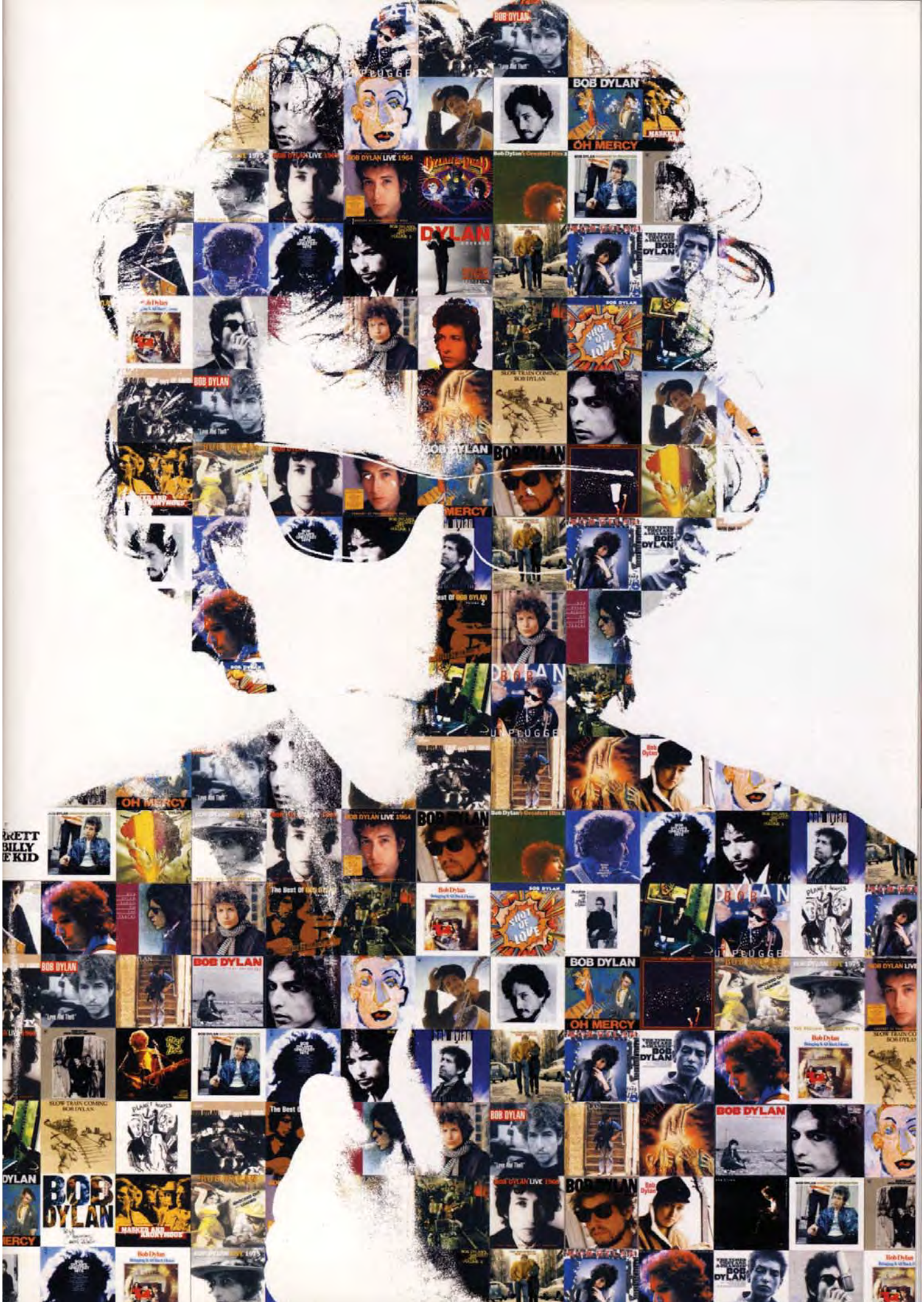
BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

THE 100 GREATEST DYLAN SONGS

Original photography: ©Larry Schultz/Corbis. Illustration by Mark Wagstaff


BOB DYLAN
OH MERCY
DYLAN
SHOT OF LOVE
SLOW TRAIN COMING
BOB DYLAN
UNPLUGGED
BOB DYLAN LIVE 1964
Love And Theft
MARKED AND ANONYMOUS

YOUR PANEL

The 100 Greatest Dylan Songs were volunteered, compiled and annotated by the following writers and musicians.

