

# INTERVIEWS FROM THE 80's



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# **KAREN HUGHES INTERVIEW, MAY 21, 1980**

*Published in "Star" (NZ) 10 July 1980 and "Dominion" (NZ) 2 Aug 1980.  
This was the first proper interview with Bob Dylan after his conversion.*

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*(What was it you wanted? #11)*

Bob Dylan stretched out his hand and reached for a cigarette from a half-empty pack on the table. "It would have been easier", he sighed "If I had become, or a Buddhist, or a Scientologist or if I had gone to Sing Sing"

I asked him if many of his friends had forsaken him.

"Ne REAL friends?" Dylan responded tellingly, blowing cigarette smoke away from my face, in the tiny hotel room in Dayton, Ohio, where we talked as his tour was cutting across America's Bible belt and winding it's way back to Los Angeles, Dylan's home of nine years.

"At every point in my life I've had to make decisions for what I believed in. Sometimes I've ended up hurting people that I've loved. Other times I've ended up loving people that I never thought I would."

"You ask me about myself" Dylan said at the end of an intensive session of questioning, "but I'm becoming less and less defined as Christ becomes more and more defined".

"Christianity", he explained, "is not Christ and Christ is not Christianity. Christianity is making Christ the Lord of your life. You're talking about your life now, you're not talking about just part of it, you're not talking about a certain hour every day. You're talking about making Christ the Lord and the Master of your life, the King of your life. And you're also talking about Christ, the resurrected Christ, you're not talking about some dead man who had a bunch of good ideas and was nailed to a tree. Who died with those ideas. You're talking about a resurrected Christ who is Lord of your life. We're talking about that type of Christianity".

"It's HIM through YOU. 'He's alive', Paul said, 'I've been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I but Christ who liveth in me'. See Christ is not some kind of figure down the road. We serve the living God, not dead monuments, dead ideas, dead philosophies. If he had been a dead God, you'd be carrying around a corpse inside you".

Dylan speaks of having constant dialogue with Christ, of surrendering his life to God's will much in the same way as Joan of Arc or St Francis of Assisi would have done. It is, he says, the only thing that matters. When you ask about his band, he replies "I think Jim Keltner and Tim Drummond are the best rhythm section that God ever invented".

His view on American politics is, "God will stay with America as long as America stays with God. A lot of people maybe even the President, maybe a lot of senators, you hear them speak and they'll speak of the attributes of God. But none of them are speaking about being a disciple of Christ".

"There's a difference between knowing who Christ is and being a disciple of Christ and recognizing Christ as a personality and being of God. I'm more aware of that than anything and it dictates my very being. So I wouldn't have much to offer anybody who wants to know about politics or history or or art or any of that. I've always been pretty extreme in all them areas anyway".

Whether on or off the road Dylan worships whenever he can at the Assembly of God, a fundamentalist, pentecostal, evangelical denomination that believe in the literal Bible and speaking in tongues. He came to Christ through a revelation, a personal experience with Jesus.

"Jesus put his hand on me. It was a physical thing. I felt it. I felt it all over me. I felt my whole body tremble. The glory of the Lord knocked me down and picked me up".

"Being born again is a hard thing. You ever seen a mother give birth to a child? Well it's painful. We don't like to lose those old attitudes and hang-ups".

"Conversion takes time because you have to learn to crawl before you can walk. You have to learn to drink milk before you can eat meat. You're re-born, but like a baby. A baby doesn't know anything about this world and that's what it's like when you're re-born. You're a stranger. You have to learn all over again. God will show you what you need to know".

"I guess He's always been calling me", Dylan said gently. "Of course, how would I have ever known that? That it was Jesus calling me. I always thought it was some voice that would be more identifiable. But Christ is calling everybody; we just turn him off. We just don't want to hear. We think he's gonna make our lives miserable, you know what I mean. We think he's gonna make us

do things we don't want to do. Or keep us from doing things we want to do".

"But God's got his own purpose and time for everything. He knew when I would respond to His call".

## **THE PAT CROSBY INTERVIEW MAY 15, 1980**

*Interview conducted at the Hilton Hotel in Pittsburgh May 15, 1980 and broadcast the same day by KDKA TV.*

*Reprinted in Clinton Heylin: Saved! - part 3, The Telegraph #30.*

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*(What was it you wanted? #12)*

**Crosby:** How and why did Bob Dylan recently stop singing the older songs and start singing gospel and about the Lord? He said he would talk to us about it ....

**Dylan:** I can understand why they feel rebellious about it because up until the time the Lord came into my life, I knew nothing about religion; I was just rebellious and didn't think much about it either way. I never did care much for preachers who just ask for donations all the time and talk about the world to come. I was always growing up with "it's right here and now" and until Jesus became real to me that way, I couldn't understand it.

**Crosby:** So you can understand people's reaction to you when you come on stage and start singing about Jesus and they want the old stuff?

**Dylan:** Oh, yeas, that's right, they want the old stuff. But the old stuff's not going to save them and I'm not going to save them. Neither is anybody else they follow. They can boogie all night, but it's not gonna work.

**Crosby:** Do you still hold the same enthusiasm for the older material or is it gone?

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah, I love that stuff. I look at it now and it amazes me that it was me that even wrote it or performed it.



## **TIM BLACKMORE TRANSATLANTIC TELEPHONE INTERVIEW, JUNE 12, 1981**

*This is one of three telephone interviews that Dylan did in Chicago June 12, 1981 to promote the up coming European tour and the new album, Shot Of Love. The interview was broadcast by Capitol Radio in London on June 15. Sources: transcription in Fourth Time Around #1 and tape.*

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*(What was it you wanted #5)*

Dylan: Well, We've just started playing in Chicago. We've been off the road for about six months.

Blackmore: And how's it looking?

Dylan: Basically it's about the same. Actually, the crowds are a little bigger, this time we're playing outdoors - we haven't played outdoors in a few years so that changes the atmosphere some. Summer nights just kind of hang in the air, get kind of humid much quicker than indoors.

Blackmore: Right, well it's been three years since you were here in London and you played those devastating concerts at the Earl Court and also down at Blackbushe. Are you looking forward to coming back to London?

Dylan: Oh, sure. It seems like they appreciate different things in Europe than they do here. Here they take a lot of things for granted. We've been playing some new songs that nobody has ever heard before. I think people in England react more spontaneously to the stuff that I do than then the people here, you know, you sit here so for long and they take you for granted, you know, and anyway, I've taken lot of my earlier songs from a lot of old English ballads and Irish ballads and stuff like that, so people will probably relate to that a lot more over there than they do here. Here, I'm not really sure if people are aware of where songs like 'Master Of War' or 'Girl From The North Country', where those songs originate and come from.

Blackmore: What was particularly exciting ... When you played Earl's Court last time was, I think a lot of us who followed your music and had been with you over the years, we were, perhaps, a little worried if you'd be playing the old songs when you came last time and you came in with those tremendous new arrangements. Were you at all nervous about whether people would accept the old songs and new arrangements?

Dylan: They did in Europe and in England. They accepted them, they didn't much accept them here and they called them - you know, I think they at the time were saying "Dylan's on a new wave" or "Disco Kick" or something like that, but over there they seemed to .... I didn't think of my songs as disco or they seemed to apply meaning to them which I'd never intended and I didn't find that to be true over there.

Blackmore: Does that mean when you started this tour that you're now doing in America that you've avoided doing re-arrangements of the old songs?

Dylan: Well. I wouldn't call them re-arrangements of the old songs. I think they are really more true to their character now. The band I've got with me now are I think the best band I've ever had. Everybody seems to understand my music more than any band

I've ever had - usually I put together bands that wouldn't be put together otherwise, but this time it seemed like that this band is born to be, together with me.

**Blackmore:** Is there anybody who was in the band that you brought over last time, who'll be coming with you this time?

**Dylan:** Well, there's just one girl, that's Carolyn Dennis - she's a really fine singer, she's been with me about three or four years. She's the only one I think who's been with me - most everybody else is new this time over, but I'm sure that you'll like the band.

**Blackmore:** What's happened since you were here last is you've released the two albums, which really testified to your Christian faith. Are we going to hear more of those songs in your set now?

**Dylan:** No, you won't be hearing any more of those songs but what happens, you know, is over a period of time those songs become old songs. And we've just finished a new album that I think is really good. We just finished that in the last month and it's supposed to be ready for release now and we'll be playing some stuff off that album too, and then things that go back as far as 'Blowin In The Wind' - I'm trying to do as many songs as I can from just all kind of periods of time.

**Blackmore:** Is this album something you've done with Jerry Wexler and Barry Beckett again?

**Dylan:** No, I did it by myself this time. Me and a guy named Chuck Plotkin - we just - I got tired of making records that kind of didn't turn out the way that I had planned it to be, but this time, this album, it sounds pretty much the way I hear my music. I think you'll like it.

**Blackmore:** Well I certainly look forward to it. Did you have any nervousness about coming here after that gap the previous time?

**Dylan:** Hmmm. Yes, maybe so I did have a little bit of nervousness - you always do. Usually the reception makes me nervous more than the actual performances - I don't get too nervous during the performances, but all the attention and all the media, you know, all that makes me kind of nervous. When you come in at the airport and there's photographers and people ask you questions and all that kind of makes me nervous.

**Blackmore:** A lot of people listening to you Bob will probably be surprised to hear you say that after what is twenty years of

making music before people, that you're still nervous in front of the attention the media gives you.

Dylan: (laughs) No .. I really don't - It just makes me nervous. I just feel people put me in a position that I didn't really start out to be in. I like to perform, I like to play, but the rest of it kind of confuses me sometimes. I'm kind of camera shy. Anyway, I never did like to have my picture taken.

Blackmore: You don't seem to be microphone shy though, you're talking into this telephone very freely.

Dylan: Well, that's a different thing because you can't see me. (laughs)

Blackmore: Well, I certainly look forward to seeing you. What do you think the chances would be of you coming to see us at Capital Radio when you are in London?

Dylan: Well, I don't know - it depends if we have the time, you know. Maybe you'll come backstage at one of the shows or something and I'll get the chance to meet you.

Blackmore: Well, I'd certainly like to do that very much!

Dylan: OK Tim, well listen, I got to go catch the bus.

Blackmore: OK, Well I hope you have a good bus trip and we look forward to seeing you over here in just a couple of weeks time. Good luck with the rest of the tour over your side of the pond.

Dylan: OK, thank you. Bye.

# THE PAUL GAMBACCINI TRANSATLANTIC TELEPHONE INTERVIEW JUNE 12, 1981

*Transatlantic telephone conversation between Bob Dylan in Detroit and Paul Gambaccini in London. Broadcasted by Radio One, BBC June 20 in the program "Rock On".*

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It sounds old but it's new.

*(What was it you wanted? #15)*

**P.G.:** Who's coming in the backing band this time? What's the music gonna be like?

**Dylan:** I'm bringing the same band that I have been touring with for the last two years.

**P.G.:** You'd be at Earl's Court, which is where you were last time. Were you surprised last time by the friendly response?

**Dylan:** Aaah, sometimes the response is less than friendly, and sometimes it's friendly, but over the years you just kind of get used to any kind of response.

**P.G.:** I know that recently in the States you've been performing a lot of your inspirational material. Will you be doing that in London?

**Dylan:** We'll be doing some of it. Most of the stuff comes from all the albums. And then we just finished an album, so we'll be including some new songs too. The name of the new album is Shot Of Love.

**P.G.:** Does that continue in the inspirational vein?

**Dylan:** You kind of have to decide that for yourself. It's different than the last, it's different than Saved and it's different than Slow Train, and it sounds old but it's new.

**P.G.:** Does it feature any of your recent players like Barry Beckett?

**Dylan:** No, I didn't do this one down in Muscle Shoals, I did it in California. So Barry's not on this one. I did use my usual band. Actually Ronnie Wood played on one song, so did Ringo.

**P.G.:** I've received some very exciting mail on the last couple of albums, because some people who shared your sense of what might be called ministry or message were very excited that you were with them on it and other people had thought, well, what is Bob doing, now?

**Dylan:** Yeah, I don't know. Sometimes it takes ... , you know the older album don't really mean something to some people until they're hearing the new one and in retrospect they go back and hear something else from the path that'll seem like it takes the steps that leads up to the new one.

I think this new album we did, for me it is the most explosive album I've ever done. Even going back to Blonde On Blonde or Freewheelin' or any of those, Bringing It All Back Home, Highway 61, or whatever they were ... I think this one is, for it's time right now, will be perceived in the same way and I may be totally wrong in saying that, but I feel that same way about this album as I did when we recorded Bringing It All Back Home, that was like a break through point, it's the kind of music I've been striving to make and I believe that in time people will see that. It's hard to explain it, it's that unidentifiable thing, you know, that people can write about, but they can only write about and around it, they can't really take charge over it, because it is what it is and you can't really expound on it, it itself is the beginning and the end of what it is.

**P.G.:** In Blood On The Tracks, which was another of my favorite albums, you were speaking right from the heart. Is that the kind of feeling you have lyrically on this album?

**Dylan:** Well, that was a different sort of thing. That was a break through album for me too in another sense of lyrics. I've done things I've never done before. This is just a different sort of thing, it's the thing I've always wanted to do. And, for one reason or another, I have always been bound in certain areas where I couldn't have the right structure around some kind of things to make it come off, in a way, because mainly, when I don't do that much talking, so when I'm playing, you have to be able to communicate with the people around you in order to get your point of view across. If you have to do too much of that communication it gets confusing and something is lost along the way. And this time that didn't happen. Everybody was pretty much together.

**P.G.:** Do you feel then, that you now have accomplished what you want to as an artist?

**Dylan:** I think so. I think the next album I do I don't --- I think I will do an instrumental album now.

**P.G.:** [surprised] You think so??

**Dylan:** Yeah. I've come as far as there is to come and now I'm gonna start doing instrumentals.

**P.G.:** Are you finding at the moment inspiration from any other artists, as I think you probably found from Dire Straits a couple of years ago?

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah well, I just spoke with Mark recently ... Hmmm, I've always liked Gordon Lightfoot ...

**P.G.:** Recently here, Bruce Springsteen's gone down very well. Do you like him?

**Dylan:** Yeah, Bruce is a very talented guy.

**P.G.:** Did you know that Bruce has included 'This Land Is Your Land' in his concert program?

**Dylan:** Oh he has? That's amazing! That's good. Well maybe he'll start doing 'Blowing In The Wind'! Maybe he'll do an album with Bob Dylan songs!

**P.G.:** Well, funnily enough, I heard on the radio recently, Manfred Mann's version of 'With God On Our Side'. And I thought that in this current atmosphere where there is so much talk about nuclear disarmament and the missile talks, particularly in Europe, where it is a great concern at the moment, that these songs of yours from the early albums about the nuclear disarmament situation take on a new timeliness. Do you ever think about that?

**Dylan:** No. Not really, but it doesn't surprise me. I thought they were timely then, and just as sure they're timely now.



# **YVES BIGOT TELEPHONE INTERVIEW, JUNE 12, 1981**

*Transatlantic telephone conversation between Bob Dylan in Detroit and Yves Bigot in Paris. Broadcasted by Radio Europe 1, Paris, June 22 & June 23.*

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Everything changes but it stays the same. (What was it you wanted? #14)

**Bigot:** Hello Bob!

**Dylan:** Yeah.

**Bigot:** Where are you calling me from?

**Dylan:** I'm calling you from Detroit.

**Bigot:** Yeah, you are gonna play there tonight?

**Dylan:** Tonight.

**Bigot:** Yeah, and how is the tour going?

**Dylan:** Oh, it's going pretty good.

**Bigot:** Bob, we are used to watch you perform in very different styles with every new tour, never trying to promote your next album, so what's the mood of this tour?

**Dylan:** Well, I usually tour, you know, between albums, and I've been touring between albums over here for the past few years. You know, we've kind of been on tour for the past two years. You'll be seeing the result of the shows from the past two years and a few new things, a bunch of other things that nobody's heard before.

**Bigot:** Okay, so who are your musicians? Who are with on this tour?

**Dylan:** Well, it's the band I've been working with in the past few years. Jim Keltner playing drums, Tim Drummond, who's playing bass, on guitars I've got Fred Tackett and Steve Ripley, and then on the keyboards a guy that goes by the name of Willie Smith. And I have four backing singers, one girl was with me last time I was there, her name is Carolyn Dennis. Then I've got some other girls you haven't seen before.

**Bigot:** You have written a lot of new songs lately. When can we expect a new a new album?

**Dylan:** Well, very very soon, in fact *\*very\** soon, maybe in the next few weeks, I hope anyway.

**Bigot:** So you've already recorded it?

**Dylan:** Yes, it's already been recorded and mixed and pressed I believe and it should be out as soon as they can get it to the stores.

**Bigot:** And who produced it?

**Dylan:** A guy named Chuck Plotkin and myself.

**Bigot:** Blood On The Tracks was the last album you produced yourself?

**Dylan:** Yes, exactly. That's the last album I did produce by myself and this the next one.

**Bigot:** Yes and the sound was very very good on that album. What do you use producers for, when you use them?

**Dylan:** Well, the past two albums I used producers to organize everything in the studio for me and to come up with some ideas and hire the musicians to use. And to help me sort out the songs and make some sense out of what I do. Just when I come in with a bunch of songs - somebody who come in and oversee that and puts it together, and come out with an album. And they'll be responsible for the sound of it. And this time I wanted to do it by myself.

**Bigot:** You were always interested in different rhythms on your last albums and on your last tour when you came into Europe you used reggae, salsa, and even funk rhythms. Are you very interested in the last developments lately of ....

**Dylan:** Well, sure. I just use about any kind of rhythm that I feel, you know, that I wanna play. Mmm, yeah I use a lot of different types of rhythms. some songs are just old hill-billy kind of rhythm you know, and some songs have like, I guess a 12 bar blues type of rhythm. Between them it's just about anything that happens to find its way into the song. I kind of use all kinds of rhythms just to keep it different.

**Bigot:** So that means you're not especially interested in the musical form but rather in the rhythm that you feel is best related to the spirit or sensibility of a song?

**Dylan:** Yes. if I can feel it I'll play it. If I can feel it I'll do it that way.

**Bigot:** Some people who study behavior say that each of us is only expressing one unique thing through his entire life that we wanted to express when we were 17; I think you have proved them wrong over your career. so regarding yourself, what was your continuous concern during your career?

**Dylan:** That I stayed honest, that I tried to be true, and didn't lie to myself or nobody else.

**Bigot:** Do you believe in fate or in destiny?

**Dylan:** Mmm - I do, sure.

**Bigot:** Do you think all was written in advance, or are we responsible for each choice we do, even if things seem planned?

**Dylan:** I do believe that things are planned for everyone of us. But I also believe that we have the will to change it at one time or another, although I'm not so sure about changing the end result.

**Bigot:** Do you feel the same as when you were a child, or do you feel you have changed?

**Dylan:** Well, you know it's like the French say: Everything changes but it stays the same.

**Bigot:** Three years ago, you said something that touched me very deeply, you said that one has to be vulnerable in order to be able to feel reality. Did your faith change your mind about this?

**Dylan:** Aha - I still believe that - yes, I do that.

**Bigot:** You don't feel stronger now? Or do you still feel that you have to have a certain label of sensitivity?

**Dylan:** Well, .... [obviously not understanding this, which like the other questions, is asked in broken English with a heavy French accent on this rather noisy telephone line] .... I think that's correct, yeah.

**Bigot:** Bob, you are a Gemini, and I am a Gemini myself, and maybe that's one of the reasons why I was, you know, touched so

much by your movie Renaldo & Clara and by the album Street Legal. And you talked very much about personality, about the difference between "that enemy within" as you call him and ... Can you tell me a little bit about that? Was it really the theme of the movie?

**Dylan:** I think so. I think it was like identity. I think you'd say that.

**Bigot:** But do you think this duality is the cause of negative things? Maybe not evil itself, but things like violence?

**Dylan:** I do think that, yeah. Sure, when one side takes over another side, one side is feeling stronger at that moment.

**Bigot:** Yes, isn't this the source of paranoia when someone isn't the one he would want to be?

**Dylan:** Sure, it's extremely dangerous.

**Bigot:** Did it ever happen to you?

**Dylan:** Oh sure, just about every day. (laughs)

**Bigot:** And wasn't Renaldo & Clara about all this?

**Dylan:** Yes! It was!!

**Bigot:** Bob, don't you feel like doing some kind of Rolling Thunder Revue again, with that incredible atmosphere?

**Dylan:** No, you won't see that again.

**Bigot:** Why? Once is enough?

**Dylan:** Well, yeah, I think so. You know things just couldn't go on that way.

**Bigot:** Maybe times have changed also?

**Dylan:** That's right. Well, you know, anything's possible, it could happen again. Yeah it could happen. I doubt it would, but it could.

**Bigot:** Are you going to do another movie someday?

**Dylan:** I would like to. I would really like to do that Yves. I just don't have - I haven't found, what do you call it? A script or something.

**Bigot:** How was the experience of doing Renaldo & Clara?

**Dylan:** Oh, it was invaluable, an invaluable experience.

**Bigot:** Tell me, in France you are going to perform in stadiums, it's not the first time is it?

**Dylan:** Oh, sure I've played stadiums before.

**Bigot:** Colombes will certainly be one of the hugest concerts for us.

**Dylan:** I hope so. I hope it will be that way.

**Bigot:** I saw you watch Bruce Springsteen perform at the L.A. Sports Arena. I think you were impressed.

**Dylan:** Oh sure, I was. Listen Yves, I've a show to do tonight and I've got to get on the bus, otherwise I won't have any way to get there.

**Bigot:** Okay, Bob. I thank you very, very much much for this interview and for your time and for everything you did. And we are looking forward to welcoming you to France.

**Dylan:** Alright, well maybe I'll get to see you, get to meet you.

**Bigot:** Okay, so do I. Thanks a lot and have a good concert. Goodbye Bob.

**Dylan:** Bye.





## **THE DAVE HERMAN INTERVIEW, LONDON, JULY 2 1981**

*Conducted at the White House Hotel in London, England on July 2, 1981.*

*Broadcast by WNEW-FM Radio, New York, July 27 1981.*

*Released on the promotional album DYLAN LONDON INTERVIEW JULY 1981,  
Columbia AS 1259, September 1981.*

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No one wants to talk about Saved

*(What was it you wanted? #16)*

**Herman:** Last night in Earl's Court, here in London, I guess there were about twenty people in there and when I kind of saw them, I guess it was when you did 'It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)' and every last one of them in the place was standing on their chair and it was a pretty special kind of a feeling. I was reminded once again, that you really do have a very .., that you play a very special part in the lives of an extraordinary amount of people all over the world and I gathered that this has always made you a bit uncomfortable, that people hold you in a very special place?

**Dylan:** I don't feel uneasy with the part of it, that part of it, but the other part of it, you know the part where you're expected to ... go to parties ... and ... be somebody all the time, you know. That's what makes me feel uncomfortable.

**Herman:** Or the part that makes people presuming you have somehow a lot of answers that they might not have to a lot of questions?

**Dylan:** Well, if you ... the answers to those questions, they've got to be in those songs I've written. Someplace, if you know where to look, I think you'll find the answers to those questions. It's right there in the songs. Better than I could say it.

**Herman:** Maybe that's why, over the years, that you have given so very few interviews, because probably people just come by and, once again, hope that you're gonna come up with some answers that are in the songs. In the lyrics and in the music. But you've given, I don't think, more than half a dozen major interviews. You've never really talk a whole lot to the press or radio people.

**Dylan:** No, I haven't.

**Herman:** The performers and artists feel that there's some kind of adversaries there, when reporters come in ...

**Dylan:** Well, performers feel that ..., they don't feel they're adversaries, but they do feel that ... they feel a lot of times that their points are not taken the right way or they feel imposed upon to answer questions that have really little to do with why they fill halls or sell records.

**Herman:** I got some questions for you that I hope aren't those and I hope that they're also questions that the answers of which aren't really in your songs. For instance it seems to me that ..., we are sitting in London, and Mrs Thatcher is the prime minister here and back home it seems to be a kind of a new political wave of conservatism sweeping across the world and I wonder if that kind of concerns you at all, if you've noticed the change in the political winds?

**Dylan:** No. I don't know much change between conservatism or liberalism. I can't see much differencies between either of those things.

**Herman:** But there are -irism of relative freedom and there are -irism of repression and I think that in the 1960s, where a lot of us

came out of, people were much freer to create, much freer to express their ideas at least in the western world.

**Dylan:** You think so?

**Herman:** Well, I don't know, I just see ... for instance there are groups of people that are boycotting sponsors of television shows that they don't like ...

**Dylan:** But they don't like them for a specific reason, though. A lot of these people that are boycotting those shows they got children, they show things on those shows, they don't want their children to see. Television now is at every home, it's not much you can do about it. It's better than outlawing TV-sets.

**Herman:** Can't they just not have their children watch the TV, I mean ...

**Dylan:** Think about forty years ago, there weren't any TV-sets, so there was nothing to boycott ...

**Herman:** OK, well another thing is, ah, in the United States the abortion question is becoming one of the major political controversies at home.

**Dylan:** Well, that is just a diversion, though. Whenever you think about abortion, pro, con, you know, I think you should be thinking about those things, then they put you away with the bigger things, which you're not thinking about. So you get everybody thinking about abortion and they turn you back from it ... not to say that abortion is not important! But you can make something so ... you know cast a spell on something and make everybody look that way and then you come at them from another direction ...

**Herman:** But that sounds like it's conspiratorial?

**Dylan:** Yeah, it does, doesn't it?

**Herman:** Yeah, it does! I think it is, but I don't think people sit in rooms and say well, let's divert them with the abortion issue, and then we can slip this in while ...

**Dylan:** You actually don't think so??

**Herman:** That calculated? You think it is?

**Dylan:** I don't know ... Now abortion is important, I personally don't believe in it but ..., unless of course somebody needs to have their life saved.

**Herman:** Well, it's not a matter of believing in abortion ...

**Dylan:** Eat too much candy, and you gonna get sick!

**Herman:** But people should have, it seems to me, just the right to make choices about themselves ...

**Dylan:** (laughs) Well, everybody \*does\* have the choice to make about themselves ...

**Herman:** Would you tell me what people mean, what it really means, when people describes themselves as "born again", which is something that we hear a lot about from a lot of people, there are millions of people that say they're born again.

**Dylan:** Yeah. What they mean by saying that is that they're born again by the spirit from above. Born once is born with the spirit from below. Which, when you're born is the spirit that you're born with. Born again is born with the spirit from above, which is a little bit different.

**Herman:** Do you know how it happens to people? Is it a decision that one makes or is it an experience that just comes. Is it unconscious, is it conscious?

**Dylan:** Well, it happens in all kinds of ways. It's really not one way that it happens I guess. If you talk to this person that tell you that it was unconscious and then you talk to another one that say it was a conscious decision. Some people say they just heard a voice on a lonesome road, other people say they were in the middle of a football game, some people were in the men's room of a Greyhound bus station. You don't have to be in any special situation, that it might come up.

**Herman:** Let's talk about Shot Of Love. It's the new album.

**Dylan:** You don't wanna talk about Saved? (laughs) No one wants to talk about Saved! (laughs more).

**Herman:** I think somebody once said "Don't look back" ...

**Dylan:** Yeah ... (laughs) ... Well, Shot Of Love is the new record, we have coming out ...

**Herman:** And it's also a kind of a return, it seems to me, to an album of songs that cover a whole lot of different subjects, there are love songs in it, there's a song about Lenny Bruce. As opposed to *Saved*, which was really a collection of religious songs, it was one theme to that album, and *Shot Of Love* is a return to a more eclectic album. I am wondering whether that is something that's happening haphazardly or whether it's something that's, what do you say, "*Saved* maybe was too much stuff in one vein or too narrow in scope, and maybe I ought to be back to doing a whole bunch of songs" or whether those were just the songs that came out of you?

**Dylan:** Yeah, those were the songs that just wanted to come out. I never know from one album to the next what kind of songs I'm gonna be doing. It amazes me that I even continue to make albums.

**Herman:** What do you mean by that?

**Dylan:** It is always a miracle of some kind when I make an album, because ... Working in a studio has always been very difficult for me.

**Herman:** You approach making records a lot differently than a lot of people do? Some people spend a year in the studio.

**Dylan:** I approach record-making in the way that I learned how to to make records when I started recording, when I recorded for John Hammond. And we work the same way.

