

Authors mind

ment. I hope so. I'd like to think he could get some pleasure from playing before an obviously excited crowd, even at the end of a long city-hopping tour.

At most concerts, the noise is a bothersome factor for me. I sit with my hands over my ears, to drown out the excess noise, and to keep myself from being too involved in the music, so that I won't come out drained at the end of it.

This time, I wanted that involvement, wanted to let the music wash over me, pulle me into it, and set me free to experience it all, without worrying, as I usually do, "how will I get out in case there's a fire?"

Maybe it wasn't all I expected. Maybe I resented the tampering with certain favorite songs, the change from fast to slow, and vice versa. Maybe I was annoyed with the intrusion of the back-up singers. If I stepped back and looked at the concert objectively, I could find fault with a few things, I'm sure.

Keep the "magic"

But I don't want to do that. I guess I don't want to ruin the magic that Barb and I always used to talk and write about in our letters. I can't go back and make it like it was—when we were the best friends in the world, and always would be, when Bob Dylan and his ideas and his magic were new to me, and I was discovering something I had never known before. Barb is far away from me now, and I'm not sure what she thinks about Bob Dylan, or even if she still does.

I know so much about Dylan now, have read so much about him and listened to his songs so many times, over and over, that I can't get that excited, stunned feeling again, and I'm sorry for it. I'm sorry I'm older, and I'm sorry Barb was never able to go to either concert with me. But I'm happy I had that feeling once, and that she was there to share it with me. So, Barb, when you read this, it's mostly for you—and thanks.



Dylan photos courtesy Mahoney Wasserman and Associates.

Dylan underfire: times are-a-changin'

By Michael Zangari

The kid's name was Robert Allen Zimmerman.

At the tender age of 19 he cautiously left the confines of a small Minnesota town to attend the state university—mainly because it's what his friends decided to do. It was more than likely for the same reason that he took a shot at being a fraternity boy.

Somewhere along the line though, something snapped. He could have been an English major, or maybe a business major, but like many freshmen, he bailed out, left school and floundered.

Twenty years later he's hanging out back stage at some auditorium listening to an instrumental version of his song "My Back Pages." The song is loosely about his early days of school and forging an identity he was comfortable with. But it's doubtful that's on his mind. He stands away from everybody else.

The sound quality backstage is terrible; the sound just echoes.

He's not unaware that his energy level is off. He's been stronger, but he's also aware that it really doesn't matter. The name he has taken on is a legend, and the crowd is on its feet before he walks out. He smiles to himself, and for all practical purposes, looks just like Bob Dylan.

Bad year

This has not been a good year for Bob Dylan. A film that was very important to him impressed all of the right people, but stiffed at the box office. He weathered a painful and publically messy divorce and to add insult to injury, his current album has (Heaven!!!!) not produced any hit singles.

The album, *Street Legal*, is as much as an immediate statement as is possible in over-blown rock 'n' roll. It was cut in less

than three weeks with a thrown-together band, and is pretty raw. It's probably the most under-rated album of the year, with moments that are as lyrically tender and reflective as any of his material. That's more than you can say for the critics. They have almost universally broadsided it as "trite" and not up to the quality of *Highway 61 Revisited* or *Blonde on Blonde* . . .

Not much is.

His concerts are getting mixed reviews, being called everything from a "Las Vegas show" to "Pretentious Rock 'n' Roll."

Evidently Bob Dylan isn't doing a very good job of being Bob Dylan.

Ironically it's the same old song. Nobody wants Bobby Dylan to grow up.

In 1965-66 when Dylan hooked up with the Hawks (later seen waltzing as the Band) to play electric music, he was bombarded from all sides with abuse for "selling out." Audiences and critics alike wanted him to go back and climb into the Bob Dylan box he had built for himself. He was faced with the bizarre situation of selling out concert after concert only to be booed and heckled during the entire show.

Uncompromising

Al Kooper who played with him off and on during this period, remembers Dylan making him play the "de dum" piano introduction to "Ballad of a Thin Man" over and over again until the audience would quiet down long enough to listen to it. Dylan would not compromise. Because "Like A Rolling Stone" was a monster hit at the time the audience would alternately boo and mouth the words to the song. It was a circl, but Dylan was one step ahead of his audience at all times, and that is pretty clear now.

The problem is that Dylan's audience is severely more critical of him, not out of any demanding sense of aesthetics, but because of the incredible level of emotional

empathy they feel for his material. When Dylan changes a line, he is toying with the sacred. Everyone in his audience has taken a Dylan song or line for their own.

When Dylan sings "Like a Rolling Stone" in concert, you get an incredible feeling of this power. Although few people are actually singing it out loud, there is an incredible mental energy. When he rips into the chorus—"How does it feel...?" you can feel the entire audience mentally screaming along with him. It has very little to do with the vehemence for a lost lover that is implied in the song. It is everyone's fantasy of personally being around to watch everyone who has ground you into the dirt being forced to eat that dirt. "How does it feel...?" It's a rare moment and an incredible catharsis.

It ain't me?

Because Dylan has had more effect on the way rock 'n' roll sounds than anyone else with the possible exception of the Beatles, he is a living legacy. As such he's entered popular myth.

But it is well to remember that Dylan has proven himself amazingly human over the years. His near death in a cycle accident sobered many, and the legends about his compulsive lying and cruelty, and the later day bursts of anger and depressions have acted as a not so subtle reminder of his humanity. Dylan, the man, is not meditating on a mountain. He, as is his right, is still growing painfully at times.

If Dylan, the artist, chooses to parody himself (as he hinted at during his Omaha show) it maybe is as important a statement as any he has yet delivered.

If anyone has earned the right to criticize Bob Dylan, it's Bob Dylan. And like everything, I'm sure that sooner or later, he'll break his own myth. And when it all comes down, he'll be the only one that could possibly do it.