Manish Agarwal, Phil Alexander, Joseph Arthur, Martin Aston, Badly Drawn Boy, Devendra Banhart, Mike Barnes, Angus Batey, Beck, Brendan Benson, Frank Black, Johnny Black, Norman Blake, James Blunt, Bono, Billy Bragg, Paul Buchanan, Eric Burdon, Joey Burns, Win Butler, John Cale, Terry Callier, Keith Cameron, Marc Carroll, Martin Carthy, Neko Case, Nick Cave, Gaz Coombes, John Cooper Clarke, David Crosby, Sheryl Crow, Fred Dellar, Donovan, Tom Doyle, Sly Dunbar, Daryl Easlea, Danny Eccleston, Johnny Echols, Marianne Faithfull, Bill Fay, Rob Fearn, Robert Fisher, David Gray, Sid Griffin, Steve Harley, Roy Harper, John Harris, Richard Hell, Chris Hillman, Bill Holdship, Al Hutchins, Colin Irwin, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Bruce Johnston, David Katz, Jon King, Al Kooper, Daniel Lanois, Sondre Lerche, Phil Lesh, Alan Light, Andria Lisle, Carl Loben, Toby Litt, Mike Love, Steve Lowe, Ben Machell, Andrew Male, Greil Marcus, Dave Marsh, Paul McCartney, Ian McNabb, James McNair, Tom McRae, Bob Mehr, Mark Mulcahy, Nas, Samantha Parton, Howie Payne, Mark Paytress, Andrew Perry, Madeleine Peyroux, Robert Plant, Chuck Prophet, Johnathan Rice, Rich Robinson, Tom Robinson, Jon Savage, John Sebastian, Pete Seeger, Victoria Segal, Charlie Sexton, Robbie Shakespeare, Johnny Sharp, David Sheppard, Sylvie Simmons, Siouxsie Sioux, Patti Smith, Rennie Sparks, Mavis Staples, Al Stewart, Sting, Romeo Stodart, Phil Sutcliffe, Rachid Taha, Richard Thompson, Paul Trynka, Jeff Tweedy, Jeremy Vine, Loudon Wainwright III, Norma Waterson, Jimmy Webb, Lucinda Williams, Brian Wilson, Lois Wilson, Jim Wirth, Ron Wood, Roddy Woomble, Robert Wyatt

Special thanks to Ben Edmonds and Al Hutchins for their tenacity, and to Sheryl Crow – so good we included her twice!

WIN BOB'S FULL HOUSE!

Outraged by our selection? Wondering where Wiggle, Wiggle got to? Burning to justify the genius of The Ugliest Girl In The World? Then send your own Dylan Top 10 to MOJO for a chance to win every Bob Dylan product currently available through Sony. Scrawl your list on a postcard and send it to **Bob's Full House!, MOJO Magazine, Mappin House, 4 Winsley St, London W1W 8HF**, or e-mail it to **mojo@emap.com**, putting Bob's Full House in the subject line. Don't forget to include contact details. Closing date is August 31, and the readers' list will appear on mojo4music.com in the near future.

We also have one pair of tickets for each of Dylan's UK shows this November. These will go to seven runners-up, so include details of your preferred show on your entry. Dates are as follows...