**Herman:** Which is?

**Dylan:** Which is, going into a studio and making a record. Right then and there. I know the other way and I know a lot of people do it the other way and it's successful for them, but I'm not interested in that aspect of recording. Laying down tracks and then coming back and perfecting those tracks and then perfecting lyrics, which seem to wanna go with those tracks. Songs are created in the recording studio. For me, see I'm a live performer, I have to play songs which gonna relate to the faces that I'm singing to. I can't do that if I was spending a year in the studio, working on a track. It's not that important to me. No record is that important. I mean the world is gonna go on ... who needs these records? You know what I mean?

**Herman:** A record is forever. This is forever too.

**Dylan:** It's forever, I guess ... but ... it sure is ...

**Herman:** You're saying that like you never thought about that before.

**Dylan:** No, I never did think about that before, but I see in my records ..., I mean I hear records that I made twenty years ago, and I say 'Oh man, God, did I make that record?'

**Herman:** Bob, long after you're gone, these records will be here and people will listen to them and think ... well one thing or another about this guy who made these records, four hundred years ago.

**Dylan:** Ooh, poor me! (laughs) But, they \*seem\* important at the time! You know, they really do. Yeah, they are important, I'm not saying that records aren't important, but ... it's also new. I mean, making records is new. Just the fact that we're doing this interview now, through this tape recorder, we couldn't have done this ...

**Herman:** There wasn't any radio stations playing 75 years ago. The point --- as an artist there must be some ...

[Through the entire interview Dylan has been softly doodling on an acoustic guitar]

I just hope that this guitar ... I don't know cause I can't hear it back ... I hope it isn't louder than we are, which would make it difficult for people to hear us, I'm afraid. Even though I'm enjoying it immensely ...

**Dylan:** Well. I play it softly then.

**Herman:** Yeah, that'd be great. It's an old guitar. It's really beat up. It's been round the world a few times I guess.

**Dylan:** Well, I've carried it around the world a few times and I think somebody else carried it around before that too.

**Herman:** Where were we? Aaah ... oh yeah, what I wanted to say about a record being forever ... There must be some concern from you as a man and artist that people will be hearing this thing and coming to conclusions about Bob Dylan long after you've gone. There must be something that you'd like to leave in the world for those people who hear these records, something that they'll get, will give meaning to your life after your life is over.

**Dylan:** Well, I'm not done yet! And I'm still doing it and I'm still not knowing \*why\* I'm doing it. Come on, I mean there's other things that I would really enjoy doing, besides playing and ...

**Herman:** Like what? I mean if any man can do what he wants to, \*you\* can!

**Dylan:** Like what? Well, I mean, like become a doctor, you know, yeah I think a surgeon, you know, who can save somebody's life on the highway. I mean that's a man I'm gonna look up to, as being somebody with some talent.

**Herman:** ????

**Dylan:** (laughs)

**Dylan:** Not to say though, that art is valueless. I think art can lead you to God.

**Herman:** It's that it's purpose?

**Dylan:** I think so. I think that's everything's purpose. I mean if it's not doing that it's leading you the other way. It's certainly not leading you nowhere. It's bringing you somewhere. It's bringing you that way or this way.

**Herman:** Well, if it expresses truth and beauty then it's leading you to God?

**Dylan:** Yeah? (laughs)

**Herman:** Well, wouldn't you say?

**Dylan:** If it's expressing truth I'd say it's leading you to God and beauty also.

**Herman:** I've always thought that those were the only two absolutes that there were.

**Dylan:** Well, beauty can be very \*very\* deceiving. It's not always of God.

**Herman:** Would you elaborate a little bit?

**Dylan:** Well, beauty appeals to our eyes ...

**Herman:** And to our hearts?

**Dylan:** Our hearts are not good. If your heart's not good, what good does beauty do, that comes through your eyes, going down to your heart, that isn't good anyway?

**Herman:** The beauty of a sunset?

**Dylan:** The beauty of the beast. The beauty of a sunset? Now, that's a very special kind of beauty.

**Herman:** Well, how about the beauty of the natural world?

**Dylan:** Like the flowers?

**Herman:** Yes, and the beasts ... and the rain ...

**Dylan:** All that is beautiful, That's God-given. I've spent a lot of time dealing with the man made beauty, so that sometimes the beauty of God's world has evaded me.

**Herman:** On Shot Of Love is a song called Lenny Bruce, which you perform just at the piano and I love the song, because I loved Lenny Bruce, I was a great admirer of him, when he was alive and working, and of course since his death. It occurred to me it's a long time since Lenny's gone, I think he went in the summer of 1967, I think it was. Why, after all these years this song about Lenny Bruce?

**Dylan:** You know, I have no idea!

**Herman:** Did that song just come to your ...

**Dylan:** I wrote that song in five minutes! It is true, I rode with him once in a taxi cab. I found it was a little strange after he died, that people made such a hero out of him. When he was alive he couldn't even get a break. And certainly now, comedy is rank, dirty and vulgar and very unfunny and stupid, wishy-washy and the whole thing.

**Herman:** Some people thought he was rank and dirty and vulgar ..

**Dylan:** But he was doing this same sort of thing many years ago and maybe some people aren't realizing that there was Lenny Bruce, who did this before and that is what happened to him. So these people can \*do\* what they're doing now. I don't know.

**Herman:** Lenny spent a lot of time bad mouthing the church, too. Well, from the point of view of organized churches. Is there a very

big difference between the political structure of the various churches, no matter what the denomination might be and what the spirit is all about. Do you think that the Catholic Church, traditional Judaism, or any way that their religions are organized with rites and rituals ... Is that part of really of what you feel the truth of the spirit of God is all about?

**Herman:** Well, that's a complicated question! I'm not an authority on catholicism. Ritual has really nothing to do with spiritual laws. However, if you do walk according to the law, all of the law, well, you'd be a pretty pure person and on a pretty high level. A person who could no doubt move mountains. if you walk according to the law, and most people can't walk according to the law, because it's so difficult, there are so many laws, that govern absolutely every area of your life.

**Herman:** Maybe it takes more than one lifetime to get all of that. Is the fact that we come back again and again something that, I'm talking about reincarnation, let's say the hindhu way of believing that we get in touch with our own divinity and do walk according to the law, that it takes more than one life? Think that there's a possibility that that might be the way? And what's 60, 70, 80 years?

**Dylan:** It's not a whole lot of time, when you think you need another lifetime! (laughs) You want another life time? How many do you want?

**Herman:** Well, you have to pay not to go through this thing twice! (laughs)

**Dylan:** That's it.. That's right! Well I figure if you can't learn it here, you can't learn it.

**Herman:** Back to Lenny Bruce, and the fact that it's again yet another Bob Dylan song about, as you even say in the song, an outlaw. A lot of the stuff, a lot of the songs over the years, Lenny Bruce, Outlaw Blues, Joey Gallo, Hurricane Carter, or Absolutely Sweet Marie, "to live outside the law, you must live honest" (sic). A lot of outlaw imagery and outlaws in your work. What is it about "man as outlaw" that intrigues you so, you spend a lot of time on ...

**Dylan:** Well, it's not anything conscious. I guess it has to do with where I grew up, admiring those type of heroes, Robin Hood, Jesse James ... You know the person who always kicked against the oppression and was ... had high moral standards. I don't know if the people I write about have high moral standards, I don't know if Robin Hood did, but you always assumed that they did.

**Herman:** You assume that Joey Gallo did?

**Dylan:** In some kind of way you have to assume that he did, in some kind of area. It's like ... I've never written a song about some rapers, you know. I think what I intend to do is just show the individualism of that certain type of breed, or certain type of person that must do that. But there is some type of standard I have for whoever I'm writing about. I mean, it amazes me that I wrote a song about Joey Gallo.

**Herman:** But you did!

**Dylan:** Yeah!

**Herman:** A long one too.

**Dylan:** Very long one. How long was that? About a half hour?

**Herman:** About eleven minutes.

**Dylan:** Yeah, well I feel that if I didn't do it, who would? (laughs) But that's an old tradition! I think I picked that up in the folk tradition, when I was singing nothing but folk songs for years. There are many songs, a lot of Irish ballads, Roddy McCorley, names escape my mind at the moment ...

**Herman:** There must be a hundred songs about Jesse James?

**Dylan:** ... Jesse James, Cole Younger, the US bandit, Billy The Kid, ... of course the English ballads had them and the Scottish ballads had them and the Irish ballads. I used to sing a lot of those songs and that just kind of carried over with me into the ... whatever the special brand of music that I play now is ...

**Herman:** People who know you and work with you told me in the last few days, when I was getting ready to talk to you, that they've never seen you more relaxed and content and ...

**Dylan:** (laughs) People always say that!

**Herman:** No, no. And I have a feeling that you are experiencing that. It's a real nice place to be now on this European tour. Otherwise I don't think we would be sitting here talking. You know, if you were preoccupied with other things or felt out of synch with yourself, I think you'd probably ????. As your friends say.

**Dylan:** Well, I know what I have to do and I'm just trying to do it, you know.

**Herman:** The ego's got a pretty big part in being a performer. How do you like to go out there night after night, do what you do, and hear that applause and ... How much of a part does that play in ... I mean, do you feel a little bit like maybe you're hooked on the stage and on the celebrity ??? of it all?

**Dylan:** No. I don't mind the celebrity part of it.

**Herman:** Could you be an anonymous person?

**Dylan:** I try to be an anonymous person. As far as the applause goes, I get just as much .... sometimes it's applause, sometimes it's booing. You get used to it over years. I mean, I've been doing it for so long, whatever the applause is, it doesn't surprise me any more.

**Herman:** But isn't it nicer when it's a big applause than ...one hand clapping?

**Dylan:** Yeah, it's a lot more comfortable.

**Herman:** Isn't it nicer when the album is in the top ten than hanging around at forty-five or something?

**Dylan:** Well, it is and it isn't. Like Slow Train was a big album. Saved didn't have those kind of numbers but to me it was just as big an album.

**Herman:** So it really matters little to you, the acceptance or the rejection on the part of the record buyers?

**Dylan:** No, it doesn't. I'm fortunate that I'm in the position to release an album like Saved with a major record company, so it would be available to people who would like to buy it.

**Herman:** Was there a time in your life in the past, when you'd be on the phone: "hey, how did the album do? Did it go from 8 to 4?" Was there a time when you really got off on that kind of stuff?

**Dylan:** Well, you always wanna know what's happening with your record, so the first few weeks, yeah, you'll call up and find out if it's selling or if it's not selling. Sure.

**Herman:** Has the music business changed in the 15-20 years or so that you have been making records?

**Dylan:** Very much so.

**Herman:** ????? winds of pain shot through you!

**Dylan:** Yeah. Now this last record that we just did was a comfortable record for me to make, because of ... you know Chuck? Chuck Plotkin? Well, we worked together on it. OK, up until then ... Well, he made the record the way I want to make a record. He understood that. He wanted to make the record in the same way. But the record business is changed because ... see when I was in ... In the sixties \*everybody\* made records the way I did. No matter who you were, Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Animals, The Byrds ...

**Herman:** Maybe we should just explain to people that that means all the people who were on the record were in the studio, in the same room at the same time, playing at the same time ...

**Dylan:** ... and they made the record. You were a group, you were somebody, before you went in and made the record. You were somebody.

**Herman:** Earned the privilege of making a record?

**Dylan:** Yeah, yeah, you paid enough dues to make a record. Now, people do not pay no dues no more, They expect to make a record right away without anybody even hearing them and then you'll find a producer, they have so many producers now, they didn't have so many producers back then, the producer was what they called the A&R man. Now you have all these producers who are in themselves stars. And it's \*their\* record. I don't think of myself as being told what to do all the time.

**Herman:** Are you on one side of the gun control issue or another? Do you think this business of all the guns we have in America ... I notice here in London, the policemen don't even have guns on their hips, they don't carry weapons.

**Dylan:** But they have a much lower crime rate over here too. Well, you can't change the States in that kind of way. It's too many people. It didn't get off on the right start ... You know the United States is like gun crazy, always has been gun crazy. White man used to shoot the Indians with guns. Guns have been a great part of America's past. So, there's nothing you can do about it. The gun is just something which America has got, lives with. I don't think gun control is making any difference at all. Just make it harder for people who need to be protected.

**Herman:** And you quoted him in a Playboy interview a few years ago, ... You said Henry Miller said that the role of an artist is to inoculate the world with disillusion.

**Dylan:** Yeah.

**Herman:** Is that what you try to do with your work?

**Dylan:** No. I don't consciously try to inoculate anybody. I just have to hope there's some kind of way this music that I've always played is a healing kind of music. I mean if it isn't I don't wanna do it. Because there's enough stuff, so-called music, out there, which is sick music. It's just sick. It's made by sick people and it's played to sick people to further a whole world of sickness. Now, that's not only true of music, this is true in film industry, it's true in the magazine industry. You know it caters to people's sickness. There's a lot of that. And if I can do something that is telling people or ... hoping anyway that .. whatever their sickness is, and we're all sick, whatever it is, you can be healed and well and set straight. Well if I can't do that, I'd as soon be on a boat, you know I'd as soon be off hiking through the woods.

**Herman:** There's a song on Shot Of Love, Every Grain Of Sand, which is about as a healing song as I ever heard from you. It's a beautiful, beautiful song.

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah, I wrote that last summer.

**Herman:** Is that what you mean by hopefully healing music?

**Dylan:** I would hope so.

**Herman:** Well, Bob, is there anything you would like to tell the vast radio audience out there?

**Dylan:** I think they know just about anything that I've got to tell them.

# **NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS, 15 AUGUST, 1981**

*Interviewer : Neil Spencer. 15 August, 1981 New Musical Express pp29-31*

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"The diamond voice within"

In a rare interview during his 1981 European tour, Bob Dylan talks about his music and religion to Neil Spencer.

Harmonicas play the skeleton keys of the rain that drapes Munich in grey drizzle for Bob Dylan's two day stay in the city.

Our Mercedes taxi splashes its way through sodden streets toward the muzzled grey modernist shapes of the Olympic complex built to house the '74 games and where tonight's show will be staged, in the splendid indoor sports arena, to an audience of several thousand.

Munich is the eleventh stop on a European tour that will take in eight countries and 23 shows, around a third of them in Britain. Being in the business of a ceaseless quest for a Bob Dylan interview, (one of several score, if not hundred), I get to see shows in Paris, London, and Munich where the quest will, to an extent, be realised; a brief backstage rencontre being promised by Dylan's management.

This was Dylan's sixth or seventh visit to Europe in his 20 year career, and this time round it was different. A lot has changed since Dylan last trod Albion's shores, not least the social and cultural fabric of Britain itself.

The expected media fanfare came, but it was muted in comparison to that afforded the '78 trip, when Dylan was seen as the concensus of the ongoing 'rock' tradition handed down from the 60s; still the enigmatic and unrepentant rebel carrying the standards of alienation, protest and emotional and spiritual exploration forward into the future.

This time it was Bruce Springsteen's turn to be feted as a visiting American superstar supreme, likewise set at the heart of a rock tradition whose myths are, for a growing number of young Europeans, now despoiled, overtaken by everyday reality or the new myths of punk and post-punk.

The national press, radio and tv didn't seem to know quite how to respond to the new, Christian Bob Dylan; and for them it was a case of better the cosy fantasy scenarios of last-chance power drives down endless American highways than the uncomfortable moral imperatives of Dylan's new kingdom.

Dylan's refusal to bow to the myths of rock - he'd always kept an ambiguous, open relation with 'rock' anyway, what with his folk roots, the frequent diversions into country, blues and anything else that took his fancy - and his insistence on his personal salvation had cost him heavy with critics and fans.

To some of them, any type of born-again Christianity smacked of U.S. president Ronald Reagan's 'moral majority', even though Dylan's new songs have consistently spelt out an anti-establishment stance, the protest era rekindled if anything. There again, any spiritual values smack of humbug to a sometimes insensitised youth culture, more caught up with the materialist and consumer values it professes to despise than perhaps it realises or cares to admit.

Christian or not, in the gritty business of attracting paying customers, there are few artists able to command the allegiance that Dylan still does, and ugly rumours of unsold tickets finally gave way to near-capacity audiences. Around 120,000 saw the British shows.

As at Earl's Court a hard look at the Munich crowd reveals plenty of original Dylan fans, many contemporaries now advancing into affluent middle age. Many more, no doubt, couldn't meet the commitment of tickets, transport and babysitters. The younger fans that Dylan has always attracted seem more prominent at the Continental shows, where rock tradition and contemporary protest - the German peace and eco movements and their equivalents in France, Benelux and Scandinavia - have not diverged the way they have in little ol' post-industrial UK.

It hasn't all been "watching the scenery go past the windows" though, as Dylan describes the touring process. A Danish daily paper ran a front page story attacking Dylan, accusing him of paranoia and claiming he kept a veritable squad of Israeli bodyguards on hand to assuage his fear of assassination. Dylan was so incensed by the story he called an impromptu press conference in north Germany where he denied that John Lennon's slaying had provoked any panic in him.

"I might as easily be run over by a truck or something," went the tone of his reply. I never did see more than a couple of security chaps, backstage or front.

Otherwise, Dylan's European jaunt can be safely judged a success. It didn't even rain at the sometimes optimistically staged open-air shows - aides speak of the way it's, ahem, miraculously stopped raining an hour or so before show-time, recalling some of the talk I'd heard around Marley tours ("he had a voice that could really touch you," Dylan says to me later when he crops up in conversation. The two never actually met however.)

Dylan's strategy on this tour has been to present a set that straddles almost his entire career, harking back to his coffee-house days on numbers like 'Barbara Allen', 'Girl from the North Country', featuring a healthy slug of 60s hits - 'Like a Rolling Stone', 'Tambourine Man', 'It's all over now Baby Blue' - and reserving pride of place for his post-conversion songs, to which he seems to bring an extra vocal commitment.

His singing this time round was quite astonishing, clearly superior to all his many past styles, from all of which he borrows for the present. With the horn section of 78 now thankfully nudged out - the present group is more supple and understated - the harmonica has found new favour. Indeed, the acoustic and harp spots were among the most affecting of the show. You could almost hear the audience gasp unbelieving joy everytime he picked up his acoustic guitar, feel them tingle whenever Bob whipped a mouth-harp from a pocket and piped that crazy, angular, plaintive harmonica music of his round the hall.

At a time when conventional rock performance is increasingly derided by many musicians and fans, to Dylan it seems that the performance is the crucible of his art, an all important testing point.

"It's so immediate it changes the whole concept of art to me," he tells me later.

Hearing him draw from that awesome vault of material he's stockpiled over the last twoscore years, it was impossible not to marvel at the sheer volume and quality of his writing. Never did 'Masters of War' sound more apt than in the precipitous war-mongering climate of the present. Other songs - 'Like a Rolling Stone' being the obvious one - seemed likewise to acquire a new resonance in the light of Dylan's Christian beliefs.

Dylan's new material continues to reflect his Christianity, though the songs of the new lp, 'Shot of Love' are less directly devotional in their approach, taking the Christian code as the bedrock of his observations rather than merely preaching, as 'Saved' too often did. Dylan's enthusiasm for his new record is only intermittently contagious, but certainly the album boasts some of his finest work in years, particularly the touching melancholic 'Grain of Sand' where Dylan's retrospection over his life leads him to state "no inclination to look back on any mistake/ as I hold this chain of events that I must break".

The new songs - which may or may not be called 'Angelina' (a title already fabled among fans) and 'Caribbean Wind' - he mentioned in my interview sound exciting, promising a fusion of his 60s sound of the 'Blonde on Blonde' era and his 80s sensibilities. One aide spoke of the new songs "being as prophetic in their way as the old ones... maybe their real time will be someway ahead in the future."

Whatever one may feel about Dylan's conversion - and the ridicule and depth of scorn to which he has been subjected for his beliefs is unfair - it's obvious that we will need some kind of spiritual dimension to our credo if we really are to build the New Jerusalem among the dark, satanic mills.

For all that, I was a little taken aback when the man took exception to having a 'Christian label' attached to him when he has so virulently informed everyone of his religious beliefs. People don't constantly refer to Pete Townshend as a Meher Baba follower because he's always kept his beliefs in context. End of sermon.

In the empty lot backstage in the athlete's changing area, Bert, a Dutch Dylanologist from Oor magazine, and I are lined up for our brief audience with Dylan.

"Oh God," comes the unmistakable voice through the open door of the dressing room as an aide reminds him of our impending presence and we catch a glimpse of Dylan pulling on a sock.

A minute later and we're shaking hands with the maestro, who seems as nervous as we are, with the air of a man slowly exhaling the potent adrenalin charge of two hours onstage at the hub of 7,000 people's attention.

His stage threads - black trousers, the satin bomber jacket with its curious golden design - lie limply across a chair, Dylan now wearing a sloppy white sweatshirt, jeans and training shoes. He looks beefier and stronger than all those "wiry little cat"

descriptions of history suggest, more sporty; the scene seems almost collegiate. The eyes are large, washed out electric blue, and rivetting, still topped by the great burst of locks.

We chat about the show, which Dylan didn't like - "you couldn't hear anything and the audience was kinda strange, you should have been at last night's show" - and about press reaction to the show. Dylan seems to feel the papers gave him a hard time whatever he does with the old songs: "you just can't win".

I remark that "Maggie's Farm" is a popular song in Britain these days, and Dylan and the bassman, who's also present, exchange blank looks before the bassie tumbles "Maggie Thatcher" and they break into laughter, me wondering about the slow association after a week playing down on the farm itself.

He'd heard about The Specials' version but wasn't familiar with it. He mumbles something about "punk waves and new waves" as he packs his stuff, before offering "I like George's song."

"George?"

"Boy, George's song is great."

Oh, George Harrison. (It transpires the two spent some time together on Dylan's stay, inspiring him to play 'Here Comes the Sun' at one Earl's Court gig. One wonders whether they discussed Monty Python's "Life of Brian" which Harrison financed.) I mumble something about whether he thinks the old songs seem to get new meaning in the light of changing times and his new beliefs, and Dylan fixes me with a piercing look.

"I'm different," he says. "The songs are the same."

"The songs don't mean that much to me actually," he continues. "I wrote them and I sing them..."

There's nothing from 'Desire' or 'Street Legal' though.

"We could do a completely different set with completely different songs. They're all old songs, even the ones from 'Slow Train' are old now."

"I tell you though, I feel very strongly about this show. I feel it has something to offer. No-one else does this show, not Bruce Springsteen or anyone."

Was he surprised at the amount of hostility the conversion to Christianity had brought?

"Not surprised at all. I'm just surprised to hear applause every time I play. I appreciate that. You can feel everything that comes off an audience... little individual things that are going on. It's a very instant thing."

Outside the tour bus is ticking over and filling up with musicians and road crew, and one of the gospel quartet is doing a soft shoe shuffle in the rain. Tomorrow, comes the word, is a proper interview, at the hotel. Maybe.

I went to see the gypsy, staying in a big hotel in the centre of the town, where the occasional appearance of a denim clad roadie provides colourful contrast to the assembled grey ranks of German businessmen.

Pre-match nerves vanish as I trot out onto the turf of Dylan's fourth floor suite. To one side, a tv flickers without sound. Dylan wanders in wearing a black leather jacket and white jeans, and we start committing words to tape. He talks slowly, his speaking voice deeper than you'd expect from his singing, and not at all like sand and glue. The replies come carefully considered and usually as evasive and non-committal as we've come to expect over the years.

**NS:** Somone told me you'd been working with Smokey Robinson. is that right?

**BD:** No... we were doing a session, along with Ringo and Willy, as he was rehearsing across the street with his new band, a new show. I'd seen him on the street going in so we went out on a break and said hello.

**NS:** You didn't work with him?

**BD:** No.

**NS:** Are you pleased with the new album?

**BD:** The last time I heard it I was. I haven't heard it since I left for Chicago. Which was at the beginning of June. I was satisfied enough to leave town.

**NS:** The sound is a lot rawer. A much looser sound.

**BD:** Well, I had more control over this record... That's the type of record I like to make. I just haven't been able to make them.

**NS:** Why's that?

**BD:** Well, usually, I've been working quickly in the studio, and for one reason or another I just get locked into whoever's producing, their sound, and I just wanna get it over with.

**NS:** Who produced this one?

**BD:** Chuck (Plotkin) and myself produced it. Bumps Blackwell did 'Shot of Love' with me, which he helped with a great deal. You remember him?

**NS:** No, who's that?

**BD:** Bumps did all the early Little Richard records and Don and Dewey records; he handled all the speciality records.

**NS:** That's the rockiest track, right? The rest is bluesy, or some of it has a reggae lilt. Do you still like reggae?

**BD:** There's not much difference between country and reggae when you take away the bass and the drums; they're very similar.

**NS:** You've always seemed to have one foot in rock'n'roll, Little Richard and all that, and the other in blues, folk, country, traditions...

**BD:** Well, I love it all, whatever might be popular at the moment.

**NS:** Do you still do everything in a couple of takes?

**BD:** On this album we did.

**NS:** I'd heard you like to work in a very spontaneous way.

**BD:** With this new band we can usually work very quickly with a new tune.

**NS:** Is it nearer your 'mercurial sound' with this band?

**BD:** Yeah... it's a little hard to produce that on stage of course. The only time we were able to do that was with The Band on those Bob Dylan and The Band tours in the 60s. Because the sound back then was so raw and primitive the sound systems wouldn't give us anything else. And when The Beatles played, you could never hear The Beatles. Even The Stones' people were screaming and there wasn't much sound. You could never hear what you were doing.

**NS:** I have to ask you about the Lenny Bruce song ('Lenny Bruce is Dead'). You said it was very spontaneous.

**BD:** That was a really quick song for me to write. I wrote that in about five minutes... I didn't even know why I was writing it, it just naturally came out. I wasn't, you know, meditating on Lenny Bruce before I wrote it.

**NS:** It's a very compassionate song.

**BD:** It is.

**NS:** It's in the tradition of your songs about folk heroes like 'Hurricane', 'George Jackson'...

**BD:** I thought 'Joey' was a good song. I know no one said much about it, I thought it was one of those songs that came off and you didn't hear that much about it.

**NS:** Looking at the other songs on the album there are a lot of criticisms of people in high places. Would you say that's true?

**BD:** (Laughs) Yeah, that's always true I guess... I don't really know, y'know. I'm not sure how it hangs together as a concept because there were some real long songs on this album that we recorded, a couple of really long songs, like there was one we did - do you remember 'Visions of Johanna'?

**NS:** Sure.

**BD:** Well, there was one like that. I'd never done anything like it before. It's got the same kind of thing to it. It seems to be very sensitive and gentle on one level, then on another level the lyrics aren't sensitive and gentle at all. We left that off the album.

We left another thing off the album which is quite different to anything I wrote, that I think in just a musical kind of way you'd like to hear. And in a lyric-content way it's interesting. The way the story line changes from third person to first person and that person becomes you, then these people are there and they're not there. And then the time goes way back and then it's brought up to the present. And I thought it was really effective, but that again is a long song and when it came to putting the songs on the album we had to cut some, so we cut those. Now what we have left is an album which seems to make its kind of general statement, but it's too soon to say what that general statement is.

**NS:** There's a reference to "the politics of sin" on 'Dead Man'.

**BD:** Yeah, well that's what sin is, politics. It just came to me when I was writing that's the way it is... the diplomacy of sin. The way they take sin, and put it in front of people... the way that they say this is good and that's bad, you can do this and you can't do that, the way sin is taken and split up and categorised and put on different levels so it becomes more of a structure of sin, or, "these sins are big ones, these are little ones, these can hurt this person, these can hurt you, this is bad for this reason, and that is bad for another reason." the politics of sin; that's what I think of it.

**NS:** Do you still feel politics is part of the illusion?

**BD:** I've never really been into politics, mostly I guess because of the world of politics. The people who are into politics as a profession, you know, it's... the art of politics hasn't changed much over the years. Were there politics in Roman times? And are there politics in communist countries? I'm sure there are.

**NS:** You feel what the world is facing is more of a spiritual crisis?

**BD:** Oh yeah, definitely. Definitely. People don't know who the enemy is. They think the enemy is something they can see, and the reality of the enemy is a spiritual being they can't see, and it influences all they can see and they don't go to the top, the end line of the real enemy - like the enemy who's controlling who you think who's your enemy.

**NS:** Who's that?

**BD:** What, who you think your enemy is?

**NS:** Yes.

**BD:** You would think the enemy is someone you could strike at and that would solve the problem, but the real enemy is the devil. That's the real enemy, but he tends to shade himself and hide himself and put it into people's minds that he's really not there and he's really not so bad, and that he's got a lot of good things to offer too. So there's this conflict going, to blind the minds of men.

