any case, instead of undermining the sense that everything is broken, as the lines "Every time you leave and go off someplace" do in the album version, this couplet about a romance reinforces it. The couple is caught up in a broken world, where miscommunication reigns. "Broken words never meant to be spoken" takes on a very specific meaning, that of the clumsy and hurtful words lovers say to one another. The fly on the wall, the voices in the hall, and the beginnings and ends of the third verse coalesce around the romance theme. What secret assignations is this fly on a wall witnessing? What are the overheard voices saying? The line "broken beginnings, broken ends" point to the answer: a relationship is collapsing, leaving "streets . . . filled with broken friends." In the midst of a world gone wrong, the narrator is trying to make his relationship work, but as he says by way of conclusion, "It ain't easy" when "everything broken." I, too, have allowed personal relationships to suffer and even collapse as a result of my anxiety and anger over the brokenness of the world in general.
--Anne Zabel

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DYLAN'S APPROACH

Debate rages in Dylan circles as to the worth of Dylan's recent live performances. Unless one believes in the notion of universally agreed-upon artistic standards, such debates don't mean much. Whether you dig or don't dig a work or art depends on a myriad of personal factors. Don't worry about whether your neighbor's digging it.

However, regardless of one's personal opinion of Dylan's recent live work, one must admit that the artistic approach that Dylan has often used for his live shows since 1988 has been unique among popular musicians. For me, that approach has touched and inspired me more deeply than anything I've experienced before from *any* artist, Dylan included.

The "Never-Ending Tour" and its collective descendants comprise an undertaking that is an extreme extension of the spontaneity and chaos that Dylan has always mined. Since 1988, he has performed about 70-100 shows a year, and chord progressions, lyrics, and most importantly, phrasings change literally from night to night and even moment to moment. The similarity or lack thereof of consecutive nights' song lists is irrelevant (though statistics such as 64 different songs over 20 shows are pretty staggering). What matters to me is that the variety of a week's worth of performances of "God Knows" or "Stuck Inside of Mobile" continues to astonish me. I've never encountered a musical artist who attempts anything remotely similar to what Dylan and his band achieve nightly. There is a world of difference between Dylan's approach and the

more ordered improvisations of jazz or the Grateful Dead. Again, regardless of whether one likes or dislikes Dylan's work, one must admit that the artistic approach that he's often used over the last six years is unique.

Each member of the band, confronted with this approach, has to carve out his own way of expressing himself and complementing the potential and actual chaos. Dylan will, for example, point at Jackson to begin a solo, cut him off just when he gets going, then give him two minutes of freedom at the end of a song. Jackson is that rare musician who is actually willing to run with that freedom and take risks, as opposed to simply churning out identical solos each night (an approach that I have seen employed, unfortunately, by Mark Knopfler). Anchoring all of this freedom is some concept of a melody, which Dylan's singing completely deconstructs. The band members are free to do whatever the hell they want with the chord structure that's half-underlying the song. For a person who knows the songs, the interpretive potential is limitless, because underlying the present experience is the experience of having heard twenty different versions of what is nominally the same song before. Or *is it* the same song?

An example of the spontaneity and creativity that exists even when Dylan plays the same song over a series of nights is "I and I" from June/July 1992.

On June 30 in Dunkirk, Dylan decides to perform the song for the first time in 56 months. He proceeds to forget most of the lyrics. Baxter is completely inaudible; I own two tapes of this show and can't hear him on either one. Maybe he was in the bathroom. Meanwhile, Dylan's playing, very softly, an acoustic guitar. So, Jackson compensates for the vocal and musical void by essentially playing a solo throughout the entire song. His playing is very aggressive. Dylan is inspired, perhaps by Jackson, to attempt one more chorus of the song after the long instrumental break at the end: a uniquely exciting move that he did not repeat for any of the later versions. "No man sees my face and liiiiii," then he fades out, the song seems over, suddenly, "eeeeeeayyves!" The band rise with him as he returns, building to a truly triumphant climax that puts to shame most of their laborious multi-minute half-speed endings.

The next night, in Reims, Dylan has apparently reread the lyrics to the song. He remembers them quite clearly, and spits out a biting, moving version. Baxter has returned, playing a wailing guitar. Instead of receding, though, Jackson plays off of both Baxter's electric and Dylan's acoustic. The performance is tighter, but still enormously fresh, due largely to the addition of Baxter and Jackson's response to that addition.