November 15 – **Nottingham Arena**
November 16 – **Manchester MEN Arena**
November 17 – **Glasgow SECC**
November 18 – **Birmingham NEC**
November 20,21, 22 – **London Brixton Academy**

100 Oh, Sister
(*Desire*, 1976)

Girl From The North Country redux. Plus Emmylou Harris.

Andrew Bird (MOJO CD cover-mount star): "I like this because it stands out from Dylan's more typical torrent-of-words type of song. It's only the surface of the story, and you're left wondering what the nature of this relationship is. What has this guy done to lose his sister's affection and why is he giving her this moral-religious guilt trip? It's mysterious and kind of creepy and also quite simple. It's the same thing that draws me to Charlie Patton or an old Childs ballad.

"One thing that Dylan managed to pull off which I think about and admire a lot is that he is able to tell a story and send a message without sacrificing the beauty of language. Can you imagine a rousing, populist protest song today that wouldn't just sound ludicrous? Sure there've been some noble, artful attempts, but nothing like Maggie's Farm. I was also drawn to this tune because of Emmylou's gorgeous vocal harmonies of the original, and I really wanted to hear my friend Nora O'Connor's singing on that song, which she did, just right, as always."

99 This Wheel's On Fire
(*The Basement Tapes*, 1975)

Watch out! Mean ol' Dylan's goin' to confiscate your lace!

Siouxsie Sioux: "I chose this for our covers album because I thought Julie Driscoll had written it. I'd seen her perform it on Top Of The Pops as a kid and I loved her Joan Of Arc look. Then I found out it was by fucking Bob Dylan! I liked the song so it stayed on anyway. Have I heard his version? No, never! He wasn't someone who captured my imagination back in the mid-'70s."

98 My Back Pages
(*Another Side Of...* 1964)

Year Zero for post-protest Dylan.

Accepting, if that's quite the word, an award presented by a New York liberal institution called the Emergency Civil Rights Committee on the evening of December 13, 1963, Dylan made a febrile speech that, among other things, appeared to express empathy with Lee Harvey Oswald. "It's took me a long time to get young," he said, amid the boos, "and now I consider myself young." Out of that evening came My Back Pages' "I was so much older then" refrain, and its rejection of well-meaning lefty rhetoric, killing off the old Dylan who'd feared "not that I'd become my enemy / In the instant that I preach". "Judas"'s rapid journey starts here. (CP)

97 Sign On The Window
(*New Morning*, 1970)

Street-wise raconteur wrestles with his Family Man alter ego.

Rich Robinson (The Black Crowes): "It's just Bob on piano at first, then his band are trying to catch up. It comes off in such a great way. Lyrically there's a lot of reflection on city life. He's trying to figure out the world and ends up looking for the simple things. "Build me a cabin in Utah / Marry me a wife, catch a rainbow trout." That's beautiful and concise but it has meaning on a greater level. Musically, it's textured to the point where it sounds like it has earth in it. I covered this song live when I did some solo touring and it made me think that whatever artists you're talking about it's all about the subtleties. And Bob's music is full of subtlety."

96 Goin' To Acapulco
(*The Basement Tapes*, 1975)

Dionysus clinks mugs with Our Lady Of Guadalupe.

Dylan's most straightforwardly beautiful voice was the one he shared with The Band's Rick Danko and Richard Manuel – a soaring banshee wail embracing fear and joy and heartbreaking sadness. Goin' To Acapulco is its apotheosis, gilding the song's outlaw ribaldry with a patina of the divine. "It's a wicked life," shrugs Bob, "but what the hell / Everybody's got to eat," while Robbie Robertson's turnarounds tumble down and Garth Hudson's organ takes it to church. The perfect funeral song? (DE)

95 Lily, Rosemary And The Jack Of Hearts
(*Blood On The Tracks*, 1975)

"There's something funny going on," says the backstage manager. He's right.