**NS:** A conflict in all of us?

**BD:** Yeah, he puts the conflict there, without him there'd be no conflict.

**NS:** Maybe that struggle is necessary?

**BD:** Well, that's a whole other subject... yes, I've heard that said too.

**NS:** When you said "strengthen the things that remain" (from 'When You Gonna Wake Up') what were you thinking of?

**BD:** Well, the things that remain would be the basic qualities that don't change, the values that do still exist. It says in the bible, "resist not evil, but overcome evil with good". And the values that can overcome evil are the ones to strengthen.

**NS:** People feel that fighting oppression is more important than spiritual interests.

**BD:** That's wrong. The struggle against oppression and injustice is always going to be there, but the devil himself is the one who creates it. You can come to know yourself, but you need help in doing it.

The only one who can overcome all that is the great creator himself. If you can get his help you can overcome it. To do that you must know something about the nature of the creator. What Jesus does for an ignorant man like myself is to make the qualities and characteristics of God more believable to me, cos I can't beat the devil. Only God can. He already has. Satan's working everywhere. You're faced with him constantly. If you can't see him

he's inside you making you feel a certain way. He's feeding you envy and jealousy, he's feeding you oppression, hatred...

**NS:** Do you feel the only way to know the creator is through Christ?

**BD:** I feel the only way... let me see. Of course you can look on the desert and wake up to the sun and the sand and the beauty of the stars and know there is a higher being, and worship that creator.

But being thrown into the cities you're faced more with man than with God. We're dealing here with man, y'know, and in order to know where man's at you have to know what God would do if he was man. I'm trying to explain to you in intellectual mental terms, when it actually is more of a spiritual understanding than something which is open to debate.

**NS:** You can't teach people things they don't experience for themselves...

**BD:** Most people think that if God became a man he would go up on a mountain and raise his sword and show his anger and his wrath or his love and compassion in one blow. And that's what people expected the Messiah to be - someone with similar characteristics, someone to set things straight, and here comes a Messiah who doesn't measure up to those characteristics and causes a lot of problems.

**NS:** Someone who put the responsibility back on us?

**BD:** Right.

**NS:** From your songs like 'Dead Man' and 'When He Returns' it's obvious you believe the second coming is likely in our lifetimes.

**BD:** Possibly. Possibly at any moment. It could be in our lifetimes. It could be a long time. This earth supposedly has a certain number of years which I think is 7,000 years, 7,000 or 6,000.

We're in the last cycle of it now. Going back to the first century there's like 3000 years before that and 4000 after it, one of the two, the last thousand would be the millenium years.

I think that everything that's happened is like a preview of what's going to happen.

**NS:** How strict is your interpretation of Christianity? The original Christians seems to have a different faith and belief that got lost.

**BD:** I'm not that much of a historian about Christianity. I know it's been changed over the years but I go strictly according to the gospels.

**NS:** Have you seen the gnostic gospels?

**BD:** Some place I have. I don't recall too much about them but I've seen them.

**NS:** Are you going to make any more movies?

**BD:** If we can get a story outline we will, I'd like to.

**NS:** Renaldo and Clara was very symbolist, and your songs on 'Street Legal' were full of Tarot imagery. Have those interests left you now?

**BD:** Those particular interests have, yes.

**NS:** Do you think that 'occult' interests like the Tarot are misleading?

**BD:** I don't know. I didn't get into the Tarot cards all that deeply. I do think they're misleading for people though. You're fixed on something which keeps a hold on you. If you can't or don't understand why you're feeling this way at that moment, with those cards you come up with a comfortable feeling that doesn't have any necessary value.

**NS:** You were also interested in Judaism at one point. You visited Israel and the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Do you feel that your interests at that time are compatible with your present beliefs?

**BD:** There's really no difference between any of it in my mind. Some people say they're Jews and they never go to a synagogue or anything. I know some gangsters who say they're Jews. I don't know what that's got to do with anything. Judaism is really the laws of Moses. If you follow the laws of Moses you're automatically a Jew I would think.

**NS:** You've always had a strong religious theme in your songs even before you became a Christian.

**BD:** (Angrily) I don't really want to walk around with a sign on me saying 'Christian'.

**NS:** It might appear that way to a lot of people...

**BD:** Yeah, but a lot of people want to hang a sign on you for whatever. It's like Mick Jagger said, 'they wanna hang a sign on you'.

**NS:** In a Playboy interview three years ago you said you agreed with Henry Miller's saying that "the purpose of the artist is to inoculate the world with disillusionment". Do you still agree with that?

**BD:** (Laughs) That's pretty good for Henry Miller... maybe that would be good for what he wanted to do. Maybe that's the purpose of his art.

**NS:** Not yours?

**BD:** Well, what I do is more of an immediate thing; to stand up on stage and sing - you get it back immediately. It's not like writing a book or even making a record. And with a movie - it's so difficult to get anything back working on a movie, you never know what you're doing and the results never come in until usually years afterwards. What I do is so immediate it changes the nature, the concept, of art to me. I don't know what it is. It's too immediate. It's like the man who made that painting there (points to painting on wall of hotel room) has no idea we're sitting here now looking at it or not looking at it or anything... performing is more like a stage play.

**NS:** You haven't painted your masterpiece yet then?

**BD:** No. I don't know if I ever will, I've given up thinking about it though.



# **SUNDAY TIMES, JULY 1, 1984**

*Interviewer : Mick Brown*

*Printed in "Sunday Times" 1 July 1984, reprinted in "Step Into The Arena"*

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**DYLAN 'Jesus, who's got time to keep up with the times?'**

This week Bob Dylan comes to Britain. The folksinger-cum-folk hero of the 1960s has not always had a good reception here. In 1965 purists attacked him for "going electric". In 1981 his new-found evangelism left many of his fans cold. What should they expect this time? Last week Mick Brown had an exclusive interview.

Bob Dylan tugged at a cigarette, stroked the beginnings of an untidy beard and gazed pensively at the stream of traffic passing down the Madrid street. "What you gotta understand," he said at length, "is that I do something because I feel like doing it. If people can relate to it, that's great; if they can't, that's fine too. But I don't think I'm gonna be really understood until maybe 100 years from now. What I've done, what I'm doing, nobody else does or has done."

The messianic tone grew more intense. "When I'm dead and gone maybe people will realise that, and then figure it out. I don't think anything I've done has been evenly mildly hinted at. There's all these interpreters around, but they're not interpreting anything except their own ideas. Nobody's come close."

But a lot of people, it seems, still want to. Bob Dylan may no longer sell records in the consistently enormous quantities he once did - a fact to which he will allow a tinge of regret - but his capacity to hold his audience in thrall seems undiminished.

By the time Bob Dylan arrives in Britain this week for performances at St. James's Park, Newcastle, on Tuesday and Wembley Stadium on Saturday, he will already have performed to almost half a million people throughout Europe - half a million people singing the chorus of *Blowing In The Wind*, an esperanto that is as much a testament to Dylan's abiding influence and charisma as the insatiable interest of the world's press in his activities.

This interest is equalled only by Dylan's determination to keep his own counsel whenever possible. As Bill Graham, the tour's garrulous American promoter and Dylan's closest adviser, keeps reminding you, Bob "is not your everyday folksinger."

All the German magazine Stern had wanted to do was touch base for five minutes in return for a front cover. Dylan declined. The press conference that he had been persuaded to hold in Verona, attended by 150 excitable European journalists, had been a fiasco: photographers barred, and the first question from the floor - "What are your religious views nowadays?" - met by Dylan irritably brushing the table in front of him, as if to sweep aside that and all other questions to follow.

"I mean, nobody cares what Billy Joel's religious views are, right?" he tells me with a wry smile. "what does it matter to people what Bob Dylan is? But it seems to, right? I'd honestly like to know why it's important to them."

One expects many things of Bob Dylan, but such playful ingenuousness is not one of them.

Dylan protects himself well, not with bodyguards but with a smokescreen of privacy and elusiveness of the sort that encourages speculation and myth. Meeting him involves penetrating a frustrating maze of "perhapses" and "maybes", of cautions and briefings - suggestive of dealing with fine porcelain - culminating in a telephone call summoning you to an anonymous cafeteria filled with Spanish families who give not a second glance to the figure in a hawaiian shirt and straw hat who at last comes ambling through the door.

He is surprisingly genial, youthful for his 43 years, lean, interested and alert, who treat the business of being Bob Dylan with an engagingly aw-shucks kind of bemusement.

It was in striking contrast to the apparition Dylan had presented the previous night, on stage in front of 25,000 people in a Madrid football stadium, his black smock coat, high boots and hawkish profile suggesting some avenging backwoods preacher.

The emphasis in his performance has shifted from the overtly evangelical songs heard in Dylan's last visit to Britain three years ago. Now it spans every phase of his 21-year career. The themes of social protest, personal love and religious faith have never been more of a piece. Dylan remains what he has always been, an uncompromising moralist. And to hear songs such as "Masters Of War", "A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall" (about nuclear war), and "Maggie's Farm" (about rebellious labour) invested with fresh nuances of meaning, not to say vitriol, is to realise that, while the sentiments may have become unfashionable in popular music, they are no less pertinent. Nobody else is writing songs like Bob Dylan. Nobody ever did.

"For me, none of the songs I've written has really dated," he says. "They capture something I've never been able to improve on, whatever their statement is. A song like "Maggie's Farm" - I could feel like that just the other day, and I could feel the same tomorrow. People say they're 'nostalgia', but I don't know what that means really. A Tale of Two Cities was written 100 years ago; is that nostalgia? This term 'nostalgia', it's just another way people have of dealing with you and putting you some place they think they understand. It's just another label."

Labels exercise Bob Dylan greatly. People have been trying to put them on him since he started, he says, "and not one of them has ever made any sense."

The furore about his religious beliefs puzzled him most of all, "like I was running for pope or something." When the word first spread that he had eschewed Judaism and embraced Christianity, and he toured America in 1979 singing overtly religious songs, the most hostile reception came not from rock audiences but when he played university campuses, "and the so-called intellectual students showed their true monstrous selves."

"Born-again christians" is just another label, he says. He had attended bible school in California for three months, and the book was never far from his side, but the idea that faith was a matter of passing through one swing door and back out another struck him as ridiculous. "I live by a strict disciplinary code, you know, but I don't know how moral that is or even where it comes from really. These things just become part of your skin after a while; you get to know what line not to step over - usually because you stepped over it before and were lucky to get back."

Was he an ascetic? Dylan lit another cigarette and asked what the word meant. "I don't think so. I still have desires, you know, that lead me around once in a while. I don't do things in excess, but everybody goes through those times. They either kill you, or make you a better person."

By this time in the conversation it did not seem awkward to ask: did he believe in evil?

"Sure I believe in it. I believe that ever since Adam and Eve got thrown out of the garden that the whole nature of the planet has been heading in one direction - towards apocalypse. It's all there in the Book of Revelations, but it's difficult talking about these things to most people because most people don't know what you're talking about, or don't want to listen."

"What it comes down to is that there's a lot of different gods in the world against the god - that's what it's about. There's a lot of different gods that people are subjects of. There's the god of mammon. Corporations are gods. Governments? No, governments don't have much to do with it anymore, I don't think. Politics is a hoax. The politicians don't have any real power. They feed you all this stuff in the newspapers about what's going on, but that's not what's really going on.

"But then again, I don't think that makes me a pessimistic person. I'm a realist. Or maybe a surrealist. But you can't beat your head against the wall forever."

He had never, he said, been a utopian: that was always a foreign term to him, something to do with moving to the country, living communally, and growing rice and beans. "I mean, I wanted to grow my own rice and beans - still do - but I never felt part of that movement."

But he could still look back on the 1960s with something approaching affection. "I mean, the Kennedys were great-looking people, man, they had style," he smiles. "America is not like that anymore. But what happened, happened so fast that people are still trying to figure it out. The tv media wasn't so big then. It's like the only thing people knew was what they knew; then suddenly people were being told what to think, how to behave, there's too much information.

"It just got suffocated. Like woodstock - that wasn't about anything. It was just a whole new market for tie-dyed t-shirts. It was about clothes. All those people are in computers now."

This was beyond him. He had never been good with numbers, and had no desire to stare at a screen. "I don't feel obliged to keep up with the times. I'm not going to be here that long anyway. So I keep up with these times, then I gotta keep up with the 90s. Jesus, who's got time to keep up with the times?"

It is at moments such as this that Dylan - once, misleadingly perhaps, characterised as a radical - reveals himself as much of a traditionalist; an adherent of biblical truths; a firm believer in the family and the institution of marriage - despite his own divorce from his wife, Sara; a man disenchanted with many of the totems and values of modern life, mass communications, the vulgarity of popular culture, the "sameness" of everything. Personally he had been reading Cicero, Machiavelli and John Stuart Mill. Contemporary literature? "Oh yeah, I read a detective story, but I can't remember what it was called."

"At least in the 1960s it seemed there was room to be different. For me, my particular scene, I came along at just the right time, and I understood the times I was in. If I was starting out right now I don't know where I'd get the inspiration from, because you need to breathe the right air to make the creative process work. I don't worry about it so much for me; I've done it; I can't complain. But the people coming up, the artists and writers, what are they gonna do, because these are the people who change the world."

Nowadays, he admits, he finds writing harder than ever. A song like "Masters of War" he would despatch in 15 minutes, and move onto the next one without a second thought. "If I wrote a song like that now I wouldn't feel I'd have to write another one for two weeks. There's still things I want to write about, but the process is harder. The old records I used to make, by the time they came out I wouldn't even want them released because I was already so far beyond them."

Much of his time nowadays is spent travelling. He was in Jerusalem last autumn for his son Jesse's bar-mitzvah - "his grandmother's idea", he smiles. Israel interests him from "a biblical point of view", but he had never felt that atavistic Jewish sense of homecoming. In fact he lives principally on his farm in Minnesota, not far from the town of Hibbing where he spent his adolescence. Then there is the domed house in Malibu, California, originally built to accomodate his five children - good schools nearby, he says - but which he has seldom used since his divorce, and a 63ft sailing boat with which he cruises the Caribbean "when I can't think of anything else to do."

He had never contemplated retirement: the need to make money was not a factor - he is a wealthy man - but the impulse to continue writing was. "There's never really been any glory in it for me," he says. "Being seen in the places and having everybody put their arms around you, I never cared about any of that. I don't care what people think. For me, the fulfilment was always in just doing it. That's all that really matters."

As the conversation had progressed, more and more people had realised who the man in the straw hat was. A steady stream had made their way to his table, scraps of paper in hand. Dylan had signed them all, with a surprisingly careful deliberation - almost as if he was practising - but his discomfort at being on view was becoming more apparent. As peremptorily as he arrived, Bob Dylan made his excuses and left.



## **BONO VOX INTERVIEW JULY 8, 1984**

*Conducted at the Slane Castle, Dublin, Ireland prior to Dylan's show. Both Bono and Van Morrison were later guests at the show, Van Morrison doing his usual It's All Over Now, Baby Blue and Bono joining Dylan on Blowin' In The Wind. Published in the Irish music paper 'Hot Press'. Reprinted in the bookleg 'Talkin' Bob Dylan ... (1984)'*

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*(What was it you wanted? #6)*

**Bono:** You have been to Ireland before, haven't you?

**Dylan:** Yeah, I was in Belfast and in Dublin, and we travelled around a little bit too.

**Bono:** Have you ever spent any time here? Have you ever been here on holiday?

**Dylan:** Yeah, well, when I was here, we travelled by car, so we stayed in different places - but Irish music has always been a

great part of my life because I used to hang out with the Clancy Brothers. They influenced me tremendously.

**Bono:** Yeah, they have so much balls as a sound, you know, when they sing, it's like punk rock.

**Dylan:** Yeah, they were playing clubs as big as this room right here and the place - you couldn't put a pin in it, it would be so packed with people.

**Bono:** You could smell their breath?

**Dylan:** Yeah!

**Bono:** I bet you could. They blow you over with their lungs! God, I'd love to sing like that.

**Dylan:** Yeah, I spent years with them running around, 61, 62, 63.

**Bono:** Greenwich Village?

**Dylan:** All over the place, I played on the same bill with them once.

**Bono:** Get their autographs? (laughs)

**Dylan:** No, I didn't get their autograph. But you know one of the things I recall from that time is how great they all were - I mean there is no question, but that they were great. But Liam Clancy was always my favorite singer, as a ballad singer. I just never heard anyone as good, and that includes Barbara Streisand and Pearl Bailey.

**Bono:** You got to be careful here!

**Dylan:** He's just a phenomenal ballad singer.

**Bono:** Yeah, you know what I envy of you is that my music, and the music of U2 is like, it's in space somewhere. There is no particular musical roots or heritage that we plug into. In Ireland there is a tradition, but I've never plugged into it. It's like as if we're caught in space. There's a few groups now who are caught in space...

**Dylan:** Well, you have to reach back.

**Bono:** We never did play a 12 bar.

**Dylan:** You have to reach! There's another group I used to listen to called the McPeake Family. I don't know if you ever heard of them?

**Bono:** The McPeake Family! I'd love to have heard of them, with a name like that.

**Dylan:** They are great. Paddy Clancy recorded them. He had a label called Tradition Records, and he used to bring back these records; they recorded for Prestige at the time, and Tradition Records, his company. They were called The McPeake family. They were even more rural than the Clancy Brothers. The Clancy Brothers had always that touch of commerciality to them - you didn't mind it, but it was still there, whereas the McPeake Family sang with harps. The old man, he played the harp - and it was that (gestures) big - and the drums.

**Bono:** Were they a real family?

**Dylan:** Yeah, they were a real family; if you go to a record store and as for a McPeake Family record, I Don't know, I'm sure you could still get them in a lot of places.

**Bono:** Have you heard of an Irish group that are working now in this middle ground between traditional and contemporary music called Clannad? Clannad is Gaelic for family, and they've made some very powerful pieces of music, including a song called "Theme From Harry's Game", it's from a film, and it knocked over everyone in Europe. It didn't get played in the US. It's just vocal and they used some low bass frequencies in it as well - it's just beautiful. They're a family, they come from Donegal, and have worked from that same base of traditional music.

**Dylan:** There's a group you have here, what's it called, Plankston?

**Bono:** Planxty.

**Dylan:** They're great!

**Bono:** Another rock'n'roll band!

**Dylan:** Yeah, but when I think of what's happening - I think they're great.

**Bono:** There's another group called De Dannan. The name De Dannan has something to do with with the lost tribes of Dan. You

heard of the disappearing tribe of Dan? They say they came from Ireland.

**Dylan:** Yeah, I've heard that, I've heard that.

**Bono:** I'm not a musicologist or expert in this area, but it would appear that this is true. Also, you know they say the Irish musical scale has no roots in Europe whatsoever, rather it comes from Africa and India. The Cartesian people, the Egyptian people, what gave them supremacy in the Middle East was the sail they developed. I forget what they call it, I forget the name of the sail, but this sail allowed them to become successful sea farers and traders and they dominated as a result of their reading, and that same sail which was used on those boats, is used on the West of Ireland.

**Dylan:** Is that right?

**Bono:** Bob Quinn made a film called Atlanteans in which this theory was elaborated. He suggests that the book of Kells, which is a manuscript, part of it has it's roots in Coptic script, not in Europe. It's not a European thing at all - it's linked from Africa, Spain, Brittany and Ireland, because that was a sea route. I'm not an expert. I shouldn't be talking about it really. But it's of interest when you think of it.

**Dylan:** Sure it is.

**Bono:** I might be able to send you over some tapes of that actually.

**Dylan:** I'd like to have them. You know Planxty? I also like Paul Brady a lot.

**Bono:** Yeah, he's great. He's a real song writer. Tell me - have you ever approached a microphone, not with words, but just to sing? I had to do this as a necessity once when some lyrics of mine were stolen - and I learnt to sing on the microphone just singing and working the words into it later. I find when I put a pen in my hand it gets in the way! Do you have words first?

**Dylan:** I do at certain times.

**Bono:** In Portland, Oregon a number of years ago two pretty girls walked in the dressing room, smiled and walked out with some of our songs, in a brief case.

**Dylan:** I used to have that happen to me all the time, except they used to take clothes!

**Bono:** Is that right?

**Dylan:** They used to take all my best clothes, but never took my songs.

**Bono:** After that we had to go in to record our second LP, October, without any songs - there was a lot of pressure. Having to sing under that stress without any words, I found out a lot of things about myself that I didn't even know were there. I'd wondered, had some of the things that have come out of you ever been a surprise to you?

**Dylan:** That usually happens at concerts or shows I'm doing, more than recording studios. Also, I never sit around, I usually play ... I'll play my guitar, rather than just have something to say, to express myself. I can express it better with my guitar.

**Bono:** I wondered had the songs that you were writing ever frightened you in some way?

**Dylan:** Oh yeah, I've written some songs that that did that. The songs that I wrote for the 'Slow Train' album did that. I wrote those songs. I didn't plan to write them, but I wrote them anyway. I didn't like writing them, I didn't want to write them. I didn't figure ... I just didn't want to write them songs at that period of time. But I found myself writing these songs and after I had a certain amount of them, I thought I didn't want to sing them, so I had a girl sing them for me at the time, and what I wanted to do was .... she's a great singer ....

**Bono:** Who is this?

**Dylan:** A girl I was singing with at the time, Carolyn Dennis her name was. I gave them all to her and had her record them, and not even put my name on them. But I wanted the songs out; I wanted them out, but \*I\* didn't want to do it because I knew that it wouldn't be perceived in that way. It would just mean more pressure. I just did not want that at that time.

**Bono:** But are you a trouble maker? Is there something in you that wants trouble that an album like 'Slow Train' stirs up? Do you wanna fight? Do you wanna box!?

**Dylan:** I don't know! I mean, I wanna piss people off once in a while, but boxing or fighting - it would be an exercise to do it. You know, I love to do it, but not with anything at stake.

**Bono:** Chess, do you play chess?

**Dylan:** Yeah, I play chess. Are you a chess player?

**Bono:** I am a chess player.

**Dylan:** I'm not that good actually.

**Bono:** I'll challenge you to a game of chess.

**Dylan:** I don't have it right now actually, I just don't have one on me, but the next time you see me!

**Bono:** Oh, you can get these little ones you know, that you can carry around.

**Dylan:** Yeah, I take them on tour all the time, but nobody in the band will play me.

**Bono:** Really?

**Dylan:** Yeah, they say it's an ego trip. They say I want to win, I don't want to win, I just like to play.

**Bono:** When you put out a record that causes trouble - is it part of an overall plan, or do you just do it?

**Dylan:** No, I don't ever put out a record to cause trouble - if it causes trouble, it causes trouble, that's apart from me. If it causes trouble, that's other people's problem. It's not my problem. I'm just not going to put out a record that I just feel - you know, if I feel like I'm inspired to make a statement, I'll make that statement. But what happens after I do it, I don't care about that.

**Bono:** What's your opening game?

**Dylan:** My opening game, you mean king's pawn up two - and all that? I don't know.

**Bono:** You just takes it as it comes.

**Dylan:** Yeah. I don't really play that seriously.

**Bono:** Well, I thought I did until I played Adam's brother Sebastian - he was only about 13 years old and he beat me!

**Dylan:** Somebody may have a chess game here.

**Bono:** I'd love to play.

*searching for a chess board ... enter Van Morrison*

**Bono:** You haven't used any synthesizers on your records so far?

**Dylan:** No, I've never used those machines.

**Bono:** The Fairlight Music Computer - have you heard of that?

**Dylan:** Fairlight?

**Bono:** Van, what do you think of electronic music?

**Morrison:** I like the music Brian Eno plays.

**Bono:** He speaks very highly of you. He's producing our record right now.

**Morrison:** Say hello.

**Bono:** (to Bob) Do you know Brian Eno?

**Dylan:** Brian Eno? I don't know Brian Eno, but I know some of his work.

**Bono:** When you're working with a producer, do you give him the lee-way to challenge you?

**Dylan:** Yeah, if he feels like it. But usually we just go into the studio and sing a song, and play the music, and have, you know ...

**Bono:** Have you had somebody in the last five years who said "That's crap, Bob"?

**Dylan:** Oh, they say that all the time!

**Bono:** Mark Knopfler, did he say that?

**Dylan:** I don't know, they spend time getting their various songs right, but with me, I just take a song into the studio and try to rehearse it, and then record it, and then do it. It's a little harder now though to make a good record - even if you've got a good

song and a good band. Even if you go in and record it live, it's not gonna sound like it used to sound, because the studios now are so modern, and overly developed, that you can take anything good and you can press it and squeeze it and squash it, and constipate it and suffocate it. You do a great performance in the studio and you listen back to it because the speakers are all so good, but, ah, no!

**Bono:** All technology does is - you go into a dead room with dead instruments and you use technology to give it life that it doesn't have, and then it comes out of the speakers and you believe it. What I've been trying to do is find a room that has life in itself.

**Dylan:** Yeah.

**Bono:** A 'living' room.

**Dylan:** The machines though, can even take the life out of that room, I've found. You can record in St Peter's Cathedral, you know, and they still make it sound like, eh, ...

**Bono:** Somebody's backyard.

**Dylan:** Yeah.

**Dylan:** That's a good idea. I'd love to record in a cathedral.

**Dylan:** You know the studios in the old days were all much better, and the equipment so much better, there's no question about it in my mind. You just walked into a studio, they were just big rooms, you just sang, you know, you just made records; and they sounded like the way they sounded there. That stopped happening in the late Sixties, for me anyway. I noticed the big change. You go into a studio now and they got rugs on the floor, settees and pinball machines and videos and sandwiches coming every ten minutes. It's a big expensive party and you're lucky if you come out with anything that sounds decent.

**Bono:** Yeah, records haven't got better, have they?

**Dylan:** No, you go in now, you got your producer, you got your engineer, you got your assistant engineer, usually your assistant producer, you got a guy carrying the tapes around. I mean, you know, there's a million people go into recording just an acoustic song on your guitar. The boys turn the machines on and it's a great undertaking.

**Bono:** There's a system called Effanel which Mick Fleetwood from Fleetwood Mac brought to Africa. It was built for him because he wanted to get some real African drummin', for "Tusk". We've used that system. It comes in a light suitcase, very small, no bullshit studio, and it just arrives, you can literally bring it to your living room.

**Morrison:** I think all the same they'll go back to 2-track eventually.

**Bono:** There's a guy called Conny Plank, who lives in Germany. He's a producer I think. He produced Makem and Clancy and some Irish traditional bands, also orchestral and funnily enough a lot of the new electronic groups, DAF, Ultravox, and so on. He used to record orchestras by just finding a position in the room where they were already balanced and he applies this in his thinking, in recording modern music: he finds a place in the room where it's already mixed.

**Morrison:** I don't know, when I started we didn't think about that! You didn't even think about recording ... (laughs)

**Bono:** You didn't even think!

**Morrison:** You didn't even know what was on the cards. One day you were in the room, they turned the tape on. After about eight hours or so, they'd say, 'OK, tea break, it's over'.

**Dylan:** Yeah, next song, next song!

**Morrison:** And that was that - it was an album.

**Dylan:** Yeah, you'd make an album on three days or four days and it was over - if that many! It's that long now ... it takes four days to get a drum sound.

**Bono:** Do you know the Monty Python team, they're comedians, British comedians, 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail'. They have a sketch that reminds me of you guys - sitting back talking of days gone by: "You tell that to the young people of today and they'd never believe you". But you can't go backwards, you must go forward. You try to bring the values that were back there, you know, the strength, and if you see something that was lost, you got to find a new way to capture that same strength. Have you any idea of how to do that? I think you've done it by the way ... I think 'Shot Of Love', that opening track has that.

**Dylan:** I think so too, You're one of the few people to say that to me about that record, to mention that record to me.

**Bono:** That has *\*that\** feeling.

**Dylan:** It's a great record, it suits just about everybody.

**Bono:** The sound from that record makes me feel like I'm in the same room as the other musicians. I don't feel like they're over *\*there\**. Some of our records, I feel like they're over there because we got into this cinema type sound, not bland like FM sound, but we got into this very broad sound. Now we're trying to focus more of a punch, and that's what we are after, this intimacy .... I've never interviewed anybody before, by the way. I hate being interviewed myself.

**Morrison:** You're doing a good job!

**Bono:** Is this OK?. Good! What records do you listen to?

**Dylan:** What records do I listen to? New records? I don't know, just the old records really. Robert Johnson. I still listen to those records that I listened to when I was growing up - they really changed my life. They still change my life. They still hold up, you know. The Louvain Brothers, Hank Williams, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Charlie Patton, I always liked to listen to him.

**Bono:** I just bought Woody Guthrie's 'Bound For Glory'. I'm just a beginner when it comes to America. I mean, it's changed me. When you go the US, coming from this country, it's more than a different continent ....