Halfway through the July 2 Belfort performance, Dylan takes off his acoustic guitar and straps on his electric. Perhaps he was getting bored with the song after three nights. He plays the electric for the rest of the song and for the next two performances (July 5 and July 10). The tenor of the performances changes completely. Dylan doesn't enunciate as well when he's playing electric guitar, so his singing on Belfort and Correggio (July 5) becomes much more tentative and muttery. Jackson, meanwhile, is drowned out for the remainder of the July 2 performance and the whole of July 5 performances. He apparently wasn't expecting Dylan to play the electric, and he becomes tentative, falling back on playing the basic chord structure. By July 10 in Leysin, however, he's made an adjustment. His solos are loud, clear, and frightening. Dylan responds with a slightly more lively vocal that builds in intensity as the song goes on.

For me, these performances of "I and I" sum up everything that I love about Dylan and his bands. Five completely different interpretations within the space of two weeks. "I still go barefoot" sounds self-pitying one night, humorous the next, tragic the next, due to Jackson's differing accompaniments and Dylan's different phrasings. *I* dig these performances very much. Check one of them out, maybe you will, too.
--Laura K.

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OVERDUE REFLECTIONS ON DYLAN'S APPEARANCE AT THE CLINTON INAUGURATION

More than two years ago now, in the Spring 1993 *Telegraph* (a Dylan magazine, POB 307, Romford, Surrey, TW10 5AQ, England), two people wrote in, angry at Dylan's participation in the celebration of Bill Clinton's inauguration. Despite the fact that someone wrote a trenchant rebuttal in the next issue, I've been chafing ever

since and want to add my two cents.

First of all, let me declare my political orientation. I'm a Democratic socialist, which puts me far to the left of the two significant U.S. political parties. I'm a loyal voter and energetic campaign volunteer for Democratic candidates, for the simple reason that they're usually the only remotely viable candidates against the Republicans. I didn't support Clinton's candidacy until he had won the Democratic nomination. When he became the chosen candidate, however, I worked my butt off for him, and the night he was elected was one of the happiest of my life. Why? Not, to be sure, because I share all of his views. I think many of them are reactionary and some are downright dangerous. I was happy because I and the rest of the world had suffered from twelve years of Reagan and Bush, two of the most right-wing leaders this country has ever had, and I feared for the future of the planet if Bush and his extreme right-wing pals had another four years to do as they wished. Maybe this is hard for Europeans, Asians, and others to appreciate, because they have choices besides an extremely conservative party and a moderately conservative party.

The man who wrote into the *Telegraph* from Norway (John Michael Hudtwalcker) thought that Dylan's performance of *Chimes of Freedom* at Clinton's inauguration in January 1993 was a case of "the romantic in a somewhat inconsistent Dylan being carried away by the sentimental nationalism in the USA, combined with the optimism of a younger president taking office." You'd be hard-pressed to find many Americans who are romantic, sentimental, nationalistic, *and* excited by Clinton's youth--it's not a typical profile--but at any rate, I'm not a combination of those traits, and I doubt that Dylan is either. Clinton's taking office was exhilarating for many of us because three months earlier, we had feared that the most powerful country on earth would continue to be governed by an anti-environmentalist, rabidly militaristic (does Hudtwalcker remember the Gulf War? Panama? Nicaragua?) ex-CIA chief who was only too happy to let blacks, women, all foreigners, and the poor slide into the pit as long as the U.S. rich could have their God-given right to get richer. And now, after twelve horrible years, a certain percentage of our fellow citizens had at last seen reason, or something, and we were going to have someone in the White House who shared *some* of our beliefs. That's why I drove 10 hours to Washington to celebrate, and I assume it's why Dylan, anti-politics but obviously concerned about the environment and certain other "political" issues, participated. I had no idea that Dylan was going to be there, and I was extremely moved by his appearance.