Ron Wood (Rolling Stone, serial Dylan sideman): "I first heard this when I was making my first solo album [*I've Got My Own Album To Do*, 1974] and it strikes me now as it did then – a strong mini-novel with twists and dark turns like something Ray Bradbury would have written, like Something Wicked This Way Comes. I love that it gathers momentum and the lyric makes you picture mysterious mining town incidents, bank robbers and hookers.

"Dylan's very impressionistic as a painter as well as a songwriter, and fun to play live with. You never quite know where you are – which suits me fine! His band rocks and before going on stage, he always says to the MD, 'Just give Woody the keys to the songs and once he's on stage he stays 'til we finish!' He gave me a cowboy hat, thrown on stage when we played Kilkenny, and he last said to me, 'Every time you play with me you get a free hat.'"

94 Tombstone Blues
(*Highway 61 Revisited*, 1965)

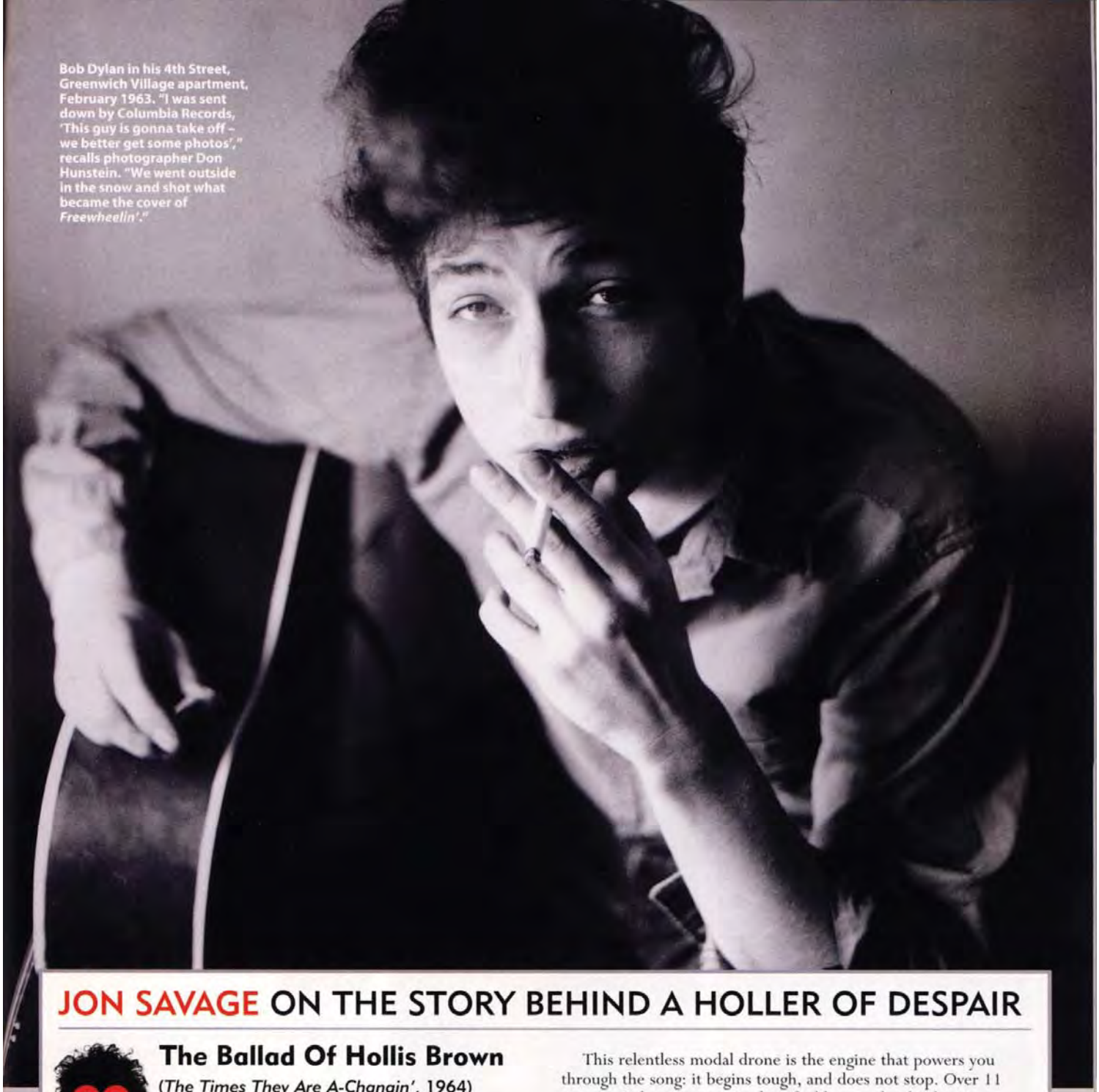
Fast-cut symbolist fun in the bone-bleaching sun.