**Morrison:** It's shell shock.

**Bono:** Yeah, coming from troubled Ireland, it's the real shell shock! I'm just getting acquainted with American music and literature. Do you still see Allen Ginsberg?

**Dylan:** I run across Allen from time to time, yeah, Gregory Corsos's back now, he's doing some readings, I think he's just published a new book.

**Bono:** I've just been reading this book 'Howl'.

**Dylan:** Oh, that's very powerful. That's another book that changed me. 'Howl', 'On the Road', 'Dharma Bums'.

**Morrison:** (to Bono) Have you read 'On the Road'?

**Bono:** Yes I have, I'm just starting that. You have a reference in one of your songs to John Donne, 'Rave On John Donne'. Have you read his poetry?

**Morrison:** I was reading it at the time.

**Dylan:** (to Bono) You heard the songs - Brendan Behan's songs?

**Bono:** Yeah.

**Dylan:** 'Royal Canal', you know the 'Royal Canal'?

**Morrison:** His brother wrote it. His name is Dominic.

**Dylan:** Oh, Dominic wrote 'Royal Canal'?

**Bono:** You know Brendan's son hang out around here in Dublin. He's a good guy, I believe.

**Dylan:** I know the solo lyrics to the 'Royal Canal'. I used to sing it all the time.

**Bono:** How does it go?

**Dylan:** (sings) 'The hungry feeling came over me stealing, as the mice were squalling in my prison cell'.

**Bono:** That's right, yeah!

**Dylan:** (continues) 'That old triangle went jingle jangle, all along the banks of the Royal Canal'.

**Bono:** That's right, when did you read that?

**Dylan:** (there's no way stopping him now) 'In the female prison there's seventy women. It's all over there that I want to dwell. And that old triangle goes jingle jangle, all along the banks of the Royal Canal'.

**Bono:** Have you been to the Royal Canal?

**Dylan:** No I used to sing that song though. Every night.

**Bono:** Our music - as I was saying earlier - it doesn't have those roots.

**Morrison:** Yeah, there was a break in the lineage. I sussed that out when I went to see Thin Lizzy years ago, the first night in L.A.

and I was watching at the back of the stage and I realized that the music was a complete cut in the connection between the end of the Sixties and the middle of the Seventies - a severing of the traditional lineage of groups.

**Bono:** I like to know more about roots music. I'm hungry for a past.

**Morrison:** You know you should listen to some of that stuff.

**Bono:** I will. I've been listening to some gospel music, you know, like the Swan Silvertones, and stuff like that.

**Dylan:** That's US stuff though.

**Morrison:** US stuff, but the British stuff you should listen to, you know, like some of the old stuff, like the Yardbirds.

**Bono:** Yeah, I've got some of their tapes recently, some real good tapes.

**Dylan:** You can still hear the McPeakes. The next generation may not be able to though. Who knows? I would hate to think that. Listen we're gonna have to get ready to play. Are you gonna stay for the show?

**Bono:** Certainly, that's what I'm here for actually.

**Dylan:** To record it, HA!



# THE BERT KLEINMAN INTERVIEW, JULY 30 1984

*Conducted by Bert Kleinman at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in New York. Also present was old time friend Artie Mogull who in 1962 signed Dylan up with Witmark & Sons. Released on DYLAN ON DYLAN, Westwood One (Radio Station Discs), Nov 17 1984.*

*Sources: Tape. Transcription in "Talkin' Bob Dylan 1984 & 1985 (Some Educated Rap)" by Stewart P. Bicker*

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*(What was it you wanted? #19)*

**B.K.:** Is it true that you taught yourself guitar and harmonica?

**Dylan:** Well, nobody really teaches themselves guitar and harmonica, you know, when you don't know anything first of all you get yourself a book or something. What I remember is learning a couple of chords from some books and then going out to watch people, you know, to see how they're doing it. You don't go so much to hear 'em ... you just go to see how they do what they do, get as close as you can, see what their fingers are doing. In those early stages it's more like a learning thing, and that can sometimes take ... years, many years. But to me I kind of picked it up fairly quickly, I didn't really play with that much technique. And people really didn't take to me because of that, because I didn't go out of my way to learn as much technique as other people ... I mean I know people who spent their whole lives learning John Lee Hooker chords, just hammering on, you know, on the E string, and that was all. But they could play it in such a beautiful way it looked like a ballet dancer. Everybody had a different style, they had styles and techniques, especially in folk-music, you know there was your southern mountain banjo, then flat picking, then your finger picking techniques, and just all of these different runs you know, different styles of ballads. Folk-music was a world that was very split-up ... and there was a purist side to it. Folk people didn't want to hear it if you couldn't play the song exactly the way that ... Aunt Molly Jackson played it. And I just kind of blazed my way through all that stuff (laughter). I would hear somebody do something and it would get to a certain point that you'd say, what do you want from that, you'd want to see what style they were playing ... I don't know I just stayed up day and night just barnstorming my way through all that stuff. And then I heard Woody Guthrie, and then it all came together for me ...

**B.K.:** Do you remember the first Woody Guthrie record you heard?

**Dylan:** Yeah, I think the first Woody Guthrie song I heard was "Pastures Of Plenty". And "Pretty Boy Floyd" and another song ... he used to write a lot of his songs from existing melodies, you know "Grand Coulee Dam". They just impressed me.

**B.K.:** Got to you?

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah. Because they were original, they just had a mark of originality on them, well the lyrics did. I just heard all those songs and I learned them all off the records. All the songs of Woody Guthrie that I could find, anybody that had a Woody Guthrie record or that knew a Woody Guthrie song. And in St. Paul at the time, where I was, there were some people around who would not only had his records but who knew his songs. So I just learned them all, some of the best records that I heard him make were these records that he made on the Stinson label, with Cisco Houston and Sonny Terry. I don't know if Leadbelly was on there too, I learned a bunch of Leadbelly's stuff too and learned how to play like that. But one of the biggest thrills I ever actually had was when I reached New York, whenever it was, and I got to play with Cisco Houston, I think I got to play with him at a party someplace. But I used to watch him, he used to play at Folk City. He was an amazing looking guy, he looked like Clark Gable, like a movie star.

**Mogull:** He reminded me a little of Tennessee Ernie actually.

**Dylan:** Yeah.

**Mogull:** Also very unheralded.

**Dylan:** Oh, completely. He was one of the great unsung heroes. One of the great American figures of all time, and no one ... you know you can ask people about him and nobody knows anything about him.

**B.K.:** When do you think you started to develop something that was uniquely yours? You were talking about playing Woody Guthrie ...

**Dylan:** Well, when I came to New York that's all I played - Woody Guthrie songs. Then about six months after that I'd stopped playing all Woody Guthrie songs. I used to play in a place called Cafe Wha?, and it always used to open at noon, and closed at six in the morning. It was just a non stop flow of people, usually they were tourists who were looking for beatniks in the Village. There'd be maybe five groups that played there. I used to play with a guy called Fred Neil, who wrote the song "Everybody's Talking" that was in the film "Midnight Cowboy". Fred was from Florida I think,

from Coconut Grove, Florida, and he used to make that scene, from Coconut Grove to Nashville to New York. And he had a strong powerful voice, almost a bass voice. And a powerful sense of rhythm ... And he used to play mostly these types of songs that Josh White might sing. I would play harmonica for him, and then once in a while get to sing a song. You know, when he was taking a break or something. It was his show, he would be on for about half an hour, then a conga group would get on, called Los Congeros, with twenty conga drummers and bongoes and steel drums. And they would sing and play maybe half an hour. And then this girl, I think she was called Judy Rainey, used to play sweet Southern Mountain Appalachian ballads, with electric guitar and small amplifier. And then another guy named Hal Waters used to sing, he used to be a sort of crooner. Then there'd be a comedian, then an impersonator, and that'd be the whole show, and this whole unit would go around non stop. And you get fed there, which was actually the best thing about the place.

**Mogull:** How long a set would you do?

**Dylan:** I'd do ... oh, about half an hour. If they didn't like you back then you couldn't play, you'd get hooted off. If they liked you, you played more, if they didn't like you, you didn't play at all. You'd play one or two songs and people would just boo or hiss ...

**B.K.:** This wasn't your own stuff you were singing there?

**Dylan:** No, I didn't start playing my old stuff until ... much later

**B.K.:** Well, when did you start to perform your own stuff?

**Dylan:** Well, I just drifted into it you know, I just started writing. Well I'd always kinda written my own songs but I never played them. Nobody played their own songs then. The only person that did that was Woody Guthrie. And then one day I just wrote a song, and the first song I ever wrote that I performed in public was the song I wrote to Woody Guthrie. And I just felt like playing it one night - and so I played it.

**B.K.:** Was writing something that'd you'd always wanted to do?

**Dylan:** No, not really. It wasn't a thing I wanted to do ever. I wanted just a song to sing, and there came a certain point where I couldn't sing anything. So I had to write what I wanted to sing 'cos nobody else was writing what I wanted to sing. I couldn't find it anywhere. If I could, I probably would have never started writing.

**B.K.:** Was the writing something that came easy to you? Because it is a craft that you do very well and you talk about it so causally.

**Dylan:** Well, yeah, it does come easy. But then ... after so many records sometimes you just don't know anymore whether ... am I doing this because I want to do it or because you think it's expected of you. Do you know what I mean? So you'd start saying, well, it's time to write a song - I'll write a song . And you'll try to do something but sometimes it just won't come out right. At those kind of times it's best just to go sing somebody's songs.

**B.K.:** Was it a lot of work writing? Was it a labour?

**Dylan:** No. it was just something I'd kinda do. You'd just sit up all night and write a song, or ... in those days I used to write a lot of songs in cafes. Or at somebody's house with the typewriter. "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" ... I wrote that in the basement of the Village Gate. All of it, at Chip Monck's, he used to have a place down there in the boiler room, an apartment that he slept in ... next to the Greenwich Hotel. And I wrote "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" down there. I'd write songs people's houses, people's apartments, wherever I was.

**B.K.:** Were you much of a polisher, I mean did you write it and then pour over it?

**Dylan:** Pretty much I'd just leave them the way they were ...

*break*

**Dylan:** Well, I don't know why I walked off that show [Ed Sullivan 1963]. I could have done something else but we'd rehearsed the song so many times and everybody had heard it. They'd run through the show you know and they'd put you on and you'd run through your number, and it always got a good response and I was looking forward to singing it. Even Ed Sullivan seemed to really like it. I don't know who objected to it, but just before I was going to sing it they came in, and this was show time you know. They came in, there was this big huddle, I could see people talking about something. I was just getting ready to play you know ... and then someone stepped up and said I couldn't sing that song. They wanted me to sing a Clancy Brother's song, and it just didn't make sense to me to sing a Clancy Brother's song on nationwide TV at that time. So ... I just left.

**Mogull:** Do you remember that time you were down in San Juan, Puerto Rico, at the CBS convention. And ... it was being held at the San Juan Hilton I guess ... this huge record convention, and it

was just as Bob was beginning to hit. And the President of CBS at the time was a fabulous man named Goddard Lieberson. And ... they wouldn't let Bob in the hotel, because he was not wearing a tie or a jacket ...

**Dylan:** Yeah, or a shirt.

**Mogull:** And Lieberson, to his credit, told the hotel manager either he comes in the hotel or I'm pulling the whole convention out of here. Have I told the story right?

**Dylan:** Yeah, he was a big supporter of mine. Goddard Lieberson, as was John Hammond. Without those people like that I don't think anything would have happened for me. If I was to come along now, in this day, with the kind of people that are running record companies now, they would ... you know ... bar the doors I think. But you had people back then who were more entranced in individuality.

**Mogull:** And also not as insecure in their jobs.

**Dylan:** No, they ran things, you know they made decisions and it stuck. Now, I mean, it seems like everybody chats with somebody else, it's like well, I'll tell you tomorrow, call me back later, yeah we almost got deal, stuff like that.

**B.K.:** Did you get along with Lieberson okay ...?

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah, he was great ... he even used to come to some sessions of mine. He stop in and say hello you know ...

**B.K.:** Was there ever any pressure on you? I mean some people considered your music almost subversive. Although I always considered it very American.

**Dylan:** I guess they did ... I don't know. But, like I said, they seemed to run things. You know other people may have been talking under their breath or something, behind their back, and things like that. But at this time their big acts were Mitch Miller, Andy Williams, Johnny Matthis. I didn't really begin to sell many records until the second record ... and the "Subterranean Homesick Blues" that made the charts.

**B.K.:** That was an amazing single when you think of what the singles were like at the time.

**Dylan:** They made some good records then, that you know were good pop records. Not on Columbia though. Phil Spector was doing a lot of stuff at the time, and Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller ...

**B.K.:** Were you listening to a lot of pop stuff at the time?

**Dylan:** Yeah, I listened to a lot of pop stuff, but it never influenced what I was doing. At least to any great degree. It had earlier, like the really earlier stuff, when rock 'n' roll came in after Elvis, Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, those people. Chuck Berry, Little Richard, that stuff influenced me ... You know, nostalgia to me isn't really rock 'n' roll. Because when I was a youngster the music I heard was Frankie Laine, Rosemary Clooney, Denis ... what's his name? Denis Day? And you know, Dorothy Collins ... the Mills Brothers, all that stuff. When I hear stuff like that it always strikes a different chord than all the rock 'n' roll stuff. The rock 'n' roll stuff I had a conscious mind at that time, but ten years before that it was like "Mule Train" and ... Johnny Ray knocked me out. Johnny Ray was the first person to actually really knock me out.

**B.K.:** What was it? What do you think it was about Johnny Ray?

**Dylan:** Well, he was just so emotional, wasn't he? I ran into him in an elevator in Australia ... he was like one of my idols you know. I mean I was speechless, there I was in an elevator with Johnny Ray! I mean what do you say?

**B.K.:** When you started to move from the pure folk style into a more electric style, was that a tough one?

**Dylan:** We're getting into a touchy subject. (laughter).

**B.K.:** Well, I mean today you go on stage and both of those things co-exist. Nobody thinks twice.

**Dylan:** Yeah, they always did co-exist ...

**B.K.:** I'm not talking so much about that, but at least what it seemed like from the outside was that people were trying to tell you how to make your music.

**Dylan:** Oh ... there's always people trying to tell you how to do everything in your life. If you really don't know what to do and you don't care what to do - then just ask somebody's opinion. You'll get a million different opinions. If you don't want to do something, ask someone's opinion and they'll just verify it for you. The easiest way to do something is to just not ask anybody's opinion. I mean if you really believe in what you're doing ... I've just asked people's

opinion and it's been a great mistake, in different areas. In my personal life, I've asked people what do you think about doing this and they've said ... Oh Wow! ...! You know, and you end up not using it or else using it wrong.

**Mogull:** As a matter of fact I think the artist has to make the innate decision about their ...

**Dylan:** Yeah, you know what's right. When those things come you know what's right. A lot of times you might be farming around and not knowing what's right and you might do something dumb, but that's only because you don't know what to do on the first place. But if you know what's right and it strikes you at a certain time then you can usually believe that instinct. And if you act on it, then you'll be successful at it. Whatever it is.

**B.K.:** Recording is a whole other thing from being on stage. And you, from what I've read, try and record as spontaneously as possible ... ?

**Dylan:** I have yeah, I have, but I don't do that so often anymore. I used to do that ... because recording a song bores me, you know, it's like working in a coal-mine. Well I mean it's not really as serious as that, you're not completely that far underground! Maybe not in a literal sense, but ... you could be indoors for months. And then what you think is real just is just not anymore, you're just listening to sounds and your whole world is just working with tapes and things. I'm not ... I've never liked that side of things. Plus I've never gotten into it on that level, when I first recorded I just went in and recorded the songs I had, That's the way people recorded then. But people don't record that way now, and I shouldn't record that way either because they can't even get it down that way anymore. To do what I used to do, or to do what anybody used to do you have to stay in the studio a longer time to get that right. Because you know technology has messed everything up so much.

**B.K.:** It's messed it up?

**Dylan:** Yeah, it's messed it up. Technology is giving a false picture. Like if you listen to any of the records that are done now they're all done in a technology sort of way. Which is a conniving kind of way, you can dream up what you want to do and just go in and dream it up! But you go see some of that stuff live and you're gonna be very disappointed, because ... er ... I mean if you want to see some of it live. You may not want to you know. Well, I think it's messed it up, but that's progress you know. You can't go back the way it used to be. For a lot of people it's messed things up,

but then for a lot of other people it's a great advantage. In other words you can get something right now, it doesn't have to be right but you can get it right. You know, it can be totally wrong but you can get it right! And it can be done just with sound and ... We were just recording something the other night and we were gonna put some handclaps on it. And the guy sitting behind the board, he was saying 'Well do you guys wanna go out there and actually clap ...? I got a machine right here that can do that.' And the name of this thing was Roland or something. (laughter). So we went out and clapped instead. It wasn't any big deal, we could have had some machine do it ... But that's just a small example of how everything is just machine oriented you know.

**B.K.:** You talk almost like ... I don't really know how to put it ... like the world's gone here and you're old fashioned.

**Dylan:** Well, I feel I'm old fashioned, but I don't believe I'm old fashioned in the way that I'm not modern fashioned. You know on a certain level there is no old fashioned and there's no new fashioned ... really nothing has changed. I don't think I'm old fashioned in the kind of way that I feel I'm a passe person that's sitting somewhere ... you know out in Montana ... just watching it snow. But even if I was, I'm sure that would be okay.

**Mogull:** Yeah, Bob, but you can't go to a concert like Wembley and get that kind of ...

**Dylan:** Yeah, okay ... but life is like that, you don't get that many years to live, right? So how long can you manage to keep up with things ...? And when you're keeping up with things what are you keeping up with? Who buys most of the records nowadays? 12 year old kids? Who buys Michael Jackson's records? 12 year olds. 14 year olds. 16, 20 ... I don't know who buys 50 million records of somebody. You know you can't compete with a market that's geared for a market for 12 year olds. You know you have rock 'n' roll critics that are 40 years old writing about records that are geared for people that are 10 years old! And making an intellectual philosophy out of it.

**B.K.:** But you don't listen to that stuff?

**Dylan:** No I don't listen to that stuff, and I don't listen to those critics. I've come up with a lot of people who should know whole a lot better, who have made a career about writing about rock 'n' roll. Writing about rock 'n' roll ...! I mean ... you know, how indecent can you be? Well, I'm not saying that it's all bad, people have to express themselves. So rock 'n' roll gives them a thrill, or did give them a thrill. Well most of the people that I can think of as

rock 'n' roll authorities, are people who have documented down what I remember growing up with as it started ... right? So everybody knows where the roots of rock 'n' roll are. Everybody knows who does what, but to make such an intellectual game out of it is beside the point, you know it's not really going to add anything to the history of popular music. It's just going to feed a lot of cynical people and self-righteous people who think they've got a claim on a rock 'n' roll goldmine ... or whatever. So I find that very distasteful.

**B.K.:** Do you have ... I'm going to ask you which ones ... but are there any things that you look back on and say 'Jesus, that was a good one' ...'

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah. Some of the songs you're talking about, you know I can't write those songs today. No way. But I look at those songs, 'cos I sing 'em all the time, I wonder where they came from and how they came ... how it's constructed. Even the simpler songs, I look at them that way. I couldn't do them now, and I don't even try, I'd be a fool to try. I think there are lot of good song-writers though, what I've done I've done all alone, but there's a lot of other good song-writers ... of my era.

**Mogull:** Like who, Bob?

**Dylan:** Randy Newman writes good songs, Paul Simon's written some good songs, I think "America" is a good song, I think "The Boxer" is a good song. I think "Bridge Over Troubled Water" is a good song. I mean he's written a lot of bad songs too, but everybody's done that. Let's see ... some of the Nashville writers ... Shel Silverstein writes great songs. Really. Like he's one of my favorite song-writers. You know, whatever you're expressing it out of the amount of knowledge and light and inspiration you're giving on it. If you're just given an inch you know ... well you've just got to make of that as much as you can.

**B.K.:** Have you ever tried your hand at any of the other arts?

**Dylan:** Yeah, painting.

**B.K.:** Really, do you do much of it?

**Dylan:** Yeah, well not so much in recent years, but it's something that I would like to do if I could ... you've got to be in the right place to do it, you have to commit a lot of time ... because one thing leads to another and you tend to discover new things as you go along. So it takes time to develop it, but I know how to do it

fundamentally so once I get into the rhythm of it, and if I can hang with it long enough ...

**B.K.:** Do you take time for yourself?

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah, I take time for myself. I don't have any public time. People think I do but that's my time.

**B.K.:** That's a great place to be.

**Dylan:** Well, that's the place you were at when you were born. That's the place you should be. I mean what's there to make you not be in that place? Do you have to be part of the machine ... so what if you're not part of the machine?

*break*

**Dylan:** I don't know if I've ever been happy if we're talking straight. I don't know ... I mean ... happy? I don't consider myself happy and I don't consider myself unhappy, I've just never thought of life in terms of happiness and unhappiness. It just never occurred to me.

**B.K.:** Do you think of it in terms of growth?

**Dylan:** No! I never think in terms of growth, I tell you what I do think though, that you never stop anywhere, there's no place to stop in. You know them places at the side of the road that you can stop, they're just an illusion.

**B.K.:** The road goes on ...

**Dylan:** Yeah, you've got to get back on the road. And you may want to stop but you can't stay there.

**B.K.:** When you talk about getting back on the road, isn't that in a sense growth ... or at least it's movement. From point A to point B.

**Dylan:** Yeah, that's growth. But what's growth? I mean everything grows, that's just the way life is, life just grows. You know, it grows and it dies, it lives and it dies. Whenever you get to a plateau, that's not it, you got to go on to the next one. You can't stay nowhere, there's no place to stay, there's no place that will keep you.

**B.K.:** Because of boredom or because that's the way it is?

**Dylan:** No, because that's just the nature of things ...

**B.K.:** So you see yourself just moving onward?

**Dylan:** I see everybody like that, I see the whole world that way. That which doesn't do that is stuff that's ... that's just dead.

**B.K.:** Ha ... what's that line? Those that are not busy being born are ...

**Dylan:** ... busy dying? What a line!

**B.K.:** Didn't somebody write that?

**Dylan:** Classic line that ... You know people say, well isn't it great to be able to do what you do? Well it is to a degree but they forget that an artist ... a touring artist, anybody that is out touring ... playing live from town to town night after night. They think that's easy. It's not easy. People think you're having a ball, they say howya doin'? I say 'I'm in Schenectady! (laughter). And they say, oh well you're having a great time and I'm stuck here in Orlando. But it's not ... you know you just have to get up and then you just have to do what you're supposed to do. I know that when I get off the road, oh man! For the first two or three weeks ... I mean you can get up any time you want! You don't have to go to sleep at this hour and get up at that hour, and get yourself lined up to do this, and be there at that certain place, and go through this and go through that, and get back and get the proper amount of sleep. You know, eat right ... in case you're afraid you'll get sick, or afraid you're gonna hurt yourself somewhere along the line. All those things ... they just disappear on the last show, then you can do anything you want. It's a high feeling.

**B.K.:** You go sailing? *long pause*

**B.K.:** Yeah?

**Dylan:** Yeah.

**B.K.:** I mean do you want to talk about anything you like to do other than ...

**Dylan:** I like to do a lot of things but I don't want to talk about the things I like to do ...

**B.K.:** Okay.

**Dylan:** I'll talk about things I don't like to do!

**B.K.:** You said that you consider yourself a pretty regular kind of a guy, would you say you're just like anybody else?

**Dylan:** Well, sure, you know I breathe the same air as everybody else does. I have to do the same things most people do.

**B.K.:** Well ... in a lot of the earlier songs there's a sense of separation ...

**Dylan:** Oh, well ... there's always a sense of separation, I mean even in the later songs. There wouldn't be any point to it if there wasn't a sense of separation. I mean if I didn't have anything different to say to people then what would be the point of it? I mean ... I could do a Ronnettes album!

**Mogull:** I think the most interesting you've said so far, Bob ...

**Dylan:** Have I said anything interesting?

**Mogull:** One thing that was exceedingly interesting to me was when you started writing because nobody was writing the songs you wanted to sing.

**Dylan:** Yeah, that's when I started writing ... and that's why I'm still writing ... I wish someone would come along and give me some songs that I could do. I mean it would be such a burden taken off my shoulder, I mean it's heavy man! (laughter).

**B.K.:** There's still a lot of expectation. Have you been able to get beyond that, to stop worrying about what people expect from you?

**Dylan:** Who expects what? I mean anybody that expects anything from me is just a borderline case. Nobody with any kind of reality is going to expect anything from me. I've already given them enough you know, what do they want from me. You can't keep on depending on one person to give you everything.

What I usually do is say, okay, I'm gonna write a song, whether it's a lyric or a rhythm ... but for me, I have to go out and play, and er ... I'm not an admirer of stuff like videos. I mean I don't mind making videos, but it's nothing for me to try and attempt to do ... because it's fake you know ... it's all about how good it looks ... anybody can make a video. Anybody. As long as you have a camera, what kind of camera do you want? 16mm, video camera, anybody can do it. And anybody can make a good one, and ... er ... people will like it. Everything is done in a technological kind of way ... you can dress it up in so many different kind of ways. So

people don't know what to think. Nobody's gonna sit there and say oh this is bullshit, or this is awful ... this don't make any sense at all ... it's been a long time since I've even seen one of those things, but the last time I saw one, I mean I was appalled. And then when you go see some of these groups, and I've seen some of them, they aren't anything, you know they're just nothing. That's because they go for the faking thing so much, and you know ... in the other arena, you have to do it live or you just don't do it. I've always played live since I started out, and that's where it's always counted for me. It don't count on a video or a movie, I don't care about being a movie star or a video star or any of that stuff you know.

*break*

**Dylan:** I'm usually in a numb state of mind before my shows, and I have to kick in at some place along the line., usually it takes me one or two songs, or sometimes now it takes much longer. Sometimes it takes me up to the encore! (laughter).

**B.K.:** The band I would image has an effect on that.

**Dylan:** Oh, absolutely. I've played with some bands that have gotten in my way so much that it's just been a struggle to get through the show Oh yeah ... at certain times it gets ridiculous you know.

**B.K.:** I'd image the flip side too, have there been bands that turn you on?

**Dylan:** Yeah, this last band ... I thought they were pretty good.

**B.K.:** Rolling Thunder was an interesting tour, it wasn't just the performing but the whole idea of the thing. There was a spontaneity of a kind to it.

**Dylan:** Yeah ... there was definitely a lot of spontaneity to that.

**B.K.:** Was it scary or exciting?

**Dylan:** A little of both. We were doing double shows on the Rolling Thunder shows. We'd be in a hall say for ... 14 hours. You know Rolling Thunder shows were 6 hours long! [sic]

**B.K.:** That had to be people loving making music.

**Dylan:** Well ... (laughing) ... there were so many people ... you know the people in the audience came and went ... people would bring their lunch or dinner or something.

**Mogull:** Like a Grateful Dead concert?

**Dylan:** Yeah, yeah.

**B.K.:** Was that your idea, did it come from you?

**Dylan:** No, it just happened. We started out with a small show and it just evolved into the ...

**B.K.:** That's an amazing thing to me, that you're able to maintain that ... a lot of people when they get to a certain place in the business ...

**Dylan:** I thought the Rolling Thunder shows were great, I think someday somebody should make a movie out of them!

**B.K.:** And call it ...

**Dylan:** Rolling Thunder!

**B.K.:** (laughter). You've been smiling a lot and laughing a lot here, but you don't do that much on stage. But you say you really enjoy yourself ... you look so serious.

**Dylan:** Well, those songs take you through different trips you see. I mean what's there to smile about in singing "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall", or "Tangled Up In Blue", or "With God On Our Side" ... or "Mr Tambourine Man", or "Like A Rolling Stone", or "License To Kill", or "Shot Of Love", or "Poisoned Love" ... any of that. How can you sing that with a smile on your face? I mean it's be kind of hypocritical.

You'll do things on certain nights, which you know are just great, you'll know they're great, and you'll get no response. And then you'll go someplace else and it'll be ... you just don't have it that night, you just don't have it, for a variety of reasons. You don't have it and you're just trying to get through it ... but it's really always got to be consistent, you've got to get it to a place where it's consistent. Then it stays on that level ... it can get great, which is really you know triple consistent ... You know I've done things where I might have had a temperature of 104, or you know, I might have been kicked in the side that day and couldn't hardly stand up. I have done shows where I could hardly stand up, you know where it's been painful to stand there. And that's kind of

humiliating in a way, because you know there's no way that you can be as good as you wanna be. Before it even starts you know you're not gonna be as good, not even as you wanna be, as you can be. There's only been one time when I've wanted to replay one show, that was in Montreal. We played a show in Montreal in 1978, I had a temperature of 104, couldn't even stand up ... but the promotor said, well you gotta play the show ... And we played the show and I didn't have nothing, nothing! And the response ... you'd think the Pope was there! (laughter). And I've played other shows where I've had everything happening, I mean I just rewrote the book, nothing - no response.