Tony Tasman (who wrote in from England) was all too correct in stating that the U.S. government, namely the military that was so nauseatingly celebrated at the Inauguration (as it always is--it wasn't Clinton's idea, and as Mr. Tasman would know if he lived in the U.S., Clinton is despised by the military because he protested the Vietnam War and refused to serve in it), is "the cops of the world. The boys with the smart bombs. The masters of war." No kidding! Do you think everyone who voted for Clinton, or celebrated his victory, likes that aspect of our country? We liberal Democrats have been trying to get our country to dismantle its weapons, stop going to war against tiny countries for the benefit of U.S. corporations, and devote itself to true justice and democracy in the world. Nor are we so naive that we don't know that "politicians are power brokers." But I disagree sharply with anyone who says that all politicians are the same, or that the only route for a person of conscience to take is to drop out of the political process altogether or support a third-party candidate who's deserving but who hasn't got a snowball's chance in hell of winning.

Furthermore, while in some measure appearing at the inauguration bespoke support for Clinton--if Dylan ever played at a Republican's inauguration I'd be furious--there's a lot more to it than that. As usual, Dylan didn't so much "display support" for the event he joined as *infiltrate* it. The Grammys, to use a more trivial event as an example, stand for everything Dylan despises about music. They reward flash over substance, value the moneymakers and gimmick-users in the music world instead of those rare musicians who put their souls and minds into their music, and would never even give Dylan recognition for being the major influence he is if he hadn't been given the stamp of approval by trend-setters like *Rolling Stone* magazine. When he was given the Lifetime Achievement Grammy, the presentation lauded him for his social conscience but the honchos ordered him not to play anything provocative like *Masters of War*, given that a

very popular war had just broken out and they didn't want to offend anyone. Did he refuse to go on the show or accept the award? No, he went on and indicted the people who brought us 100,000 dead Iraqis by playing the song he'd been specifically told not to play. (Yes, yes, I know that no one could decipher the lyrics, but allow me a wee bit of slack.)

Likewise, instead of giving Clinton his unqualified "support" (Tasman) or "endorsement" (Hudtwalcker), Dylan went on stage and reminded Clinton of his stated ideals: to care for the "luckless," the "outcast," the "mistreated," the "gentle," the "kind," the "abandoned and forsaked." In the face of military might, Dylan sang about those whose strength is not to fight. I mean, the song is not nationalistic, patriotic, or indeed political; it sings of how justice, compassion and acceptance are so natural and right that even the thunder and lightning speak out in their favor. Is this not a challenge to any politician, to anyone who has been entrusted with the wellbeing of a nation and the entire world?

I admit that I am frustrated that Dylan did not try to better enunciate his lyrics that day.

To say that "playing at a Presidential Inauguration [does not] have anything to do with artistic development or necessity" (Hudtwalcker) is, given the particular circumstances of American politics in 1993, to say that speaking one's political views does not have anything to do with artistic development or necessity. "Political views" is just a dirty word for "heartfelt convictions"; an artist's deepest religious, moral, and existential beliefs must have a political expression or else he/she is divorced entirely from the world of people, for politics is simply the mechanism by which people are oppressed or empowered. Yes, "politics is a nightmare," as Dylan said shortly after the inauguration, but "we live in a political world." The question of whether or not to engage in that political world is not an easy one. On January 17, 1993, Dylan chose to engage. On many, many other occasions, he has chosen not to.

Mr. Hudtwalcker writes that "whether the name of the president is Clinton or Bush, no matter what his age, in accepting the political world per se, the artist gives it his endorsement at the cost of losing his independence and integrity. His art no longer represents any opposition or challenge, and the artist has lost not only his integrity but also his freedom." Most artists, indeed, allow themselves to be tainted by the powers they come into contact with, but Dylan resists and subverts power and maintains his integrity. If one believes that politics is inherently corrupt, any more than any human system, then one must condemn Dylan not only for playing at the inauguration, but for voting, for paying taxes, for obeying the law, and for benefiting from the fruits of the American political system. But "the political world per se" is nothing more than the system by which a group of people is ruled, and fortunately for Americans, we rule ourselves as much as have almost any people who have ever lived. That the system is flawed and frustrating, I'm the first to admit. But so is the entire universe, and in my view, refusing to use one's power to do good is not a moral option. Raising one's voice to the powers that be in order to remind them of their responsibility to truth and justice is not an act of capitulation on an artist's part, but an act of resistance. I can raise my voice by shouting on the street corner, by voting, by leafletting my town; Dylan, fortunately for all of us, can raise his voice in all these ways and also, thanks perhaps to the fact that his subversive nature has not been fully recognized, is allowed to raise it on international television from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. He did so to his credit at the March on Washington in 1963, and he did so, also to his credit, thirty years later.
--Stephen Laller

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