Norman Blake (Teenage Fanclub): "It's just relentless, a six-minute torrent of surrealistic images. You can tell it was written at the height of Pop Art, with these incredible iconic characters: Galileo, Cecil B. DeMille, Beethoven all thrown together. And there's a lot of humour in it – all that stuff about knitting a bald wig for Jack The Ripper. There's a real punk quality to it too – Dylan has youthful energy pouring out of him and the band are missing cues. I was listening to it this morning and it struck me, for the first time, how much Dylan had influenced the early Velvet Underground – especially a song like Hey, Mr Rain. There's a really similar sound and intensity."

93 Chimes Of Freedom
(*Another Side Of...* 1964)

Spokesman For A Generation gets caught in rain, sees light, disappears.

If Dylan was caught at divergent roads in '64 – the narrow path of the protest singer or an ascent to skies of super-real impressionism – then this is his moment of epiphany. In a city doorway, waiting out an electrical storm, Dylan and companion marvel as thunder and lightning "[seem] to be the chimes of freedom flashing." Musically spare, sung as if trying to remember a dream, it's the sound of protest song and songwriter fragmenting in awesome nature. And what of those bells of lightning tolling for the luckless? Nature's just rage or clangorous futility? Maybe the freedom is in the not knowing. (AM)



Bob Dylan in his 4th Street, Greenwich Village apartment, February 1963. "I was sent down by Columbia Records, 'This guy is gonna take off – we better get some photos'," recalls photographer Don Hunstein. "We went outside in the snow and shot what became the cover of *Freewheelin'*."

JON SAVAGE ON THE STORY BEHIND A HOLLER OF DESPAIR

92

The Ballad Of Hollis Brown

(*The Times They Are A-Changin'*, 1964)

THE BALLAD Of Hollis Brown is a major work that has received scant attention in recent years. Written around the same time as A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall and premiered in September 1962, it was finally issued on *The Times They Are A-Changin'* LP in January 1964. A permanent fixture of Dylan's live sets from 1962 to the end of 1964 – and, notably, featured at Live Aid in 1985 – it remains a song to which he regularly returns in concert.

The song began life as a newspaper item – in common with other contemporary pieces like Only A Pawn in Their Game. Unlike some of these social comment songs, however, Hollis Brown does not point the finger but rather, from the very first line, plunges you into the cumulative desperation of the starving poor. This accords with the fatalism that comes from the song's melodic source: the murder ballad Pretty Polly, recorded in 1927 by Dock Boggs and tackled by Dylan himself in Minneapolis during May 1961.

This relentless modal drone is the engine that powers you through the song: it begins tough, and does not stop. Over 11 stanzas, Dylan uses two modes of address – the third party descriptive and the more direct "you" – to ram home the fact that, for Hollis Brown and his family, there is no money, no friend, no escape, no future. Each detail piles up and up until there is no way out except seven deaths. This fated, fatal mood of pre-determination is highlighted by the ambiguous promise of reincarnation in the song's cosmic ending: "somewhere in the distance / there's seven new people born".

"FOR HOLLIS BROWN AND HIS FAMILY THERE IS NO ESCAPE, NO FUTURE."