When I do whatever it is I'm doing there is rhythm involved and there is phrasing involved. And that's where it all balances out, in the rhythm of it and the phrasing of it. It's not in the lyrics, people think it's in the lyrics, maybe on the records it's in the lyrics, but in a live show it's not all in the lyrics, it's in the phrasing and the dynamics and the rhythm. It's got nothing whatsoever to do with the lyrics, I mean it does - the lyrics have to be there, sure they do. But ... you know there was this Egyptian singer Om Khalsoum, have you ever heard of her? She was one of my favorite singers of all time - and I don't understand a word she sings! She'd sing one song - it might last for 40 minutes, same song, and she'll sing the same phrase over and over and over again. But in a different way everytime. I don't think there's any US or Western singer that's in that kind of category ... except possibly me! (laughter). But on another level, do you know what I mean?

*break*

**Dylan:** To me it's not a business, and to the people who have survived along with me - it's not a business. It just isn't. It's never been a business and never will be a business. It is just a way of surviving you know, it's just what you do you know. It's just like somebody who's trained to be a carpenter, that's what they do, it's what they do best. And that's how they make a living I guess.

**B.K.:** Were you ever going to be anything else ... were you ever going to be an insurance salesman?

**Dylan:** I was never gonna be anything else, never. I was playing when I was 12 years old, and that was all I wanted to do - play my guitar. I was always going to these parties where all these biggest guys were ... you know ... and it was a way of getting attention and whatever ... It starts out that way but I never really knew where it was going to lead. Now that it's lead me here - I still don't know where it is.

**B.K.:** You sound like ... well obviously you're older than you were in the sixties, but also you seem to have a degree of self-knowledge and certainty of where you're going as a person ...

**Dylan:** I don't know where I'm going as a person ...

**Mogull:** I hear contentment ...

**Dylan:** Well, in certain areas - yeah, I hope so. I don't know what's gonna happen when I'm not around to sing anymore. I hope somebody else comes along who could pick up on what I'm doing and learn exactly what it is ... that makes it quite different. I keep looking for that somebody ... not necessarily to cover me, but to take it a step further. I've already taken it as far as I can take it, maybe I won't see that person - I don't know. But somebody, sometime will come along and take it that step further. But I haven't seen anyone ... now I don't want to say that in a bragging sort of way, it just hasn't gone any further.

**B.K.:** But there is something ... that's why you go back to the stage.

**Dylan:** Yeah, well I'm just thankful I can play on stage and people will come and see me. Because I couldn't make it otherwise, I mean if I went out to play and nobody showed up, that would be the end of me. I wouldn't be making records I'll tell you that. I only make records because people see me live. So as long as they're coming along to see me live I'll just make some more records.



# **BILL FLANAGAN INTERVIEW, NEW YORK, MARCH 1985**

*Bill Flanagan interviewed Bob Dylan in New York in March 1985 for his 1985 book "Written In My Soul."*

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*"I'm not going to write a fantasy song. Even a song like 'Mr. Tambourine Man' really isn't a fantasy. There's substance to the dream."*

**Bob Dylan**

In November of 1985 Columbia Records threw a party for Bob Dylan at New York's Whitney Museum. Banks of video screens were illuminated with images of the Ages of Dylan. There was the scrawny protest poet who wrote "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times They Are a Changin'," the wild-haired rock & roll legend who screamed "How does it \*feel\*?" and "Everybody must get stoned," and all the other Dylans: the pastoral daddy of "Lay Lady Lay" and "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," the anguished gypsy of "Blood on the Tracks" and the Rolling Thunder Revue, the righteous evangelist of "Slow Train Coming" and "Neighborhood Bully." That week the newspapers were running front page stories about the release from prison of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, the boxer whose cause Dylan had championed a decade earlier, and whose murder conviction had finally been overturned. Carter's claim to fame in most of the articles was that he was the subject of a Bob Dylan song.

Downstairs, circling around Dylan himself were old folkies (Judy Collins, Arlo Guthrie, Roger McGuinn), the first wave of punk (Lou Reed, John Cale, Iggy Pop), literate British rockers (Pete Townshend, David Bowie, Ian Hunter), American traveling bands (the Band, the E Street Band), and all manner of New Yorkers - Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel, Yoko Ono, the Talking Heads - whose art grew out of the lower Manhattan bohemia that Dylan brought into the center of American consciousness. There were older legends, too, such as Roy Orbison and John Hammond, Sr., and Jerry Wexler. "Every one of us here," Ian Hunter said, "owes Dylan thanks for something."

A gaggle of television reporters buttonholed guests at the door and asked about Bob Dylan's significance. No one had an adequate answer. I said that Dylan refused to accept any limits on rock & roll and thus showed everyone else that the form could

expand to include all sorts of ideas. Billy Joel said that Dylan was at least the greatest American songwriter, period.

The next afternoon I was with Pete Townshend. He joked about the futility of trying to offer a concise explanation of Dylan's significance. "They asked what effect Bob Dylan had on me," he said. "That's like asking how I was influence by being born."

Joni Mitchell put it this way: "When I head Bob Dylan sing, 'You got a lotta nerve,' I though, 'Hallelujah, man, the American pop song has grown up. It's wide open. Now you can write about anything that literature can write about.' Up until that time rock & roll songs were pretty much limited to, 'I'm a fool for ya, baby,'"

It would be a mistake to claim that Dylan had completely overcome the prejudice that some advocates of the separation of "high" from "low" art still have against anything that rides into town on the back of rock & roll. There are still some critics and academics who claim that Dylan's lyric talent was not as extraordinary as has been alleged; that his greatest gifts were self-promotion and good fortune. These holdouts are fighting a losing battle. For while they roll their eyes and groan that Dylan is, after all, just a rock singer, Dylan's praises are sung by those he's inspired who have themselves triumphed in arts accepted by the old guard. If Dylan is not a great artist then playwrights such as Sam Shephard, filmmakers such as Scorsese, poets such as Allen Ginsberg, actors such as De Niro are not capable of recognizing great art. Sometime between Jimmy Carter's quoting of the "great American poet" at the 1976 Democratic Convention and Dylan's trip to Moscow's International Poetry Festival in 1985 (he represented the United States, at the invitation of Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko), most of those who \*just don't get it\* shut up and sat down.

When we spoke, Dylan, whose musical style owed a great deal to country and folk singers such as Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie, and the Stanley Brothers, traced his poetic roots to the Black bluesmen who crossed paths with Willie Dixon and inspired Chuck Berry. "Those blues guys from the thirties and forties," Dylan said, "just used two-line couplets. You can't say things any better than that really. You can say it in a different way, you can say it with more words, but you can't say anything better than what they said. And they covered everything."

Recalling his own early days in New York he said, "All these black guys would come up from south of the border and recite poetry in the park. Now they'd call them rappers. The best was a guy named Big Brown who had long poems. Each one was about

fifteen minutes long. They were long, drawn-out badmen stories. Romance, politics, just about everything you could imagine was thrown into his stuff. He came out of Texas, I think, and he was in jail a lot. I always thought that was the best poetry I ever heard. Streetwise poetry. There were quite a few of those guys around in the sixties. I heard them at Mardi Gras, too. They were just brilliant speakers.

The following interview took place in New York in March 1985. Hearing that Dylan was mixing what would become his "Empire Burlesque" album in Manhattan, I left a letter for him explaining about this book. I got a message a couple of days later that Dylan would be happy to talk to me. I expected perhaps an hour of his time and prepared for Dylan's historic reluctance to explain his work. To my delight I found Dylan warm, cooperative, and as talkative as anyone I've interviewed. Dylan expressed enthusiasm for the idea of a book of interviews with songwriters and amazement that no one had done it before.

He asked about different songwriters I'd interviewed, and when I mentioned Lou Reed, Dylan talked about Reed's "Doin' the Things That We Want To" and its reference to Sam Shephard's play "Fool For Love." He said that Reed's song had inspired Dylan and Shephard to write a sort of response - which emerged in 1986 as "Brownsville Girl." Dylan said that just as Reed's song opened with the narrator at the play, the Shephard/Dylan song would open with the narrator at the movie. Maybe what's most surprising about Bob Dylan is that once you connect with his vision, everything he says makes sense.

After a couple of hours of intense conversation I'd exhausted my questions. I switched off the tape recorder and thanked my host for his generosity. Dylan kept talking, and soon I was turning the recorder back on to catch his amendments.

In "Tangled Up In Blue" Dylan wrote, "She opened up a book of poems and handed it to me / Written by an Italian poet in the fifteenth [sic] century / And every one of them words rang true and glowed like burnin' coal / Pourin' off of every page like it was written in my soul."

Posterity is a contrary old bitch, but if she remembers any rock & roller to future generations, it will probably be Bob Dylan.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** In "Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight" (Infidels) you wrote, "It's like I'm stuck inside a painting that's hanging in the Louvre." In "I And I" (Infidels) you said, "If she wakes up now she'll just want me to talk / And I got nothin' to say, 'specially about

whatever was." People come to you with so much expectation, do you have a hard time finding people who can relate to you normally?

**BOB DYLAN:** No, not really. I don't know how other people write their songs. I write them lots of different ways. Once they get put into a perspective, they all fall into the same dimension. But they really come out of different dimensions. Sometimes you'll write a song where you'll just stick with it and get it done. You'll feel that it's not coming from anyplace, but it's for you to do. There's nothing to base it on. You're in an area where there isn't anybody there and never was. So you just have to be real sensitive to where you're walking at the time. Not try to go one way or the other, just stay balanced and finish it. "Every Grain of Sand" is a song like that. Writing that song was like, "This is something that I'm going to have to stay steady with." Otherwise it could get out of hand. You must keep it balanced. And there's no footnotes around. It's the kind of an area where there's no precedent for it.

A lot of times you'll just hear things and you'll know that these are the things that you want to put in your song. Whether you say them or not. They don't have to be your particular thoughts. They just sound good, and \*somebody\* thinks them. Half my stuff falls along those lines. \*Somebody\* thinks them. I'm sure, when I'm singing something, that I'm not just singing it to sing it. I know that I've read it. Somebody's said it. I've heard a voice say that. A song like "Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight" sort of falls into that category: "I'll take you to a mountaintop and build you a house out of stainless steel." That kind of stuff just passes by. A guy's getting out of bed saying don't talk to me; it's leaving time. I didn't originate those kinds of thoughts. I've felt them, but I didn't originate them. They're out there, so I just use them.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Are there thoughts that go by that you resist writing about?

**BOB DYLAN:** Everything I've written about I can relate to. There's a lot of stuff I hear that I wouldn't write about, because it don't mean anything to me. You hear people talk every day, and most of it goes in one ear and doesn't even come out. Or it goes in then out the other. Bill Monroe once said he got his best thinking done when people were talking to him. I always liked that.

Not a whole lot of real thought goes into this stuff. It's more or less remembering things and taking it down. Sometimes you're just taking notes on stuff and then putting it all together. Sometimes it's just the opposite. A lot of people ask, "What comes first, the words or melody?" I thought about that. It's very rare that

they don't come together. Sometimes the words come first, sometimes the melody comes first, but that's the exception. Most of the time the words and melody come at the same time, usually with the first line. With me it's usually the first line. I know Bob Seger writes from hooks and titles. A lot of people do that. They come up with a line that sums up everything and then they have to go backwards and figure out how to fill it in. With me I usually start right at the beginning and then wonder where it's going. I sometimes fill in the middle and the end at some other time, but I don't usually work \*backwards\*.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** What do you mean when you say that with something like "Every Grain of Sand," you have to be careful to not let it get out of hand?

**BOB DYLAN:** You're not \*conscious\* of it. In a song like that, there's no consciousness of any of this stuff having been said before. "What's this like?" Well, it's not like anything. "What does it represent?" Well, you don't even know. All you know is that it's a mood piece, and you try to hold onto the mood and finish. Or not even finish, but just get it to a place where you can let it go. Because those kinds of things you'll never finish if you don't do them all at one period of time. I've done a lot of stuff where I said, "I'll finish it next week. " Well, next week never comes. And then you go back and look at the stuff and say, "Wow, this is great." but you can't get connected to it again.

The saddest thing about songwriting is when you get something really good and you put it down for a while, and you take for granted that you'll be able to get back to it with whatever inspired you to do it in the first place - well, whatever inspired you to do it in the first place is never there anymore. So then you've got to consciously stir up the inspiration to figure what it was about. Usually you get one good part and one not-so-good part, and the not-so-good wipes out the good part.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Would you ever sit on something for months or years, waiting until you could connect to it again?

**BOB DYLAN:** No, I don't have any expectations, if I'm putting something down, that it'll be something great if only I can get back to it. I keep it in front of me for a while, and if I don't have it done by a certain time... I'll go back and it'll still be there, but I won't be able to relate to it.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** "Mr. Tambourine Man" can be interpreted a hundred ways, but it could be about a specific real thing: wanting to keep going when you've been out all night and everyone else

has gone home, and the only other person left awake is some guy standing on the corner banging a tambourine. Do all your songs have a literal reality to you?

**BOB DYLAN:** Well, songs are just thoughts. For the moment they stop time. Songs are supposed to be heroic enough to give the illusion of stopping time. With just that thought. To hear a song is to hear someone's thought, no matter what they're describing. If you see something and you think it's important enough to describe, then that's your thought. You only think one thought at a time, so what you come up with is really what you're given. When you sit around and \*imagine\* things to do and to write and to think - that's fantasy. I've never been much into that. Anybody can fantasize. Little kids can, old people can, everybody's got the right to their own fantasies. But that's all they are. Fantasies. They're not \*dreams\*. A dream has more substance to it than a fantasy. Because fantasies are usually based on nothing, they're based on what's thrown into your imagination. But I usually have to have proof that something exists before I even want to bother to deal with it at all. I must exist, it must have happened, or the possibility or it happening must have some meaning for me.

I'm not going to write a fantasy song. Even a song like "Mr. Tambourine Man" really isn't a fantasy. There's substance to the dream. Because you've seen it, you know? In order to have a dream, there's something in front of you. You have to have seen something or have heard something for you to dream it. It becomes \*your\* dream then. Whereas a fantasy is just your imagination wandering around. I don't really look at my stuff like that. It's happened, it's been said, I've heard it: I have proof of it. I'm a messenger. I get it. It comes to me so I give it back in my particular style.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** That's what I mean about songs having a literal reality: the images aren't just random.

**BOB DYLAN:** Right. It does have a literal reality. I don't think it could stand up if it didn't. Because other people can identify with it, and they know if it's true or not.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** You've changed the lyrics to "Tangled Up in Blue" since you first recorded it on "Blood on the Tracks".

**BOB DYLAN:** That was a peculiar record. I always wanted it to be the way I recorded it on "Real Live", but there was no particular reason for it to be that way, because I'd already made the record. That was another one of those things where I was trying to do something that I didn't think had ever been done before. In terms

of trying to tell a story and be a present character in it without it being some kind of fake, sappy attempted tearjerker. I was trying to be somebody in the present time while conjuring up a lot of past images. I was trying to do it in a conscious way. I used to be able to do it in an unconscious way, but I wasn't into it that way anymore. That particular song was built like that, and it was always open to be cut better. But I had no particular reason to do it because I'd already made the record.

However, there's a version we used to do on stage with just electric guitar and a saxophone - keeping the same lyrics, thinking that maybe if I did that to it it would bring it out in an emotional way. But it didn't hold up very well that way. So I changed the lyrics, to bring it up to date. But I didn't just change it 'cause I was singing it one night and thought, "Oh, I'm bored with the old words." The old ones were never quite filled in. I rewrote it in a hotel room somewhere. I think it was Amsterdam. I wanted to sing that song so I looked at it again, and I changed it. When I sang it the next night I knew it was right. It was right enough so that I wanted to put it down and wipe the old one out.

That was another of those songs where you're writing and you've got it, you know what it's about, but half of it you just don't get the way you wanted to. Then I fixed it up, and now I know it's where it should be. I think it makes a big difference, too.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** One immediate difference is that it's no longer clear if it's only one guy telling the story. It now starts off in the second person, and goes into the first person when he meets the woman in the bar. The earlier section is now isolated, and the events it described may have happened to someone else.

**BOB DYLAN:** Yeah, exactly. See, what I was trying to do had nothing to do with the characters or what was going on. I was trying to do something that I don't know if I was prepared to do. I wanted to defy time, so that the story took place in the present and past at the same time. When you look at a painting, you can see any part of it or see all of it together. I wanted that song to be like a painting.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Have you ever put something in a song that was too personal? Ever had it come out and then said, "Hmm, gave away too much of myself there"?

**BOB DYLAN:** I came pretty close with that song "Idiot Wind." That was a song I wanted to make as a painting. A lot of people thought that song, that album "Blood on the Tracks", pertained to me. Because it seemed to at the time. It didn't pertain to me. It

was just a concept of putting in images that defy time - yesterday, today, and tomorrow. I wanted to make them all connect in some kind of a strange way. I've read that that album had to do with my divorce. Well, I didn't get divorced till four years after that. I thought I might have gone a little bit too far with "Idiot Wind." I might have changed some of it. I didn't really think I was giving away too much; I thought that it \*seemed\* so personal that people would think it was about so-and-so who was close to me. It wasn't. But you can put all these words together and that's where it falls. You can't help where it falls. I didn't feel that one was too personal, but I felt it \*seemed\* too personal. Which might be the same thing, I don't know. But it never was \*painful\*. 'Cause usually with those kinds of things, if you think you're too close to something, you're giving away too much of your feelings, well, your feelings are going to change a month later and you're going to look back and say, "What did I do that for?"

**BILL FLANAGAN:** But for all the power of "Idiot Wind," there's part of it that always cracked me up. You talk about being accused of shooting a man, running off with his wife, she inherits a million bucks, she dies, and the money goes to you. Then you say, "I can't help it if I'm lucky." (Laughter.)

**BOB DYLAN:** Yeah, right. With that particular set-up in the front I thought I could say \*anything\* after that. If it did seem personal I probably made it overly so - because I said too much in the front and still made it come out like, "Well, so what?" I didn't really think it was too personal. I've never really said anything where I thought I was giving away too much. I mean, I give it all away, but I'm not really giving away any secrets. I don't have that many secrets. I don't find myself in that position.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** What about "Ballad in Plain D" [an early song in which Dylan described, in painful detail, his breakup with Susan Rotolo]?

**BOB DYLAN:** Oh! Yeah. That one... That one I look back and I say, "I must have been a real schmuck to write that." I look back at that particular one and say, of all the songs I've written, maybe I could have left that alone. But if that's the only one I look back and say maybe I shouldn't have written, I think that's a pretty good record. That's maybe five hundred to one.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Now, you \*had\* temporarily split with your wife before "Blood on the Tracks". That album must be at least somewhat about that.

**BOB DYLAN:** Yeah. Somewhat about that. But I'm not going to make an album and lean on a marriage relationship. There's no way I would do that, any more than I would write an album about some lawyers' battles that I had. There are certain subjects that don't interest me to exploit. And I wouldn't really exploit a relationship with somebody. Whereas in "Ballad in Plain D," I did. Not knowing that I did it. At that time my audience was very small. It overtook my mind so I wrote it. Maybe I shouldn't have used that. I had other songs at the time. It was based on an old folk song. But I know what you mean. If you're going through some relationship and it's not working out well and that's the way you feel, no matter what else you see or what else you do you keep getting back to that: "Oh, I feel lousy." So you try to take it out and write a song about it. A lot of people can't do that. They have nobody to sing it to. So a person in my position says, "Well, I got this available information, this is the way I really feel; I think I'll write it and say how I feel."

I don't do that. I don't like feeling those kinds of feelings. I've got to think I can do better than that. It's not going to positively help anybody to hear about my sadness. Just another hard luck story.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** In Nikos Kazantzakis's "Report to Greco", he wrote that, like every man, as his life drew to a close he had to drag the cross he had made up his own Calvary - and that the work a man leaves behind on that ascent is just the blood on the tracks. Did you read that, or was that just a cosmic connection?

**BOB DYLAN:** Must have been, I hadn't read that. All the words have been used; it's just how we put them together. And even that - though we might think we've come up with something super, fantastic, I think if you look in the right place you'll find somebody else has done it.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** "Blood on the Tracks" was such a powerful work that it's amazing that you followed it with an album, "Desire", on which you collaborated with a second lyricist, Jacques Levy. Why didn't you try to sustain what you'd tapped into with "Blood on the Tracks?" Why not try to keep it going?

**BOB DYLAN:** I guess I never intended to keep that going. It was an experiment that came off. I had a few weeks in the summer when I wrote the songs. I wrote all the songs for "Blood on the tracks" in about a month and then I recorded them and stepped back out of that place where I was when I wrote them and went back to whatever I was doing before. Sometimes you'll get what you can out of these things, but you can't stay there.

Cowriter. That was probably an album where I didn't have anything and I wasn't even thinking about making a record. I think I ran into Jacques downtown and we went off and just wrote some songs. The people from the Hurricane Carter movement kept calling me and writing me. And Hurricane sent me his book, which I read and which really touched me. I felt that the man was just innocent, from his writings and knowing that part of the country. So I went to visit him and was really behind him, trying to get a new trial. So that was one of the things I brought to Jacques, too. I said, "Why don't you help me write this song and see if we can do something?" So we wrote "Hurricane," and then we just wrote a bunch of others. An album came out of it.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Have you been in touch with Hurricane Carter recently?

**BOB DYLAN:** No, I haven't seen him since the seventies. He got re-incriminated or whatever. I heard a lot of stories, good and bad, about what really happened. It just got a little out of hand, a little too complicated. But as I understand, he was set up again. They knew what buttons to push [note: Shortly after this conversation, Hurricane Carter's conviction was overturned.]

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Anything you've ever tried to write about and been unable to do?

**BOB DYLAN:** Yeah. \*Anything\* I try to write about, I can't do it. If I try to write \*about\* something - "I want to write about horses" or "I want to write about Central Park" or "I want to write about the Cocaine industry" - I can't get anywhere with that. I have to always take it out. It's like that "Hurricane" song. I wanted to write a song about Hurricane Carter, I wanted to spread the message. It really doesn't come out about Hurricane. Really, the essence of it is never what it's about. It's really about you. Unless you're standing in somebody else's shoes you just don't know what it feels like. You don't know what it's about.

You can go to a movie and say, "What's this about?" A movie is something that gives the illusion of stopping time. You go someplace and you sit there for a while. you're looking at something. You're trapped. It's all happening in your brain and it seems like nothing else is going on in the world. Time has stopped. The world could be coming to an end outside, but for you time has stopped. Then someone says, "What was it about?" "Well, I don't know. It was about two guys who were after the same girl." Or, "It was about the Russian Revolution." Well, yeah, that was what it was about, but that wasn't \*it\*. That's not what made you stay there and stare at the screen, at a light on the wall. In

another way you could say, "What's life about?" It's just going by like a movie all the time. It doesn't matter if you're here for a hundred years, it still goes by. You can't stop it.

So you can't say what it's about. But what you can do is try to give the illusion of the moment of it. And even that's not what it's about. That's just proof that you existed.

What's anything about? It's not about anything. It is what it is.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Jackson Browne said that he thought "Every Breath You Take" was kind of unfair to the woman to whom it was directed, 'cause the song is told so powerfully from Sting's point of view and it's so inescapable.

**BOB DYLAN:** Oh, I don't think so. That was a good song. Sort of reminds me of "Stand By Me." You can take any side you want. You don't have to tell the other person's side. There's no law that says you have to do that. I think he said whatever he had to say in that song pretty bluntly and right to the point. He didn't try to make it cute or clever or anything. He did it and was gone. I think that was a really good song.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Do you think it's appropriate to write in the voice of a killer, as Bruce Springsteen did in "Nebraska?"

**BOB DYLAN:** I'm not too familiar with that particular song of Bruce's. But it's not inappropriate to put yourself in somebody else's place. That's a quite common thing to do. Folksingers used to do that all the time, and I've done a bit of that, too. "House of the Rising Sun" is written from a woman's point of view, and up until Eric Burdon did it, men used to sing it from a woman's point of view. That was something that you just did. If you go back and listen to the Stanley Brothers or the Country Gentlemen or Jim and Jesse, any of the bluegrass groups, there's quite a few songs where they put themselves into the first person. I've done that myself. I've written songs from the first person. I haven't recorded too many of them, but I have done it. That's legitimate.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Sure. What I'm wondering about is, once you get in that person, once you give that person a voice, do you have a moral responsibility not to give voice to evil, not to say, "Why'd I kill all these people? I guess there's just a meanness in this world?"

**BOB DYLAN:** Is that what "Nebraska" says?

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Yes.

**BOB DYLAN:** I don't know. I don't know why you give a voice to one person and not another. But everybody's got a voice and there's \*somebody\* who can get inside of everybody and be their lawyer. Why not write a song for the guy who killed all the people at the McDonald's out in San Diego? I'm sure he's got a voice, too. And if he talked from the grave I'm sure he could get a lot of people to feel sorry for him, to sympathize with him. It depends on what your \*cause\* is. Is your cause to just go out and randomly shoot people? Kinky Friedman, I think, wrote a song about the guy who went up on the Texas tower and did that. But it's hard to tell.

Usually you do that if somebody's been given a bad rap and you sort of know it. But I don't know what Bruce's intentions were. That song was about Charlie Starkweather? Well, I grew up in the same area as Charlie Starkweather and I remember that happening. That affected everybody out there. And everybody pretty much kept their mouth shut about it. Because he did have a sort of a James Dean quality to him. He was in the papers a lot. I must have been about seventeen or eighteen when that happened. I don't recall how most people felt about it. Nobody glorified him, though.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Did you see "Badlands", Terence Malick's movie about it?

**BOB DYLAN:** Yeah, I love Martin Sheen, I think he's a fantastic actor. But that didn't really remind me of Charlie Starkweather. I don't think it had anything to do with Charlie Starkweather. I went through that period of time and I remember it firsthand. I remember what the impact of that was. I don't think there's any way you can elevate Charlie up above what he did or what happened.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Mark Knopfler told me that you wrote a song called "Prison Guard" about a complete skunk, and Mark took that song to be a sort of reaction to "Nebraska."

**BOB DYLAN:** Oh, yeah, Mark heard that song. (Smiles.) I did write a song like that but I never recorded it. I didn't think I needed to record it. It was a talking thing about this prison guard who's just sort of [a?] rough character. He doesn't mind throwing people off the fourth tier and busting anybody's head in. And then it goes on to describe his family and his town. Then when I got done I just thought it was pretty pathetic. The whole picture was just too pathetic. I don't know what was in my mind when I was doing that.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** But it wasn't inspired by or a takeoff on "Nebraska?"

**BOB DYLAN:** Uhhh. I don't know what inspired it. No. It was more or less one of these things where somebody in a uniform can get away with something that somebody who's not wearing a uniform can't.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** "Masters of War" is a very harsh song: "I'll stand o'er your grave 'til I'm sure that you're dead." "Neighborhood Bully" is equally hard, yet a lot of critics expressed surprise at its militancy. I don't understand why so many people assume you're a pacifist. The critic Mark Rowland said you were always more concerned with justice than politics.

**BOB DYLAN:** (Laughs.) Yeah. I don't know why people choose to think whatever they think. Is pacifism a philosophy? I'm not really sure what it is.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** If someone strikes you, you turn the other cheek.

**BOB DYLAN:** That's not pacifism, though. Turning the other cheek is an aggressive move, actually. There is some strategy where if someone pushes on you, you can go with their push and make their strength work against them.

Pacifism. I know I'm not comfortable with those words and I wonder if other people are as comfortable with those broad terminologies like \*pacifism\*, \*rightism\*, \*leftism\*, \*militarism\*, \*republicanism\*. In this country a Republican is one thing: you can go to Ireland and say you're a Republican you'll get a different reaction. You can use all these words \*here\*. It's pretty safe to say anything you want to say. But whether there's any meaning to it or not, I don't know. I don't comprehend those terms simply because I don't think other people do. They talk about humanism and secularism, everything's got an \*ism\*. Not that I'm so stupid that I can't understand what they mean, but I don't think anybody else knows what they mean. To be perfectly honest, I don't think people know what they're talking about when they use all these words. They have no idea what they're saying. It's like saying, "I saw a house yesterday." Oh yeah, I saw one, too. But it probably wasn't the same one you saw.

But I hear that a lot. People seem to think they know all about me. Maybe they don't. Maybe everything I've done has been one side of something. One part. Certainly nothing that I've written defines me as a total person. There's no one song that does that. Nothing I do really should surprise anybody. It seems like I've been doing it for so long I can't remember when I wasn't doing it. There's

nothing I could say that isn't documented somewhere in the past so you could think, "Yeah, he would say something like that."

**BILL FLANAGAN:** It's funny. When I was growing up people would always say, "Bob Dylan, oh, he writes a lot of songs against the Viet Nam War" and I had all those albums and I'd always say...

**BOB DYLAN:** Which ones? (Laughs.)

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Right, 'cause the songs they'd cite - like "Hard Rain" and "Blowin' in the Wind" - all predated Viet Nam. "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine" has that very powerful image, "I dreamed I was amongst the ones that put him out to death." It's human nature to point at other people. It's rare an artist takes the position of saying, "We're all capable of being the villain."

**BOB DYLAN:** Well, I don't mind taking that position. Because that's just a true statement. We're all sinners. People seem to think that because their sins are different from other people's sins, they're not sinners. People don't like to think of themselves as sinners. It makes them feel uncomfortable. "What do you mean sinner?" It puts them at a disadvantage in their mind. Most people walking around have this strange conception that they're born good, that they're really good people - but the \*world\* has just made a mess of their lives. I had another point of view. But it's not hard for me to identify with anybody who's on the wrong side. We're all on the wrong side, really.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** You integrate your faith into the songs more subtly than at the time of "Slow Train Coming."

**BOB DYLAN:** Now I'm just writing from instinct. I do that most of the time anyway. I just write from instinct and however it comes out is how it comes out. Other people can make of it what they choose to. But for me I can't expound too much on what I'm doing because I really don't have any idea what I'm doing. But I'll tell you one thing, if you're talking just on a scriptural type of thing, there's no way I could write anything that would be scripturally incorrect. I mean, I'm not going to put forth ideas that aren't scripturally true. I might reverse them, or make them come out a different way, but I'm not going to say anything that's just totally \*wrong\*, that there's not a law for.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** One of the nice things about "Sweetheart Like You" is that anyone brought up with the Bible will hear that song one way, but the song will still work on a different level for someone else.

**BOB DYLAN:** Oh, I think so, yeah. Because the Bible runs through all U.S. life, whether people know it or not. It's the founding book. The founding fathers' book anyway. People can't get away from it. you can't get away from it wherever you go. Those ideas were true then and they're true now. They're scriptural, spiritual laws. I guess people can read into that what they want. But if you're familiar with those concepts they'll probably find enough of them in my stuff. Because I always get back to that.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Do people you know recognise themselves in your songs?

**BOB DYLAN:** Oh, yeah, a lot of people do. They tell me they're so-and-so. They used to anyway. "Einstein disguised as Robin Hood" would be in the hallway. A lot of people would tell me they were this person or that person. Not so much anymore. It used to be more common than it is now.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Did people sometimes get it right?

**BOB DYLAN:** No. Not really. But a lot of people can identify with the feelings I have and what I describe something as. I don't think it's anything more than that.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** A reporter for "Time" magazine named Jones went around saying that he was the inspiration for "Ballad of a Thin Man." He got some articles written about him. I thought, "Geez, what a thing to brag about!"

**BOB DYLAN:** Yeah, there were a lot of Mister Joneses at that time. There obviously must have been a tremendous amount of them for me to write \*that\* particular song. It wasn't just one person. It was like, "Oh, man, here's the thousandth Mister Jones."

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Let's talk about the mechanics of writing. Do you write on guitar or piano, and does the music come into your head before you go to your instrument?

**BOB DYLAN:** Yeah, a lot of times \*riffs\* will come into my head. And I'll transpose them with the guitar or piano. A lot of times I'll wake up with a certain riff, or it'll come to me during the day. I'll try to get that down, and then lines will come from that. Or it could come on any instrument I can play. Electric guitar is different from acoustic guitar. Banjo style is really good, you can write good songs on the banjo. These are all real instruments. Then they have all the technological instruments, these little keyboard things. They give you all kinds of sounds. Those are - sort of - okay.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** You're not completely sold?

**BOB DYLAN:** They sound real good, but I haven't been too successful at using any of that stuff. But I write with a combination of instruments. My melodies are usually very simple. They have to be simple. Otherwise I couldn't remember them. If they were a little more complicated I couldn't remember them. So they have to be simple. And that's really about it.

And then I write lines down. I have notes scribbled all over the place. Sometimes I'll go out and say, "Whatever else I do today, I'm going to write down all the lines that seem interesting to me. Either that I think of or that I overhear." I'll try to stay committed to that for a certain period of time. Because most of the time you don't do that. The stuff that goes by, you think of and then say, "Okay, I thought about it. Big deal. Who cares?" Or you'll hear something amusing and then forget that, too. Sometimes I'll make an effort to just go out and get that stuff and see if it means anything. And sometimes it does. I'll just put it somewhere and then get back to it sometime. Usually if it has meaning for me, it's important. There's a lot of great things you hear that aren't really that relevant. That's really about it. There's no real complicated deep genius quality to it.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** That's easy for you to say, you've written all these great songs.

**BOB DYLAN:** Well, I think it has more to do with instinct. There's nothing studied about it. I think you just have to trust your own instinct.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** You sang at Martin Luther King, Jr.'s march on Washington. Did you ever meet him?

**BOB DYLAN:** No. I heard him speak but I never met him.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Did you know John Coltrane?

**BOB DYLAN:** I've \*seen\* John Coltrane. Yeah. I watched him play. I've seen him, I've seen Monk, Miles a lot, Horace Silver. I did some sessions once with Don Cherry and Billy Higgins. I really don't know what happened to that stuff. There were a lot of jazz guys around in the coffeehouse scene in the Village. The folk music and jazz clubs and poetry were all kind of the same thing back then. I used to see those guys a lot. What they had that I picked up on in my singing - I can hardly even call myself a \*singer\* - was a sense of phrasing and dynamics.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** I heard Bill Cosby say one night that when he was starting out as a comic in the Village he'd walk back and forth across the street and hear you playing in one club and John Coltrane in another. Were you conscious of how much ground was being broken?

**BOB DYLAN:** No. Nobody was really conscious of what was happening. But there were a lot of different people on the street. I remember when Bill Cosby came to town. He used to work at the club I worked at. He was a stand-up comedian then. He was just another one of the guys, another entertainer. He got work a little faster than most people, I think, but I'd already started playing. I used to eat with Bill all the time.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** You're famous for going into the studio and recording very quickly to catch the moment. But a couple of your recent albums, "Slow Train" and "Infidels", were more labored over.

**BOB DYLAN:** See, when I started to record they just turned the microphones on and you recorded. That was the way they did it back in the sixties. Whatever you got on one side of the glass was what came in on the controls on the other side of the glass. It was never any problem. What you did out front was what you got on the tape. And it always happened that way. Whether you played by yourself or played with a band didn't really matter - there'd be leakage and that stuff, but you were pretty much guaranteed that whatever you did on that side of the glass was going to be perceived in the same kind of way. That was never any problem. So what happened to me was, I kept working that way through the seventies. I didn't realize things had changed! (Laughs.) I really didn't. I don't think I knew you could do an overdub until 1978. I just didn't think about it. Maybe I was \*so\* outside of it that I hadn't realized that. The problem is, you can't record that way anymore. If you go into a studio now, the technology is so different that you might have a live sound that you want and you'll put that live sound down, but it won't sound that way on the other side of the glass. So then you have to contrive the sound to make it sound the way you really want. In other words, if you want to sound a certain way, whatever that way is, it'll never happen in the studio.

There's a kind of an outdated thing called "live excitement in the studio." It doesn't happen anymore, because people don't record that way. A lot of people put things down one track at a time. Things are so advanced that you'll be able to \*phone\* in your parts pretty soon. Anyway, the problem with it is that no matter what you do, it's not going to come out that way anyway. People try. Some people use a certain studio because it used to have a certain sound. But they might have changed all the equipment in

the place, so it's not going to have that sound anymore. I like the old sound, but it's done. It's never going to come back. So you just have to deal with what the modern way is.

A lot of my records have been made because it's - quote - time to make a record. "When's your new record going to be delivered?" "Oh, next month." Time for me to go in and make a record. I never used to think about it during the year. I had other things to do. Some of the seventies records were made on just one block of time. "This month I'm going to block all this time out, write the songs, record the songs, mix 'em, press 'em, get a cover together, and it's all out in a month or two." It took me a long time to get off that particular style. I didn't really enjoy it that way.

Sometimes I've never done the songs before - I'll just write 'em and put 'em somewhere. Then when I'm making a record I'll need some songs, and I'll start digging through my pockets and drawers trying to find these songs. Then I'll bring one out and I've never sung it before, sometimes I can't even remember the melody to it, and I'll get it in. Sometimes great things happen, sometimes not-so-great things happen. But regardless of what happens, when I do it in the studio it's the first time I've ever done it. I'm pretty much unfamiliar with it.

In the past what's come out is what I've usually stuck with, whether it really knocked me out or not. For no apparent reason. I've stuck with it, just from lack of commitment to taking the trouble to really get it right. I didn't want to record that way anymore. Now I'm recording more than I used to record. About two years ago I decided to get serious about it and just record. Because I do need records out and I do have deadlines and commitments. It's been a big struggle to come up with them at certain times. So rather than do that, what I do now is just record all the time. Sometimes nothing comes out and other times I get a lot of stuff that I keep. I recorded this album ["Empire Burlesque"] for a long time. I just put down the songs that I felt as I wanted to put them down. Then I'd listen and decide if I liked them. And if I didn't like them I'd either re-record them or change something about them. I wanted to be the first one to judge it rather than put them out there to the people and have them do it.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Does the producer make a big difference?

**BOB DYLAN:** I produce my own records, really. I don't even know what a producer does. Producers usually get in the way. They're fine for picking you up at the airport and making sure all the bills are paid at your hotel. If they're really good producers, they'll find songs for you to sing that really make sense for you. But the

producers I have aren't even really like producers. They make a record sound right, but I haven't run into any that know any more about what I'm doing than I do.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** You've mentioned a couple of times how much you value conciseness but you're more responsible than anyone for breaking out of tight, structured song forms.

**BOB DYLAN:** Yeah. Well, I come out of that folk music/rock & roll structure. So that's the only kind of structure I really deal with. I don't consider myself a pop songwriter like Burt Bacharach/Hal David, even Lionel Richie. I think you have to be too relaxed a person, you have to have too much patience (laughs) to do that sort of thing. But I don't know what I've done. I usually think of myself as last. When I think of songwriters I don't really think of myself. I think of other people. I know I'm doing it, too. But it gives me more of a kick to see somebody else do it. I *\*need\** to do it. Like that Jonathan Richman. I get a kick out of that. I'd rather listen to that. Whereas my stuff, I need to do it, I have to do it, I'm inside it all the time. So I've got a get *\*out\** of it. When I hear my old stuff I just think of how badly it was recorded.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Has there ever been a time when you didn't want to write, to perform? There've been periods when we didn't hear from you.

**BOB DYLAN:** I've tried to get away from it, but I never could. It's all I've ever done, really. I'm still hearing stuff that was made in the fifties and the sixties that maybe I heard once and forgot about or maybe I never heard.

**BILL FLANAGAN:** Do you ever think maybe you'd like not to be tuned into it all the time, not receiving? Maybe the muse could give you a break?

**BOB DYLAN:** No. That would scare me. I wouldn't know what else to do. I would be lost.

# **THE ROBERT HILBURN INTERVIEW**

## **NOVEMBER 17, 1985**

*Published in Chicago Sun Times 17 Nov 1985 as "At 44 Bob Dylan Looks Back"; transcribed in "Talking Bob Dylan 84-85" by Bicker*

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*What was it you wanted? #20)*

Maybe it's because he did not give interviews at all for years, or maybe it is just that he is the most important songwriter of the modern pop era, but I cannot imagine passing up the chance to talk to Bob Dylan - even if strings are attached.

The interview invitation from Columbia Records suggested that Dylan only wanted to discuss his latest album: "Empire Burlesque", the studio collection from last summer and "Biograph", the ambitious retrospective set that just hit the stores.

Dylan himself quickly cut the strings. He showed little interest in those subjects as he sat on a chair in the backyard of his Malibu home.

"The new releases?", Dylan asked almost sheepishly, "I hope you don't make this look like some carny trying to hawk his own records. I don't know if you even want to hit on the records. When people think of me, they are not necessarily going to buy the latest record, anyway. They may buy a record from years ago. Besides I don't think interviews sell records".

So why did Dylan agree to a series of interviews, including his first formal network TV interview (for "20/20")?

"I really haven't had that much connection or conversation (over the years) with the people at Columbia" he said, referring to his record label for most of two decades. "Usually I turn in my records, and they release them. But they really like this record ("Empire Burlesque"), so they asked me to do some videos and a few interviews to draw attention to it".

"But that doesn't mean I want to sit around and talk about the record. I haven't even listened to it since it came out. I'd rather spend my time working on new songs or listen to other people's records. Have you heard the new Hank Williams album, the collection of old demo tapes? it's great".

About the project, Dylan said: "Columbia wanted to put out (a retro- spective) album on me a few years ago. They had pulled out

everything (from earlier albums) that could be classified as love songs and had it on one collection. I didn't care one way or another, but I had a new record coming out, so I asked them not to it then".

"I guess it's OK for someone who has never heard of me and is looking for a crash course or something. But I've got a lot of stuff that is lying around all over the place in cassette recorders that I'd put out if I was putting the set together".

One thing about "Biograph" that does please Dylan is a 36-page booklet written by Cameron Crowe, who wrote numerous Rolling Stone magazine profiles and the book and then the screenplay "Fast Times at Ridgemont High". The "Biograph" text is a brief, affectionate look at Dylan's life with generous quotes from the songwriter.

Dylan, 44, is not being open just to the press these days. For years he has tended to be isolated even when doing a benefit concert - avoiding photographers and, often, other artists backstage by arriving just before showtime and leaving quickly after the last number.

At September's Farm Aid benefit at the University of Illinois however, he was almost leisurely hanging out with Tom Petty, whose band backed him on the show, and chatting with other performers including Randy Newman, Lou Reed and Emmylou Harris. Normally camera-shy, Dylan did not even turn away when a TV crew and a few photographers pointed their lenses at him as he sat on steps outside his dressing room trailer.

One reason for the naturalness, a backstage observer joked at Farm Aid, was that Dylan wanted to prove - after his disastrously spacey performance with the Stones' Keith Richards and Ron Wood at Live Aid - that he still had his faculties.

"Yeah", Dylan grumped about July's Live Aid concert in Philadelphia, "They screwed around with us. We didn't even have any (sound) monitors out there. When they threw in the grand finale at the last moment, they took all the settings off and set the stage up for the 30 people who were standing behind the curtain. We couldn't even hear our own voices (out front), and when you can't hear, you can't play; you don't have any timing. It's like proceeding on radar".

Dylan's Malibu home, on a bluff overlooking the ocean, is quite secluded and a guard shack at the only entrance to the property keeps the curious away. The atmosphere is rural. A dirt driveway

runs through the property, and lots of small animals, including chickens and a few large dogs roam around.

On this cool afternoon, Dylan was wearing the same outfit that he has always seemed to be wearing in recent years. jeans looking as if they were ready for the hamper, a wrinkled T-shirt and motorcycle boots. Except for Europe last year, he has not toured much in the 80's. Still he is on the road so much - Minnesota, New York, London or some more isolated exotic places - that he does not really call any place home.

"I'm just not the kind of person who seems to be able to settle down", he said as two dogs edged against his chair. "If I'm in L.A. for say, two months, I'll be in the studio for maybe a month out of that time, putting down ideas for songs".

"On The other days I'm usually recuperating from being in the studio. I usually stay in a long time, all night, part of the day. Then I'll go off to New York or London and do the same thing. I'm going to London soon to work on some stuff with Dave Stewart".

Stewart, one half of the Eurythmics, joined Dylan on guitar on the Emotionally Yours video.

Dylan expects to concentrate on performance videos because he has not been pleased with concert clips based upon his songs - either the arty 'Jokerman' video or more conventional narrative of 'Tight Connection'.

He would probably just as soon not do videos at all, but realizes their importance in the market place.

"It used to be that people would buy a record if they liked what they heard on the radio, but video has changed a lot of that", he said. "If someone comes along now with a new song, people talk about 'Well, what does it look like?' It is like 'I saw this new song'".

One continuing question for Dylan is his much-publicized 'born-again' Christian phase. He has said he does not like the term 'born-again', and his music has moved away from the aggressive dogma of the 'Slow Train Coming' album. But Dylan still refuses to define his exact religion.

"I fell like pretty soon I am going to write about that", he said. "I feel like I got something to say but more than you can say in a few paragraphs in a newspaper".

He did smile at the mention of the hostile reactions generated during his 'born-again' Christian tours of 1979 and 1980. "If you make people jump on any level, I think it is worth while, because people are so asleep".

Beyond music, Dylan's special interest these days is art. He maintains an artist's studio behind his Malibu house and showed off his character sketches, with the nervous excitement of a proud parent. He hopes to put them in a book and write something to go with each drawing. Dylan is also thinking about a book of short stories. "That may sound presumptuous", he said, "but there are a lot of things, I'd like to say that I can't say in songs".

On his continued energy he said: "It's kinda funny. When I see my name anywhere, it's (often) the '60's this or the '60's that. I can't figure out sometimes if people think I'm dead or alive".

This man who has been hounded, dissected, idolized and ridiculed over the years, stepped outside the studio. The sun had set and the dogs raced over to him. He paused - as if searching for a summary statement.

"I've had some personal ups and downs, but usually things have been pretty good for me", he finally said. "I don't feel old", but I remember in my 20's (when) I'd think about people in their 30's as old. The thing I really notice now is time".

"Things used to go a lot slower. The days now go by so very fast. But I've never felt numb (about life). There is something about the chords, the sound of them that makes you feel alive. As long as you can play music, I believe you'll feel alive".



# **SPIN, VOLUME ONE, NUMBER EIGHT, DECEMBER 1985**

*Interviewer : Scott Cohen*

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*Who's Who, What's What, and Why*

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In this issue we publish what is possibly Bob Dylan's most candid interview ever. Scott Cohen spent several days with Dylan in California and then stayed in constant touch with him for the following two weeks as they added to the story. Starting on page 36, it is the largest interview we've ever run.

Don't Ask Me  
Nothin' About Nothin'  
I Might Just Tell  
You The Truth

## **Bob Dylan Revisited**

*Interview by Scott Cohen*

Bob Dylan, poet laureate, prophet in a motorcycle jacket. Mystery tramp. Napoleon in rags. A Jew. A Christian. A million contradictions. A complete unknown, like a rolling stone. He's been analyzed, classified, categorized, crucified, defined, dissected, detected, inspected, and rejected, but never figured out. He blew into mythology in 1961 with a guitar, harmonica, and corduroy cap, a cross between Woody Guthrie and Little Richard. He was like the first punk folksinger. He introduced the protest song to rock. He made words more important than melody, more important than the beat. His smokey, nasal voice and sexy phrasings are unique. He can write surreal songs with a logic all their own--like a James Rosenquist painting or a Rimbaud prose poem--and simple, straight-from-the-heart ballads with equal ease. He can take the dark out of the nighttime and paint the daytime black. He probably could have been the biggest sex symbol since Elvis, had he chosen to. Then Mick Jagger came along. The Stones, the Beatles, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, all paid him their due. The radical Weathermen took their name from him. He caused a riot at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival when he went on stage and played electric rock. The folk faction thought he sold out. Later, during the height of "flower

power," when everyone was getting into Eastern religion, Dylan went to Jerusalem, to the Wailing Wall, wearing a yarmulke. A decade later he was a born-again Christian, or so it seemed, putting out gospel records. People discovered that he really wasn't where it's at. It's not like Dylan suddenly got less political or more spiritual. Biblical references have always been in his songs. People have been calling him a visionary for years. Who knows? Suppose a spiritual revolution is going on and rock 'n' roll's just a prelude to something else. Who would make a better prophet than Dylan? Sometimes, what looks large from a distance, close up ain't never that big. Dylan's like one of his lines. He lives pretty simply, in a nice house on secluded property on the California coast, with a bunch of chickens, horses, and dogs. The fact that he's more visible now and doing ordinary things, like the Grammys, videos, even this interview, doesn't make him any less mysterious. It adds to it.

### **You Want to Talk to Me, Go Ahead and Talk**

A lot of people from the press want to talk to me, but they never do, and for some reason there's this great mystery, if that's what it is. They put it on me. It sells newspapers, I guess. News is a business. It really has nothing to do with me personally, so I really don't keep up with it. When I think of mystery, I don't think about myself. I think of the universe, like why does the moon rise when the sun falls? Caterpillars turn into butterflies? I really haven't remained a recluse. I just haven't talked to the press over the years because I've had to deal with personal things and usually they take priority over talking about myself. I stay out of sight if I can. Dealing with my own life takes priority over other people dealing with my life. I mean, for instance, if I got to get the landlord to fix the plumbing, or get some guy to put up money for a movie, or if I just feel I'm being treated unfairly, then I need to deal with this by myself and not blab it all over to the newspapers. Other people knowing about things confuses the situation, and I'm not prepared for that. I don't like to talk about myself. The things I have to say about such things as ghetto bosses, salvation and sin, lust, murderers going free, and children without hope--messianic kingdom-type stuff, that sort of thing--people don't like to print. Usually I don't have any answers to the questions they would print, anyway.

### **Who would you want to interview?**

A lot of people who aren't alive: Hank Williams, Apollinaire, Joseph from the Bible, Marilyn Monroe, John F. Kennedy, Mohammed, Paul the Apostle, maybe John Wilkes Booth, maybe Gogol. I'd like to interview people who died leaving a great unsolved mess

behind, who left people for ages to do nothing but speculate. As far as anybody living goes, who's there to interview? Castro? Gorbachev? Reagan? The Hillside Strangler? What are they going to tell you? The destiny of the world's wealthiest man, that don't interest me. I know what his reward is. Anybody who's done work that I admire, I'd rather just leave it at that. I'm not that pushy about finding out how people come up with what they come up with, so what does that leave you with? Just the daily life of somebody. You know, like, "How come you don't eat fish?" That really wouldn't give me answers to what I'm wondering about.

### **Dark Sunglasses**

I started out with Batman and Robin-type sunglasses. I always thought the best kind of sunglasses are the motorcycle helmets with the black plastic masks on them. That way, nobody can recognize the back of your head either. With sunglasses, you buy them off the rack, if they fit, and put them on. Shoes are tougher. You go into a store, try this pair on, that pair on. I feel I have to buy something if I put it on. What I'm looking for is a pair of glasses that can see through walls, whether they're sunglasses or not.

### **Isn't it hard to wear dark glasses after all these years?**

Late at night it is, when I'm driving. I don't wear them all the time. I've gone through periods when I wear them, but I don't know why. I'm nearsighted, so I wear them for that reason.

### **Highway 61 Revisited**

People ask me about the '60s all the time. That's the first thing they want to know. I say, if you want to know about the '60s, read *Armies of the Night* by Norman Mailer, or read Marshall McLuhan or Abraham Maslow. A lot of people have written about the '60s in an exciting way and have told the truth. The singers were just a part of it. I can't tell them that much. Certain things I can remember very clearly. Others are a kinda blur, but where I was and what was happening I can focus in on if I'm forced to. Of course, there are people who can remember in vivid detail. Ginsberg has that talent and Kerouac had that talent to a great degree. Kerouac never forgot anything, so he could write anything because he could just remember.

### **My Back Pages**

Miles Davis is my definition of cool. I loved to see him in the small clubs playing his solo, turn his back on the crowd, put down his horn and walk off the stage, let the band keep playing, and then

come back and play a few notes at the end. I did that at a couple of shows. The audience thought I was sick or something. Lily St. Cyr (the stripper), Dorothy Dandridge, Mary Magdalen, that's my definition of hot. My first pop hero was Johnny Ray. I saw him late '78. I think he was playing club lounges. He hasn't had a hit for a while. Maybe he needs a new record company. I hope the guy's still alive. People forget how good he was. The only person I can think of who didn't return a phone call of mine was Walter Yetnikoff (president of CBS) the summer before last. I placed it personally, direct dial, long distance, at 3 o'clock in the morning. The last record I bought was Lucille Bogan. She was a blues singer who I had heard of, but not her records. I don't buy too many contemporary records. I didn't go down to the record store and buy the record personally. I know someone who works in a record store in town and I called and asked him to set it aside. No, I didn't actually pick it up, somebody else did. The first expensive thing I bought with my first big paycheck was a '65 baby-blue Mustang convertible. But a guy who worked for me rolled it down a hill in Woodstock and it smashed into a truck. I got 25 bucks for it. The name on my driver's license is Bob Dylan. It was legally changed when I went to work for Folk City a few thousand years ago. They had to get my name straight for the union. I never watch sports on TV, although I did see John McEnroe beat Jimmy Connors at Wimbledon when I was over in England last year. There was a TV set backstage and I had gotten there early and I paid attention to the whole thing. Usually I don't stay with something that long. I used to play hockey when I was growing up. Everyone sort of learns how to skate and play hockey at an early age (in Minnesota). I usually played forward, sometimes center. My cousin was a goalie at the University of Colorado. I didn't play too much baseball, because my eyes were kind of bad and the ball would hit me when I wasn't looking. I never played much basketball, unless I played with my kids. Football I never played at all, not even touch football. I really don't like to hurt myself. I have a good understanding with all the women who have been in my life, whether I see them occasionally or not. We're still always best of friends.

### **Tangled Up in Blue**

I once read a book of Nathaniel Hawthorne's letters to some girl, and they were extremely private and personal, and I didn't feel there was any of myself in those letters, but I could identify with what he was saying. A lot of myself crosses over into my songs. I'll write something and say to myself, I can change this, I can make this not so personal, and at other times I'll say, I think I'll leave this on a personal level, and if somebody wants to peek at it and make up their own minds about what kind of character I am,

that's up to them. Other times I might say, well, it's too personal, I think I'll turn the corner on it, because why do I want somebody thinking about what I'm thinking about, especially if it's not to their benefit.

### **Tales of Yankee Power**

The best songs are the songs you write that you don't know anything about. They're an escape. I don't do too much of that because maybe it's more important to deal with what's happening rather than to put yourself in a place where all you can do is imagine something. If you can imagine something and you haven't experienced it, it's usually true that someone else has actually gone through it and will identify with it. I actually think about Poe's stories, "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Pit and the Pendulum." Certainly, if you look at his life, he really didn't experience any of that stuff. But some fantastic stories came out of his imagination. Like, "Here I am stuck in this job I can't get out of. I'm working as a civil servant, what am I going to do next? I hate this existence." So what does he do? He sits in his attic and writes a story and all the people take it to mean he's a very weird character. Now, I don't think that's an illegitimate way to go about things, but then you got someone like Herman Melville who writes out of experience-- Moby Dick or Confidence Man. I think there's a certain amount of fantasy in what he wrote. Can you see him riding on the back of a whale? I don't know. I've never been to college and taken a literary course. I can only try to answer these questions, because I'm supposed to be somebody who knows something about writing, but the actual fact is, I don't really know that much about it. I don't know what there is to know about it, anyway. I began writing because I was singing. I think that's an important thing. I started writing because things were changing all the time and a certain song needed to be written. I started writing them because I wanted to sing them. If they had been written, I wouldn't have started to write them. Anyway, one thing led to another and I just kept on writing my own songs, but I stumbled into it, really, it was nothing I had prepared myself for, but I did sing a lot of songs before I wrote any of my own. I think that's important too.

### **Did you ever send your poems to any poetry magazines?**

No, I didn't start writing poetry until I was out of high school. I was 18 or so when I discovered Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Phillip Whalen, Frank O'Hara, and those guys. Then I went back and started reading the French guys, Rimbaud and Francois Villon; I started putting tunes to their poems. There used to be a folk music scene and jazz clubs just about every place. The two scenes were very much connected, where the poets would read to a small combo,

so I was close up to that for a while. My songs were influenced not so much by poetry on the page but by poetry being recited by the poets who recited poems with jazz bands.

### **The Real You at Last**

Sometimes the "you" in my songs is me talking to me. Other times I can be talking to somebody else. If I'm talking to me in a song, I'm not going to drop everything and say, alright, now I'm talking to you. It's up to you to figure out who's who. A lot of times it's "you" talking to "you." The "I," like in "I and I," also changes. It could be I, or it could be the "I" who created me. And also, it could be another person who's saying "I." When I say "I" right now, I don't know who I'm talking about.

### **All I Really Want to Do**

As long as I continue to make records and play, which I'm not through doing yet, I have to go along with what the scene is at the time. I'm not a Pete Seeger. I've actually done that every once in a while, where I have led two thousand, three thousand people through songs, but I haven't done it like Pete Seeger. He's a master at that, leading a mass of people in four-part harmony to a song not even in their language. I think he could appeal to people as much as Sting could, because he could make them feel like they matter and make sense to themselves and feel like they're contributing to something. Seeing Tears for Fears is like being a spectator at a football game. Pete is almost like a tribal medicine man, in the true sense of the word. Rock 'n roll performers aren't. They're just kind of working out other people's fantasies.

### **Bob Dylan's 115th Dream**

I signed a record contract with John Hammond, Sr., of Columbia Records in 1961. It was a big moment. I had been rejected by a lot of folk companies--Folkways, Tradition, Prestige, Vanguard. It was meant to be, actually. If those other companies had signed me, I would have recorded folk songs, and I don't think they would have stayed with me. Most of those companies went out of business, anyway. Dream #116: The Freewheelin' album. The girl on the cover with me is Suze Rotolo, my roommatre at the time.

### **Newport, 1965**

The first time I played electric before a large group of people was at the Newport Folk Festival, but I had a hit record out (Bringing It All Back Home), so I don't know how people expected me to do anything different. I was aware that people were fighting in the

audience, but I couldn't understand it. I was a little embarrassed by the fuss, because it was for the wrong reasons. I mean, you can do some really disgusting things in life and people will let you get away with it. Then you do something that you don't think is anything more than natural and people react in that type of riotous way, but I don't pay too much attention to it.

### **Motorpsycho Nitemare**

In 1966 I had a motorcycle accident and ended up with several broken vertebrae and a concussion. That put me down for a while. I couldn't go on doing what I had been. I was pretty wound up before that accident happened. It set me down so I could see things in a better perspective. I wasn't seeing anything in any kind of perspective. I probably would have died if I had kept on going the way I had been.

### **Gospel Plow**

In 1979 I went out on tour and played no song that I had ever played before live. It was a whole different show, and I thought that was a pretty amazing thing to do. I don't know any other artist who has done that, has not played whatever they'r known for. The Slow Train record was out and I had the songs to the next record and then I had some songs that never were recorded. I had about 20 songs that never had been sung live before, and nobody seemed to pick up on that. They were seeing me as if they were dropping into some club I was playing in and were to witness something that really wasn't for publicity purposes. Yet it got all kinds of negative publicity. The only thing that bothered me about it was that the negative publicity was so hateful that it turned a lot of people off from making up their own minds, and financially that can hurt if you got a show on the road. The first time we went out on that tour, we had something like eight weeks booked. Two of the weeks were in San Francisco. In the review in the paper, the man did not understand any of the concepts behind any part of the show, and he wrote an anti-Bob Dylan thing. He probably never liked me anyway, but just said that he did. A lot of them guys say stuff like, "Well, he changed our lives before, how come he can't do it now?" Just an excuse really. Their expectations are so high, nobody can fulfill them. The can't fulfill their own expectations, so they expect other people to do it for them. I don't mind being put down, but intense personal hatred is another thing. It was like an opening-night critic burying a show on Broadway. This particular review got picked up and printed in all the newspapers of the cities we were going to play to even before tickets went on sale, and people would read this review and decide the didn't want to see the show. So it hurt us at the box

office, and it took a while to work back from there. I thought the show was pretty relevant for what was going on at the time.

### **Positively 4th Street**

Outside of a song like "Positively 4th Street," which is extremely one-dimensional, which I like, I don't usually purge myself by writing anything about any type of quote, so-called, relationships. I don't have the kinds of relationships that are built on any kind of false pretense, not to say that I haven't. I've had just as many as anybody else, but I haven't had them in a long time. Usually everything with me and anybody is up front. My-life-is-an-open-book sort of thing. And I choose to be involved with the people I'm involved with. They don't choose me.

### **Heart of Gold**

The only time it bothered me that someone sounded like me was when I was living in Phoenix, Arizona, in about '72 and the big song at the time was "Heart of Gold." I used to hate it when it came on the radio. I always liked Neil Young, but it bothered me every time I listened to "Heart of Gold." I think it was up at number one for a long time, and I'd say, "Shit, that's me. If it sounds like me, it should as well be me." There I was, stuck on the desert someplace, having to cool out for a while. New York was a heavy place. Woodstock was worse, people living in trees outside my house, fans trying to batter down my door, cars following me up dark mountain roads. I needed to lay back for a while, forget about things, myself included, and I'd get so far away and turn on the radio and there I am, but it's not me. It seemed to me somebody else had taken my thing and had run away with it, you know, and I never got over it. Maybe tomorrow.

### **Has Anybody Seen My Love?**

"Tight Connection to My Heart" is a very visual song. I want to make a movie out of it. I don't think it's going to get done. I think it's going to go past on the way, but of all the songs I've ever written, that might be one of the most visual. Of all the songs I've written, that's the one that's got characters that can be identified with. Whatever the fuck that means. I don't know, I may be trying to make it more important than it is, but I can see the people in it. Have you ever heard that song "I'm a Rambler, I'm a Gambler," ... "I once had a sweetheart, age was 16, she was the Flower of Belton and the Rose of Saline"? Same girl, maybe older. I don't know, maybe it should stay a song. In most of my songs, I know who it is that I'm singing about and to. Lately, since '78, that's been true and hasn't changed. The stuff before '78, those people

have kinda disappeared, '76, '75, '74. If you see me live, you won't hear me sing too many of those songs. There's a certain area of songs, a certain period that I don't feel that close to. Like the songs on the Desire album, that's kind of a fog to me. But since '78 the characters have all been extremely real and are still there. The ones I choose to talk about and relate to are the ones I find some kind of greatness in.

### **Million Dollar Bash**

I know going on the Grammys is not my type of thing, but with Stevie (Wonder) it seemed like an interesting idea. I wasn't doing anything that night. I didn't feel I was making any great statement. For me, it was just going down to the place and changing my clothes.

### **Idiot Wind**

Videos are out of character for me, too. The latest ones I've done with Dave Stewart are all right. The other ones, I don't know, I was just ordered around. I didn't pay much attention to those videos. You have to make them if you make records. You just have to. But you have to play live. You can't hide behind videos. I think once this video thing peaks out, people will get back to see who performs live and who don't.

### **X-Rated**

I don't think censorship applies to me. It applies more to Top 40 artists. People who have hit records might have to be concerned with that, but I don't have those kinds of records that I'd have to be concerned about what I say. I'm just going to write any old song I feel like writing. The way I feel about it, I don't buy any of those records, anyway. I don't even like most of that music. I couldn't care at all if the records you hear on the radio are X-rated or R-rated. I don't think it's right, however, I'm opposed to it. I think every single song that you hear can be seen in another point of view from what it is. People have been reading stuff into my songs for years. I'd probably be the first one with a letter on their record.

### **Which letter?**

F and B, Fire and Brimstone. But I don't know about the B, that could stand for Boring. Certainly a lot of stuff today would fall into that category.

### **Rainy Day Women**

I've always been drawn to a certain kind of woman. It's the voice more than anything else. I listen to the voice first. It's that sound I heard when I was growing up. It was calling out to me. When everything was blank and void, I would listen for hours to the Staple Singers. It's that sort of gospel singing sound. Or that voice on the Crystal's record, "The He Kissed Me," Clydie King, Memphis Minnie, that type of thing. There's something in that voice, that whenever I hear it, I drop everything, whatever it is.

### **What happens when the body doesn't match the voice?**

A body is a body. A woman could be deaf, dumb, crippled, and blind and still have soul and compassion. That's all that matters to me. You can hear it in the voice.

### **I forgot More Than You'll Ever Know**

I never had that much to do with Edie Sedgwick. I've seen where I have had, and read that I have had, but I don't remember Edie that well. I remember she was around, but I know other people who, as far as I know, might have been involved with Edie. Uh, she was a great girl. An exciting girl, very enthusiastic. She was around the Andy Warhol scene, and I drifted in and out of that scene, but then I moved out of the Chelsea Hotel. We, me and my wife, lived in the Chelsea Hotel on the third floor in 1965 or '66, when our first baby was born. We moved out of that hotel maybe a year before Chelsea Girls, and when Chelsea Girls came out, it was all over for the Chelsea Hotel. You might as well have burned it down. The notoriety it had gotten from that movie pretty much destroyed it. I think Edie was in Chelsea Girls. I had lost total touch with her by that time, anyway. It may just have been a time when there was just a lot of stuff happening. Ondine, Steve Paul's Scene, Cheetah. That's when I would have known Edie if I would have known her, and I did know her, but I don't recall any type of relationship. If I did have one, I think I'd remember.

### **I Threw It All Away**

I once traded an Andy Warhol "Elvis Presley" painting for a sofa, which was a stupid thing to do. I always wanted to tell Andy what a stupid thing I done, and if he had another painting he would give me, I'd never do it again.

### **Another Side of Bob Dylan**

I never read Freud. I've never been attracted to anything he has said, and I think he's started a lot of nonsense with psychiatry and that business. I don't think psychiatry can help or has helped

anybody. I think it's a big fraud (pun not intended) on the public. Billions of dollars have changed hands that could be used for far better purposes. A lot of people have trouble with their parents up until they're 50, 60, 70 years old. They can't get off their parents. I never had that kind of problem with my parents. Like John Lennon, "Mother": "Mother, I had you but you never had me." I can't imagine that. I know a lot of people have. There are a lot of orphans in the world, for sure. But that's not been my experience. I have a strong identification with orphans, but I've been raised by people who feel that fathers, whether they're married or not, should be responsible for their children, that all sons should be taught a trade, and that parents should be punished for their children's crimes. Actually, I was raised more by my grandmother. She was a fantastic lady. I love her so much, and I miss her a lot. But, getting back to the other thing, it all needs to be shaken up, and it will be. I never had any barriers to get across that were that clear to me, that I had to bust down to anything I truly loved. If I had any advantage over anybody at all, it's the advantage that I was all alone and could think and do what I wanted to. Looking back on it, it probably has a lot to do with growing up in northern Minnesota. I don't know what I would have been if I was growing up in the Bronx or Ethiopia or South America or even California. I think everybody's environment affects him in that way. Where I grew up...it's been a long time since. I forgot about it once I went east. I couldn't remember very much about it even then. I remember even less about it now. I don't have any long great story to tell about when I was a kid that would let anybody know how it is that I am what I am.

### **Patti Smith says you were Rimbaud in a previous incarnation**

I don't know if she's right or wrong, but Patti Smith, then, of course, knows a lot of deep details that I might not be aware of. She might be clued in to something that's a little beyond me. I know at least a dozen women who tell me they were the Queen of Sheba. And I know a few Napoleons and two Joan of Arcs and one Einstein.

### **All Along the Watchtower**

There weren't too many Jews in Hibbing, Minnesota. Most of them I was related to. The town didn't have a rabbi, and it was time for me to be bar mitzvahed. Suddenly a rabbi showed up under strange circumstances for only a year. He and his wife got off the bus in the middle of winter. He showed up just in time for me to learn this stuff. He was an old man from Brooklyn who had a white beard and wore a black hat and black clothes. They put him

upstairs of the cafe, which was the local hangout. It was a rock 'n' roll cafe where I used to hang out, too. I used to go up there every day to learn this stuff, either after school or after dinner. After studying with him an hour or so, I'd come down and boogie. The rabbi taught me what I had to learn, and after he conducted this bar mitzvah, he just disappeared. The people didn't want him. He didn't look like anybody's idea of a rabbi. He was an embarrassment. All the Jews up there shaved their heads and, I think, worked on Saturday. And I never saw him again. It's like he came and went like a ghost. Later I found out he was Orthodox. Jews separate themselves like that. Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, as if God calls them that. Christians, too. Baptists, Assembly of God, Methodists, Calvinists. God has no respect for a person's title. He don't care what you call yourself.

### **A Puff of Smoke**

I've never been able to understand the seriousness of it all, the seriousness of pride. People talk, act, live as if they're never going to die. And what do they leave behind? Nothing. Nothing but a mask.

### **Knockin' on Heaven's Door**

Whenever anybody does something in a big way, it's always rejected at home and accepted someplace else. For instance, that could apply to Buddha. Who was Buddha? An Indian. Who are Buddhists? Chinese, Japanese, Asian people. They make up the big numbers in Buddhism. It's the same way with Jesus being a Jew. Who did he appeal to? He appeals to people who want to get into heaven in a big way. But some day the true story will reveal itself, and by that time, people will be ready for it, because it's just going in that direction. You can come out and say it all now, but what does it matter? It's going to happen anyway. Vanities of vanities, that's all it is.

### **They're Not Showing Any Lights Tonight**

I went to Bible school at an extension of this church out in the Valley in Reseda, California. It was affiliated with the church, but I'm not a believer in that born-again type thing. Jesus told Nicodemus, "A man must be born again." And Nicodemus said, "How can I go through my mother's womb?" and Jesus said, "You must be born of the spirit." And that's where that comes from, that born-again thing. People have put a heavy trip on it. People can call you what they want. The media make up a lot of these words for the definition of people. I mean, who's a person anymore? Everything's done for the media. If the media don't know about it,

it's not happening. They'll take the littlest thing and make it spectacular. They're in the business of doing that. Everything's a business. Love, truth, beauty. Conversation is a business. Spirituality is not a business, so it's going to go against the grain of people who are trying to exploit other people. God doesn't look at people and say, "That's a banker, that's a dentist, that's an oil-well driller."

### **What's the messianic complex?**

All that exists is spirit, before, now and forever more. The messianic thing has to do with this world, the flesh world, and you got to pass through this to get to that. The messianic thing has to do with the world of mankind, like it is. This world is scheduled to go for 7,000 years. Six thousand years of this, where man has his way, and 1,000 years when God has His way. Just like a week. Six days work, one day rest. The last thousand years is called the Messianic Age. Messiah will rule. He is, was, and will be about God, doing God's business. Drought, famine, war, murder, theft, earthquake, and all other evil things will be no more. No more disease. That's all of this world. What's gonna happen is this: you know when things change, people usually know, like in a revolution, people know before it happens who's coming in and who's going out. All the Somozas and Batistas will be on their way out, grabbing their stuff and whatever, but you can forget about them. They won't be going anywhere. It's the people who live under tyranny and oppression, the plain, simple people, that count, like the multitude of sheep. They'll see that God is coming. Somebody representing Him will be on the scene. Not some crackpot lawyer or politician with the mark of the beast, but somebody who makes them feel holy. People don't know how to feel holy. They don't know what it's about or what's right. They don't know what God wants of them. They'll want to know what to do and how to act. Just like you want to know how to please any ruler. They don't teach that stuff like they do math, medicine, and carpentry, but now there will be a tremendous calling for it. There will be a run on godliness, just like now there's a run on refrigerators, headphones, and fishing gear. It's going to be a matter of survival. People are going to be running to find out about God, and who are they going to run to? They're gonna run to the Jews, 'cause the Jews wrote the book, and you know what? The Jews ain't gonna know. They're too busy in the fur business and in the pawnshops and in sending their kids to some atheist school. They're too busy doing all that stuff to know. People who believe in the coming of the Messiah live their lives right now as if he was here. That's my idea of it, anyway. I know people are going to say to themselves, "What the fuck is this guy talking about?" But it's all there in black and white, the written and unwritten word. I don't

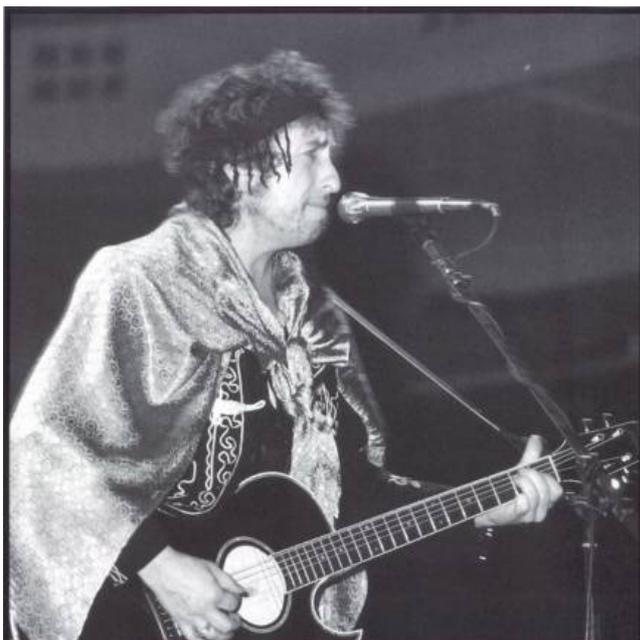
have to defend this. The scriptures back me up. I didn't ask to know this stuff. It just came to me at different times from experiences throughout my life. Other than that, I'm just a rock 'n' roller, folk poet, gospel-blues-protestest guitar player. Did I say that right?

### **Blowin' in the Wind**

Politics have changed. The subject matter has changed. In the '60s there was a lot of people coming out of schools who were taught politics by professors who were political thinkers, and those people spilled over into the streets. What politics I ever learned, I learned in the streets, because it was part of the environment. I don't know where somebody would hear that now. Now everybody wants their own thing. There's no unity. There's the Puerto Rican Day parade, Polish Day, German Week, the Mexican parades. You have all these different types of people all waving their own flags, and there's no unity between all these people. In the '60s, there wasn't any separation. That's the difference between then and now that I can see. Everybody now is out for their own people and their own selves, and they should be 'cause they look around and see everything's unbalanced.

### **The Times They Are a-Changing**

The times still are a-changing, every day. I'm trying to slow down every day, because the times may be a-changing, but they're going by awfully fast. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child. When I became a man, I put away childish things."



# Rolling Stone Issue 394 , January 16, 1986

*Interviewer : Toby Creswell over the phone from Australia  
Printed in Rolling Stone (Australian edn.) 16 Jan 1986; reprinted in "Rolling  
Thunder Supplement 1"*

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Australian edition p57 Music News

*Gates of Eden Revisited  
A Conversation with Bob Dylan  
(Toby Creswell)*

It doesn't really matter now whether Bob Dylan is a fundamentalist Christian, anymore than it mattered whether he was going to the Synagogue when he recorded 'Blood on the Tracks' ten years ago. Amongst all the crucial lines that Dylan has sung, one sticks out - "He not busy being born is busy dying." Dylan, of all the great creators of his generation, has been busy being born over a series of almost thirty albums, each of which has added to all that had come before.

However, there have been some constants. There has always been a sense of engagement with the external world. When Dylan gave up writing specific protest songs in 1964, he began writing songs about hypocrisy, prejudice, injustice, malice, exploitation and cruelty. Those concerns are still the subject of his songs. At the same time he was writing love songs like "Love Minus Zero/No Limit", which is a tender and complete statement of affection that is also a religious statement. Dylan has sung of both sacred and profane love throughout his career, sometimes concentrating on one, sometimes on the other. Then there was the electric bite of pure rock & roll as portrayed on "Subterranean Homesick Blues," a song that Dylan notes, on the five-album 'Biograph' retrospective, was recorded in one take.

All these are still elements of Dylan's current work. His choice of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers as a backing band suggests that he still after that fire in his rock & roll. Moreover, the news that he is working with Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics suggests that he still sees himself as contemporary.

Given all of that and the quality of the last album, 'Empire Burlesque,' the presence of the Heartbreakers on Dylan's Australian tour promises us an extraordinary series of concerts.

CBS has just issued the 'Biograph' box set: ten sides of Dylan from 'Bob Dylan' to 'Shot of Love.' It is an awesome body of work, unequalled in rock & roll, even the outtakes and the unfinished songs like "Jet Pilot" which later became "Tombstone Blues."

As somebody who has listened to Bob Dylan for twenty years, I jumped at the chance of an interview. But what do you say over the telephone to someone whom you have grown up with? My friend Danny said you usually talk about how the family is doing. What do you ask Bob Dylan, though?

**TC:** This tour you'll be playing with the Heartbreakers, the first time you've played with a band since the Band tour a decade ago. It must be good to get back to that format.

**BD:** We don't really know what the format is going to be yet. It's a lot easier, though, because as band members they sort of think as one person. When you put people together who've never played together before, there's so many different people ; it takes years for people to play together like the Tom Petty Band. We were all raised on the same sort of music.

**TC:** You played with the Heartbreakers for Farm Aid. You seem to have been doing rather a lot of those shows lately.

**BD:** These things pop up every once in a while. I don't think it'll become a regular thing. This year these seem to have been a couple of those kind of shows.

**TC:** It seems that these shows have become such huge events that they tend to overshadow the issues.

**BD:** I know what you mean. That can happen. The atmosphere is like a carnival. But by raising that kind of money, they must be getting these problems into the minds of a lot of people who wouldn't have had it on their minds before, and that's a good thing.

**TC:** You have said in the past that the function of art is to lead you to God. There were the three gospel albums: 'Slow Train Coming,' 'Saved' and 'Shot of Love,' but your last two records have taken a different slant.

**BD:** Well, it all depends where you come at it from. I come at things from different sides to get a different perspective on what it is I'm trying to focus in on. Maybe all my songs are focusing on the same thing. I don't know; maybe I'm just coming in from all sides.

**TC:** The difference between the gospel records and the recent stuff seems to be that earlier you were laying down the law.

**BD:** 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. I haven't heard those albums in quite awhile ; you're probably right.

**TC:** You have said recently that you didn't think rock & roll still existed in its pure form, that it was no longer viable. Would you put yourself in with that?

**BD:** I don't think I put myself in that category. I'm not coming up anymore, you know what I mean? I probably was speaking about the industry itself. I listen to it but mostly I don't pay much attention to modern music. It's everywhere, in places that maybe it shouldn't be. There comes a time to shut off the radio, there's a time to turn off the tube, but the way it's projected into society there's not much of a chance that you can get to do that. There are very few people I know who play the real old-style music. When it first appeared, as I remember it, it was an escape from everything that was going on, which was mainly lies, so when music came it was a direction to pull you in that was out of this myth. But now nobody wants to get pulled out of the myth because they don't recognise it as being a myth. That's what it's like here anyway. They like where they're at, they like what's going on, and music is just an extension of that, so they like it, too. It's nothing different, it doesn't pull you anywhere.

**TC:** So what's the solution?

**BD:** Turn it off. It's a decision people have to make. That's what the Sixties and the Fifties were all about. There are other ways to operate, to survive. There's got to be some type of light, some type of brightness outside of everything that you're given on a mass consumer level. What I can see is the mass monster. I don't know what it's like in Australia, but in America it's everywhere. It's invaded your home, your bed, it's in your closet. It's come real close to kicking over life itself. Unless you're able to go into the woods, the back country, and even there it reaches you. It seems to want to make everybody the same. People who are different are looked at as being a little bit crazy or a little bit odd. It's hard to stand outside of all that and remain sane. Even outrageousness gets to be in fashion. Anything you can think of to do, someone is going to come along and market it. I think it's going to change. I don't think it can stay like this forever, that's for sure. I think it's going to change but for the moment it's hard to find anything that's really hot.

**TC:** 'Empire Burlesque' seems a very straightforward record by comparison with some of your earlier work. Is simplicity something you are striving for?

**BD:** I strive for something that feels right to me. It could be a lot of different kinds of moods and phrasings, or lines that might not seem to be too connected at the time with the music. They're all connected. A lot of times people will take the music out of my lyrics and just read them as lyrics. That's not really fair because the music and the lyrics I've always felt are pretty closely wrapped up. You can't separate one from the other that simply. A lot of time the meaning is more in the way a line is sung, and not just in the line.

**TC:** These last few years have been very prolific for you.

**BD:** Yeah, I've been trying to find different things that are offshoots of the things I would normally do. I feel like something might open up in the next couple of months in different areas. There's a bunch of songs I want to write that I haven't been able to get close to. I almost know what they are but the information that I need is not really available to me so I have to go out and get it and I haven't done that. I expected to have a little more of that on Empire Burlesque but I just didn't do it. They are the true story type things, real things that have happened that I would like to comment on. I need to talk to the people involved but I haven't followed through yet. I hope to have some of that stuff on the next album I do.

**TC:** Were you pleased with the way 'Empire Burlesque' turned out?

**BD:** Yes, for what it was I thought it was really good. I think the next record is going to sound even better. I'm not too experienced at having records sound good. I don't know how to go about doing that, though I thought I got pretty close last time with Arthur Baker. I think next time, working with Dave Stewart here, the stuff we're doing has been happening a lot easier, quicker, so I think it's going to sound a lot more together than the last record.

**TC:** You recorded that album yourself and gave it to Arthur Baker to mix?

**BD:** Pretty much so. I just went out and recorded a bunch of stuff all over the place and then when it was time to put this record together I brought it all to him and he made it sound like a record. Usually I stay out of that side of the finished record.

**TC:** Why?

**BD:** I'm not good at it. There are guys that don't mind sitting in the control booth for days and days. I'm just not like that ; I'm a one-mix man. I can't tell the difference after that.

**TC:** Your music often seems to get ignored as compared with the emphasis that's placed on the lyrics, but they've had some really nice instrumental passages like "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid," for example.

**BD:** Yes, I just did a bunch of tracks with Dave Stewart that have no lyrics, and you don't even miss the lyrics, really. They're just different chord patterns that make up a melody. My records usually don't have a lot of guitar solos or anything like that on them. The vocals mean a lot and the rhythm means a lot, that's about it.

**TC:** Your voice seems to have changed a lot over the years.

**BD:** Maybe it has, I don't know.

**TC:** It sounded different to me, particularly after 'Street Legal' when you started using girl singers.

**BD:** I'm not aware of any significant difference, really. I've always heard that sound (female backing) with my music. I just hear it in there, it's just like another way of putting horns in. That sound has always been one of my favourites, just that vocal part, because I don't do anything with solo-type work - it's all part of the overall effect, it's more just playing the song and getting the structure of it right. The vocal parts are like another instrument but not a solo instrument. Apart from that, I just like the gospel sound.

**TC:** Seeing the latest videos and the 'We are the World' video, you seem to have less of the legend around your neck, you seem freed of the burden of being Bob Dylan.

**BD:** I don't think I ever carried that around except for 1974, when I did that tour with the Band. That was pretty much of a heavy tour because of the notoriety and the legendary quality of the people involved. I had to step into Bob Dylan's shoes for that tour. Since that time, I never thought about it. I wouldn't do half the things I do if I was thinking about having to live up to a Bob Dylan myth.

**TC:** Do you feel that you've been guided to where you are?

**BD:** You're always guided to where you are., but you have the choice to mess it up. Sooner or later evrything that goes around comes around. So, yeah, I feel like I've been guided to wherever it is I'm at right now, but I don't know whatever it is I'm supposed to be doing. I might have something else to do. I can't figure out what it would be, though, because I like doing what I do. Who's to say? There's a lot of luck involved, a lot of circumstance. You can't do anything alone, though. You've always got to have somebody supporting you or nobody would get anywhere.

**TC:** Do you think that with time comes wisdom?

**BD:** With experience. Things don't really change, just attitudes.

**TC:** You've been doing videos with Dave Stewart. What do you think of the video age?

**BD:** I don't think much about it at all. It's not going to go away. Everyplace you look, you're drowning in it. You can't turn on your TV without seeing music videos. It's like the unions. Unions in the early thirties were all communist organisations and now they're big business.

**TC:** It's got to the point where everybody seems to be using rock & roll for their own ends. In America, you have politicians associating themselves with rock & roll songs.

**BD:** Absurd isn't it. The rock & roll songs they're quoting from don't deserve to be quoted from like that. You couldn't do that with the early stuff, Little Richard and Chuck Berry - what politician is going to quote Chuck Berry? Who's going to quote Carl Perkins or Gene Vincent or any of those guys? It was outside then.

**TC:** Today it's image rather than content. People hold up an image of a star and hope to attach themselves to that image.

**BD:** That's absolutely correct. It's destroying the fabric of our minds and all we can do is complain about it, so we just have to shut it out. You just have to cut it off and not let it get into your framework because that's the only way you're going to escape it. You can't meet it head on. You've probably got a little more space to breathe over there, but here it's heavy. There's not many places you can go where you're not reminded of the current cultural ambitions of people who are on their way to be stars.

**TC:** When you started out you must have wanted to be a star in some way?

**BD:** I wanted to be a star in my own mind, I wanted to be my own star. I didn't want to be a star for people I didn't really identify with. For me what I did was a way of life, it wasn't an occupation.

**TC:** Has it been all it was cracked up to be?

**BD:** Yes and no. I'm still doing it , you know. It seems to be what I've done more years than I haven't done it, but I'm just going to keep on doing it till it runs out. Yes, it was all it was cracked up to be, because I never strayed from it. Maybe I would've gone down if I'd gone into being a movie star or if I'd started believing what other people said of me or if I'd started to think I was this person that everybody was talking about. I know there are a lot of people that did go down. They started believing what the newspapers said about them. I never believed it one way or another, so for me, I don't really feel much of a change. I feel very little change between now and ten years ago, twenty years ago. I don't feel like I've travelled that far or done that much.

**TC:** You mentioned the Unions earlier and I was thinking of the song "Union Sundown," on 'Infidels' which is a very specific commentary. Do you still feel a need to make that type of comment?

**BD:** Oh, yes, that comes with the territory.

**TC:** There seems to be two types of songs you've written, those which are here and now, and a lot that seem to focus on the eternal.

**BD:** Well, that's the important thing, if you lose that, you start getting into stuff that is mindless and meaningless. Usually there's a voice that goes on, there's some kind of warning point if that ever happens, but mostly what this kind of music is about is your ability to feel things. There's a lot of stuff going on that you hear that you know nobody felt nothing about ; you can hear it in the spirit. So much stuff gets thrown at you with no feeling behind it because nobody feels anything anymore. But there are a lot of good things going on that I don't understand. A lot of music that's coming out is way beyond me. There are some people who are really gifted musicians, I mean in a classical sense, and they're coming out with a lot of different stuff that is being thought out and preplanned.

**TC:** There does seem to be an attempt by people, like Miami Steve on the "Sun City" record, to say things about apartheid and about what is happening in America today.

**BD:** Yes, he's highly committed to that.

**TC:** It seems like a very difficult struggle.

**BD:** Well, it is a very difficult struggle, because most people don't want to hear that.

**TC:** There's a lot of red-baiting going on again.

**BD:** That's been going on since the Fifties.

**TC:** The cold war seems to be coming back.

**BD:** I don't think it ever went away, you know. It just lays low for a while. People need something to hate, you've got to hate something. As soon as your old enough, people try to make you hate something or somebody. Blacks are a little easier, Communists you can't really see. The early Christians were like Communists. The Roman Empire treated the Early Christians the same way as the Western world treats the Communists.

**TC:** So it doesn't really change?

**BD:** No, things don't, it's just got a different name on it. There's always someone you're told you've got to step on so you can rise up a little higher.

**TC:** Your kids are grown up now. What's the perspective like as a father?

**BD:** It gives you a perspective on what kids are doing. I don't think kids are any different from what they ever were, really. It's like my daddy once said, when he was twelve years old he asked his dad something and he didn't think his dad knew too much about what he was talking about. When he got to twenty-five, he asked him the same question and he got the same answer and he was amazed how his father got to be so smart.

# HEARTS OF FIRE PRESS CONFERENCE

*At the National Film Theatre in London August 17, 1986. Sources: Hearts Of Fire: The Press Conference - article by John Bauldie in The Telegraph #25. Tape from the press conference.*

*Note: The largest part of the interview above is transcribed from the tape and as on most press conference tapes, the questions are often very hard to hear. Suggestions for the ...inaudible... parts would therefore be most appreciated.*

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*(What was it you wanted? #13)*

**Press:** Bob, you've directed a film yourself, Renaldo & Clara, and you're not very well known for singing or speaking other people's words. Why did you decide to commit to this film?

**Dylan:** Oh, it's just the right time, right place, right words.

*questions to the Marquand, Fiona, Everett*

**Norman:** I'm Philip Norman from the Sunday Times and I'd like to know why one of the biggest poets and musicians of this century feels he has to play someone who's a retired star. Why isn't he a performing star, as he is, such a great star? Why is he bothering?

**Dylan:** Well, it's just a movie ...

**Norman:** Why aren't you writing poetry? Why aren't you doing the things you're really great at?

**Dylan:** Well, I do! I'm just taking some time off here.

**Norman:** Does that mean you're relaxing?

**Dylan:** Yeah.

**Norman:** So you're not going to be trying?

**Dylan:** Oh no, no, I'm gonna be trying very much.

**Press:** Bob Dylan's written four songs for this movie. Can he tell us anything about those, please?

**Dylan:** Well, I haven't written those songs just \*yet\*. (laughter)

**Press:** Well, they tell us that you have.

**Dylan:** I'm about to ... (laughter)

**Press:** What are they going to be about?

**Dylan:** They're gonna be about the movie.

**Press:** Are they going to be protest songs?

**Dylan:** I hope so, yeah, (laughter) if Richard allows them to be.

**Press:** Protesting about what?

**Dylan:** Protesting about the elements in the movie. You have to see the movie.

**Norman:** You seem very uncertain, Mr. Dylan. Do you know a great deal about this movie yet?

**Fiona:** It's ten thirty in the morning!

**Dylan:** I know enough about the movie. I didn't \*write\* the movie though. A lot of the questions you maybe want to ask the writer.

**Norman:** Nobody's interested in anybody but you.

**Dylan:** What?

**Norman:** Nobody's interested in anybody but you, in this hall.

**Dylan:** (slightly disgusted) Aah ...

*questions to Everett and Marquand*

**Press:** I'm from the Guardian. Can I ask Bob Dylan, if he says it's the right place as well as being the right time, is that place England? What do you think of England since you were last here? Do you like England?

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah, I love England.

**Press:** What are your thoughts on this country at the moment?

**Dylan:** Well, I just got here yesterday, haven't been sleeping since then.

**Press:** Are you looking forward to working here?

**Dylan:** Yeah.

**Press:** You took your name from Dylan Thomas. Have you ever been back to Wales? I see you're going back there now. Are you still interested in Dylan Thomas?

**Dylan:** Oh, yeah.

**Press:** Will you be making a trip back to his village, to where he was born and wrote?

*Marquand whispers to Dylan: "We're gonna be very close"*

**Dylan:** We're gonna be *\*very\** close. (with a loud laugh)

**Press:** How were you persuaded to do this film with Mr Marquand? What sort of bargaining chips did he use?

**Dylan:** I don't have any bargaining chips.

**Press:** But why did *\*this\** film stand out as opposed to any other?

**Dylan:** Well, you know, I'm not really doing nothing right now. Seemed like a good thing to do.

**Press:** What about you Richard, how hard did you persuade him?

**Marquand:** I don't think I really persuaded you Bob, did I?

**Dylan:** I don't think so.

**Marquand:** I heard that he was interested and we turned up at the house and we had an afternoon together and we seemed to like each other. (to Dylan:) Did you like me?

**Dylan:** Did I like you? Yeah, you drank a lot.

**Press:** In the words of Billy Parker: "You wake up, you're a *\*star\**! But there ain't nothing *\*to\** you no more. You're empty". Is that a sentiment that you would agree with?

**Dylan:** Some stars are like that, yeah.

**Press:** Are you?

**Dylan:** (with emphasis) No, I'm not like that, but I'm playing another character who *\*is\** like that. I'm getting into my character right now! (laughter, applause)

**Press:** Can you tell us what it is you find fascinating about this character?

**Dylan:** Well, he's a very self-made person. Nobody ever gave him anything. He had to take it all.

**Norman:** Why didn't you write the script yourself?

**Dylan:** I couldn't have written a script like this. It's beyond me.

**Norman:** I don't think it is.

**Dylan:** (laughs)

**Norman:** Why are you so modest?

**Dylan:** (laughs more)

**Norman:** Why are you pretending to be inadequate? You're one of the great writers of this age.

**Dylan:** Well, thank you. thank you!

**Norman:** Why don't you write a script yourself?

**Dylan:** I don't know. I'm just trying something different right now, you know.

*questions to Fiona & to Marquand about financing and distribution*

**Press:** Could I ask Bob, are they going to give you any time off when they're doing the film, so you could sneak off and play, and if you're not, when are we going to see you play next?

**Dylan:** I don't know.

**Press:** When are we going to see you play next?

**Dylan:** We've just finished a tour, so maybe sometime in a couple of years.

**Press:** What are your plans after this film, Bob?

**Dylan:** Oh, maybe just driftin' around. Then I maybe touring again.

**Norman:** Are you easily bored, Mr. Dylan?

**Dylan:** (sharply) I'm never bored!!

**Norman:** Have you any notion of how bored you're gonna be doing this picture?

**Dylan:** Well ... (disgusted) maybe you'll be around. (laughter)

**Press:** This film is about stardom and how to handle stardom. Will you be drawing on your own experience on how to handle it?  
...inaudible ...

**Dylan:** No, not really, you know. I don't consider myself a big star, other people do.

**Press:** You are a poet and a singer and you are taking up the role of an actor, which is ...inaudible... very different. How are you gonna handle that?

**Dylan:** Ah, I find some some way.

**Press:** ...inaudible...

**Dylan:** I'll figure it out.

**Norman:** Can I ask why you want to be an actor?

**Dylan:** I just want to see what it's like.

**Norman:** But you've seen what it's like before.

**Dylan:** (laughs) I wanna see it again!!

**Norman:** It obviously sickened you. It obviously put you off, because you haven't done it for ten or twelve years.

**Dylan:** Well, we'll see.

**Press:** Is this the first time that you have to follow a script?

**Dylan:** No, I think I had to do it once before.

**Press:** A big thing in America in the music ...inaudible... How does this go along with the Bob Dylan protest songs of the sixties that you're apparently gonna be writing and singing in this film?

**Dylan:** I don't know.

**Press:** You feel good about America at the moment?

**Dylan:** I've always felt good about America! America's big you know, there's all kinds of different parts to it, you know.

**Press:** The parts that you used to write about, you felt very bitter about, very contempt .... and you were very funny about it. Why aren't you funny about Ronald Reagan?

**Dylan:** Well, I mean, what's so funny about that? (laughter)

**Press:** It's terrible joke on the world!

**Dylan:** (tired) Aaah, it's all a joke!

**Press:** ...inaudible...

**Dylan:** Well, I don't know. The sixties are gone you know.

**Press:** Do you regret the ...inaudible... of legends that surrounds you?

**Dylan:** No.

**Press:** But you give that impression.

**Dylan:** Well, you know, impressions can be misleading.

**Press:** Have you lost your enthusiasm?

**Dylan:** For what?

**Press:** For life and for writing.

**Dylan:** (disgusted) Naaahhh.

**Press:** Mr. Dylan, you've talked today about doing this picture because it's different you've said. You, in the past, have been in charge of your own destiny as an artist. But recently you've seemed to have collaborated with Sam Shepard to write an epic song. Here you're going to collaborate with others to make a movie. Does this mean that you're changing your artistic career and that you're now going to do more things that involves collaborating with others or being involved in other people's projects, rather than simply doing your own work?

**Dylan:** It's not so much other people's projects as finding somebody to work on the same project \*with\*.

**Press:** How did the project with Sam Shepard evolve?

**Dylan:** I don't know, we wrote a bunch of things a few years ago and ...

**Press:** If you were rewriting *The Times They Are A-Changin'* now, if you were writing it now, how would you write it different? Or would you?

**Dylan:** No, it would be the same.

**Press:** Would you say the eighties are same as the sixties or is there something different to protest now?

**Dylan:** Well, you know, if somethings good, it transcends that, whatever generation or date, that you write it.

*questions to Fiona, Everett & Marquand*

**Press:** Bob Dylan, a lot of musicians have made entirely successful attempts to cross over into films. What impressions have you got from ...inaudible... Mick Jagger and David Bowie.

**Dylan:** I like them all in films and Chris, I don't know ...

**Press:** Have you studied their attempts? Tried to learn from ... [interrupted]

**Press:** Do you watch many films?

**Dylan:** I don't remember the last film I saw. Must have been great, I don't know ...

**Press:** ...inaudible... bought all the albums and now they're forty. Have you got anything to say to them?

**Dylan:** Just keep buying them! (laughter)

**Press:** What are you reading at present?

**Dylan:** I was reading a biography of Ulysses S. Grant.

**Press:** He used to get very drunk I believe.

**Dylan:** Who did?

**Press:** Ulysses S. Grant.

**Dylan:** Yeah, well I haven't got to that part yet (laughter)

**Press:** ...inaudible... interesting to you? A drunken civil war general from the Northern side. I thought you sympathized with the South.

**Dylan:** Ahhh. I thought he was OK.

**Press:** ...inaudible... you did the last tour with Petty for the money. Can we take that to be a new philosophy of yours?

**Dylan:** I'm always doing tours for the money! What's so new about that?

**Bauldie:** Bob, I was watching The Maltese Falcon recently, and it was full of lines that sounded as though you could have written them. Do you recall watching that film before you wrote the Empire Burlesque songs?

**Dylan:** Which film?

**Bauldie:** The Maltese Falcon.

**Dylan:** I might have seen it. Were there lines from it in there?

**Bauldie:** Lots of them.

**Dylan:** Were there really?

**Bauldie:** Yes, Is it one of your favorite films, that?

**Dylan:** I don't remember. Which lines were they?

**Bauldie:** Do you want a list?

*interrupted by questions about shooting of the concert scenes*

**Press:** Are you deliberately elusive with the press or just shy?

**Dylan:** (mumbles) I don't know.

**Press:** Can I just ask, are the Heartbreakers gonna be in the movie and are you gonna tour with the Heartbreakers again?

**Dylan:** I don't think they're in this movie.

**Press:** Are you going to tour with them again?

**Dylan:** Maybe.

*questions to the others*

**Press:** What are your impression of the British press? (laughter)

**Dylan:** The press is the same all over the world.



# THE THIRD CHRISTOPHER SYKES INTERVIEW, TORONTO, OCTOBER 18, 1986

Source: *The Telegraph* #30

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Well, gimme an answer and I'll say it!  
(*What was it you wanted?* #22)

**Sykes:** You said "People say I can't act, but they say I can't sing either ..."

**Dylan:** I said that?

**Sykes:** Yes.

**Dylan:** You sure it wasn't Rupert who said that? Hahahaha.

**Sykes:** Well, I'd like you to say it now.

**Dylan:** What?

**Sykes:** So this is my question to get you to say it: How do you rate your acting potential?

**Dylan:** My \*what\*?

**Sykes:** Your acting potential?

**Dylan:** What are we doing here?

**Sykes:** I just want you to say this line, that you've got to remember, this scripted line: "People say I can't act, but they say I can't sing either".

**Dylan:** Who said I can't act? Hahahaha. I mean who?

**Sykes:** You said it!

**Dylan:** Oh, gee. I don't remember saying that. Why would I say something like that?

**Sykes:** Can I ask you what makes a good song?

**Dylan:** Melody. Rhythm. That stuff, I guess. But mostly it's sentiment - whether you can identify with what the sentiment of

the song is, what the song says, as a song. That's what makes a good song. Someone would say, "this is a good song" and someone else would say "that's a good song". Whether it's true for anybody makes it a good ... anything. You can't say that about a tree or a leaf or a vegetable though. You only say that about man-made things. Nobody ever judges God's creations, right? Nobody ever says "That tree looks prettier than that tree". There's no judgement in nature. Did you ever notice that?

**Sykes:** So, how's it done, to make all these good songs?

**Dylan:** I don't know, I have no idea.

**Sykes:** Is writing songs a disciplined thing, like a job?

**Dylan:** No, no. Some people do work like that, I know what you mean. For me it is, if I have enough time to concentrate. I need that. A lot of times I might think of something, but if I'm not in the right place to carry it through, it just won't get done. Won't happen. I don't think of myself as a writer, I really don't. I write songs, you know, but I just write the lyrics to those songs to sing. Sometimes the lyrics change before I get 'em into the studio to record them, and then when I get 'em out of the studio I'll make changes when I have to play them live. So they will change.

**Sykes:** Not only do you change the words to the songs when you sing them - I can understand that - but sometimes you change the treatment from performance to performance; you play around with it, so that it's not a fixed thing.

**Dylan:** I do yeah, but I've just sort of done it out of necessity. Maybe I have a show on the road and I need to do songs, so I'm forced up to it. I'll do songs that I think are important to put in a particular place. You know, one day a ballad singer was someone who carried the news from town to town, or set himself up somewhere where he could play things to people who could understand them in a certain way. I don't know how any of today that are still doing that. Now, things are a little bit more worldwide. Then if there was a fire in one county you might not even hear about it in the next county. Now, with communication being so widespread, everybody knows about everything no matter where it's going on - or they think they know about it. That's a whole other subject. I don't even think you really know about it anyway, even if you do see it on TV or hear it on the news. I still think you have no idea what's going on - if what you're seeing is even a replica of anything that really has happened, or is happening.

I wonder about the time when all those guys, Mozart and Haydn and even Beethoven himself, and Strauss, Chopin, you know, those guys were the pop heroes of their day, but there must also have been ballad singers around - more so than today even - and they'd have been playing in all the drawing rooms of the court, for audiences of maybe six people, so the people never go to see them. I used to see street singers - I used to \*be\* one! I did it for two or three years, but I ran into people that had been doing it for 20 or 30 years, and boy, they knew how to handle a crowd, that's for sure.

**Sykes:** Do you know how to do that?

**Dylan:** Handle a crowd? yeah. I can make enough noise to handle a crowd.

**Sykes:** You were talking about doing your songs differently in concerts ...

**Dylan:** You know why that happens? It's because a lot of times my records were made ... especially in the '70's ... I took a lot of songs into the studio that I really wasn't that familiar with. I just had written them, so I didn't know ... and it depends on what musicians you have playing with you - like, what can they do, you know? And sometimes I've been in the studio with bands - just studio guys that have been put together - and you have to figure out which way this band's gonna play, especially if you want to do six songs in a session.

**Sykes:** You like to get it over and done with, don't you? You don't want to spend a year doing an album, like some of these other stars now do ...

**Dylan:** I wouldn't mind spending a year on an album, I mean, if it was worth my while ... Hahahaha!

**Sykes:** Worth your while?

**Dylan:** If somebody said to me to try to do a certain thing that took a year or something like that. I don't know \*why\* you'd spend a year on an album, I guess you could go off to Rio for part of the time, you know, record down there, go to Montserrat, record there, and then maybe take a quick ride to Paris, record there for a couple of weeks. Hahahaha. I don't know how you'd spend a year on an album. How's it done? I don't know.

**Sykes:** To get it right?

**Dylan:** Well, that must be the reason! To get it right. I always figure it always be more right, so you can always wonder about that. I know I have.

**Sykes:** Do you listen to your albums?

**Dylan:** No, I really don't. I overhear them sometimes when other people have them on, but I don't listen to them. I don't listen to anybody's albums really. Most records - new records - you buy, check them out, see what somebody's doing, but as for sitting down and needing to hear it, you know, time and time again, throughout your day and night just to feel connected to something, I don't hear nothing around like that these days. I mean for \*me\*, you know. Other people may find that for them those things do that.

**Sykes:** Do you have an idea about the way you'd like your albums to be listened to - just coming out of radios and buses ... ?

**Dylan:** Yeah, well ... look man, I gotta go. I'm out the door.

**Sykes:** But can we just keep this going a little bit ... it's probably much more interesting to us than it is to you.

**Dylan:** I gotta \*eat\* though! I gotta see somebody.

**Sykes:** Do you know what I mean? That there might be a way in which you sort of imagine them being listened to?

**Dylan:** No, I don't. I don't. I don't know where that fits in to what we're talking about.

**Sykes:** I was looking through your lyrics - there aren't very many political songs in there.

**Dylan:** I don't know which of my songs was ever political.

**Sykes:** Master Of War is.

**Dylan:** I don't know if even Masters Of War is a political song. Politics of \*what\*? If there is such a thing as politics, what is it politics of? Is it spiritual politics? Automotive politics? Governmental politics? What kind of politics? Where does those word come from, politics? Is this a Greek word or what? What does it actually \*mean\*? I don't know what the fuck it means. Left, right, rebel. Some people are rebels. Let's see, Afghanistan are rebels, but they're OK. Nicaragua's got rebels and they're OK. Their rebels are all right. But in El Salvador the rebels are the bad

guys. Nicaragua, the rebels are the good guys. If you listen to that stuff you go crazy. You don't even know who \*you\* are anymore. It don't make any sense to me. I don't see good guy, bad guy. It's that Dave Mason song "There ain't no good guy, there ain't no bad guy, there's only you and me and we just disagree". True or what?

**Sykes:** We all have our favorite rebels I guess.

**Dylan:** Yeah! That must be it!

**Sykes:** Who do you admire?

**Dylan:** Who is there to admire now? Some World leader? I could probably think of many people actually that I admire. There's a guy who works in a gas station in LA - old guy, I truly admire that guy.

**Sykes:** What's he done?

**Dylan:** What's he done? He helped me fix my carburettor once.

**Sykes:** You are serious, aren't you, about the gas man?

**Dylan:** Hmmm.

**Sykes:** You're putting a lot of work and a lot of time into this film, and then you say you're not going to see it.

**Dylan:** Oh, I may see it, I might go see it. I don't know. I'm not sure about the date it's gonna open. Hahahaha.

**Sykes:** You say it's a joy to work with Fiona, that she's got what it takes.

**Dylan:** I think so. I think she could be the next Joan Crawford. Hahahaha!

**Sykes:** I think I meant as a singer.

**Dylan:** I'm talking about acting. as a singer? She could be the next anybody. She don't have to be the next anybody, she could be the first one like her.

**Sykes:** What does it take?

**Dylan:** What do \*you\* think? What do you \*really\* think?

**Sykes:** Well, the trouble is I can't use my answer.

**Dylan:** Well, gimme an answer and I'll say it!

**Sykes:** Well some kind of talent which is rather indefinable, and some kind of determination to use it despite feeling that it's all terribly difficult and so on, and also despite all the pressures from other people to get you to do something else rather than doing that; to survive all the manipulation and exploitation that I suppose goes with people wanting to use this talent that you happen to have, to get what they want, which might not be the same as what you might want to be doing. That kind of thing I suppose,

**Dylan:** Well!

**Sykes:** Do you make friends with these people you're working with? I'm kind of interested.

**Dylan:** Hahahaha! You should work in Beverly Hills, man! You should have a little clinic! Hahahaha! Hahahaha! Charge people \$500 for every ten minutes!

**Sykes:** Like Prince's Dr Feelalright!

**Dylan:** Yeah!

**Sykes:** Do you like Prince's stuff?

**Dylan:** Prince? Yeah. Who don't like Prince? Well, I guess I could name a few! Hahahaha! No, he's a fantastic guy, ain't he? He can do anything, can't he?

**Sykes:** Do you have any future movie plans?

**Dylan:** Yeah, I do have plans to make a movie with Alan Rudolph next fall.

**Sykes:** With who?

**Dylan:** Alan Rudolph. He's a movie director. He's a bright guy. It's a complicated story, about a piano player who gets into trouble because of a good buddy of his, and then he winds up doing some book work for a woman whose husband has disappeared, marries her, then falls in love with her daughter. And the other guy finally shows up again and the movie comes to a screeching halt.

**Sykes:** So how do you decide which kind of script attracts you? Or, why this one? Because I've got to tell you, when I read this script I just thought ... well, as it turns out I can see it's all working,

but when I first read the script, I've got to be honest, I didn't think it looked too good.

**Dylan:** Well, I'd heard that too, you know. I heard that. But ... I dunno. It guess it's better than it looks!

**Sykes:** Quite a bit of it's changed. You mentioned to me the other day that you're writing a novel.

**Dylan:** Nah, nah.

**Sykes:** Was that a joke?

**Dylan:** I started ... You always like to think you're writing a novel. To write a novel you got to be able to concentrate on it for a long period of time. I know people who've written them, and they just stick with them for a year or more maybe and live pretty cut off in the meantime. I don't know if I could do that because I tour and move around. Maybe someday. Maybe I'll have something to say.

**Sykes:** You like the names of places, don't you? Like Baton Rouge ...

**Dylan:** Belfast! Hahahaha! Whitney Houston! Hahahaha! Sounds like the name of a town, don't it? I love the sounds of words, yeah!

**Sykes:** Sometimes, you often use the phrase "Who cares?". Obviously \*you\* care, deeply, about certain things - and I suppose I'd like to know what those are.

**Dylan:** I suppose you would!

**Sykes:** I suppose you're not going to tell me either, so I suppose I'll forget it ...

## 25 MAY 1989? PUBLISHED IN A SPANISH PAPER 18 JUNE 1989

*Interviewer: Unknown*

*Published 18 June 1989 on a Spanish paper*

*(From: buck@eleazar.dartmouth.edu (Rebecca A. Buck)*

*Newsgroups: rec.music.dylan*

*The following interview, published this month in the Rolling Thunder Supplement, really sounds so little like Dylan.*

*Heylin says that it was published in a Spanish paper on June 18, 1989. Inaki Aguirrezabal translated it, and comments that "It is a really strange interview judging by both the questions and the answers ... (though the translation) is absolutely faithful to the original contents." Dylan supposedly gave this interview in LA before he left for the European tour this year (around the 25th of May, perhaps). He was "inbetween 'a recording session' ... and 'getting his next film ready.'" The interview was syndicated through an agency called LID, but this is the only use we know of. )*

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"IF I KEEP GOING FOR SO MANY YEARS, THERE MUST BE A REASON FOR IT"

Bob Dylan finished last night in San Sebastian his brief tour in Spain. He did not agree to be interviewed neither in Madrid nor in Barcelona. He does not trust photographers either. This European tour which will finish on 26th in Greece, is not characterized by his devotion to the public. he does not only avoid the Press, but also his performances are limited to just the signed contract, without a single encore for his wholehearted and nostalgic followers. The following interview was recorded in Los Angeles, some hours before he caught the plane that would take him to Europe.

**BD:** I used to admire Woody Guthrie and Robert Johnson (the blues singers). It is impossible not to admire some people, it's something that illuminates you and makes you feel small.

**Q:** What is your next film about?

**BD:** It is the most exciting project I ever been at. The story is much more than a film in which Bob Dylan takes part. If you want to be sincere just with yourself, you'll go wrong. If you aren't sincere with your heart, you'll fail. But I can't tell you what it is about until we start filming. The film is going to be significant. If I

could tell you what it is about I would, but I can't - the same as I can't explain my songs either. It is a feeling of reality that I assume and most people who listen to me will understand. The level of reality in which we find ourselves, me and my work - these are things that can't be explained.

**Q:** Bob Dylan is known for having a soft spot for women. Why?

**BD:** I think that most women are beautiful. Many of them seem to have been taken off a picture. They are vulnerable and also strong.

**Q:** Goddesses are not real. That is what you said in an interview some years ago.

**BD:** A beautiful woman is like a goddess. She is on a pedestal.

**Q:** During the filming of Renaldo and Clara you improvised a lot with your character and Joan Baez participated in the bedroom scenes.

**BD:** Joan knew me very well in and outside the bed, that's why we could make some scenes really interesting for the public.

**Q:** Do you think you are the number one?

**BD:** How many years have I kept going? A lot. There must be a reason for it.

**Q:** Elvis Presley?

**BD:** A relic of the past.

**Q:** Frank Sinatra?

**BD:** He is on the way to becoming a relic. If I was him I would be retired by now.

**Q:** Bob Dylan?

**BD:** I continue on my way upwards.

**Q:** Until then

**BD:** That depends on some things, like the audience, my enthusiasm and my strength. (smiling he answers) Why, I am just like any other, I only try to keep going.

**Q:** As regards his present attitude towards women, Bob's answer is not very precise:

**BD:** I am on a sort of crossroads in my life and I can do without that. I can feel the attraction but I can also keep myself apart. I admire beauty more than anything else but now I don't feel I must possess it. The ideal man or woman doesn't exist. When you look for something you are not really looking for a man or a woman. You are looking for someone who awakes something which is buried inside you and once that person does it you become familiar and you always want that and then you stay with that person. But two people who are in love are not in love just with each to her. There is a third element intermingled and that third element is an ideal. Both must love the same ideal and that is what they have to share. If that doesn't exist, then it's not love, it's necessity.

**Q:** Is it true that during your bad times, when everything seems to be a waste of time, you usually say, "I go out with the animals or spend more time with my children. I like teenagers, they are less obscure and purer."?

**BD:** The worst time in my life was when I tried to search (for) the past, for instance when I went back to new York for the second time. I didn't know what to do, everything had changed and I also tried to sing and write at the same time, and sometimes that drove me crazy. One thing is writing and singing is very different. One is opposed to the other, and I can't write with the energy with which I perform and I can't perform with the energy with which I write.

**Q:** Many times you have said that you had to fight. Against what?

**BD:** With the past. When I recall the past it is something almost masochistic. I had some beautiful moments I wish to keep. I've been in the darkness...now I wish to concentrate in the light only.