The Ballad Of Hollis Brown was a highlight of Dylan's first major TV appearance, on Folk Songs And More Folk Songs, in May 1963. Its compulsive dread is best heard on an extraordinary live version from Philadelphia in November 1964, where Dylan spits out the stanzas like machine gun bullets and his guitar makes the noise of a full rock'n'roll band. In its length – over six minutes – and intensity, The Ballad Of Hollis Brown now sounds like a precursor to the great psychological/perceptual epics – It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding), Desolation Row – that would follow in 1965.

"DYLAN'S SONG MOVED ME TO TEARS" PATTI SMITH

91 Spanish Harlem Incident
(*Another Side Of...* 1964)

Scorchio! Bob's in thrall to a gypsy gal "too hot for taming".

Howie Payne (The Stands): "I heard that it was recorded in one night with a couple of bottles of wine and you do get the feeling of being there in the room with him. He bursts out laughing or forgets his words, or knocks the mike-stand or rambles some nonsense; but it's the human element that Dylan gets through whatever persona he's donning. This is definitely semi-drunken, it's got that 4am feel of a sailor in New York, staggering up First Avenue while the dawn's rising over the East River, following a girl who's leading him into dangerous territory. It's so perfectly delivered, and almost feels like it's falling to pieces at times. The riff, too, is striking 'cos it doesn't quite fit and is attacked really harshly, which makes it seem rockier. It's got a lot of Irish in it, even though it's about a girl from Harlem, it has a raucous Clancy Brothers feel. It's like he's on a boat on a rough ocean, and the girl has the power to make it all right for him."

90 Señor (Tales Of Yankee Power)
(*Street-Legal*, 1978)

Once dismissed by Greil Marcus as "a pastiche of the best moments of the Eagles' Hotel California".

A grim, era-shifting adventure that seems to bounce between frontier America, first century Jerusalem, and some strange futuristic netherworld, the song is Dylan's attempt to convey the widescreen majesty and redemptive themes of the films of Peckinpah and Ford. Metaphorically rich lyrics foreshadow his looming Christian phase; the song is rife with apocalyptic imagery. Guided by a mournful Latin-flecked groove, expansive sax, soul choir and a creaking lead vocal to capture the drama of the narrative ("Let's overturn these tables/Disconnect these cables"), Señor is both epic and inscrutable. (BM)

89 Talkin' Bear Mountain Picnic Massacre Blues
(*Time Out Of Mind*, 1997)

Woody Guthrie-indebted disaster movie rap – played for laughs.

Badly Drawn Boy: "It's Bob Dylan's funniest song, all about how he buys tickets to a picnic but ends up corralled onto this ship, which sinks. He wakes up on the shore: 'My arms and legs were broken, my feet were splintered, my head was cracked, I couldn't walk, I couldn't talk, smell, feel, couldn't see, didn't know where I was. I was bald.' He was bald! Dylan's great at going that one step further than anyone else. Like rhyming the same rhyme – in The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll, when he rhymes 'table' with 'table' twice in a row! It was his 60th a few years ago, I was doing David Letterman, and they time everything in rehearsal, and the guy counts you down and then you've got your song to play. But I did a little intro: 'I'd like to wish Bob Dylan a happy 60th birthday.' The floor manager went barmy, but it was worth it."

88 Lonesome Day Blues
(*Love And Theft*, 2001)

Wry, rolling blues that laughs in the face of the reaper.

Ian McNabb "I think Dylan is better now than he's ever been. I wasn't into all that 'The sun ain't yellow/It's chicken... Napoleon in rags' period. It sounds cool, witty, sharp and 'university' and I love those records, but the last two albums are some of the best things he's written. He sounds like he's been through everything and is resigned to his fate. Somebody of that age with that wisdom, it's inspirational because it just says you get to the end of the game and you still don't have the answers. On Lonesome Day Blues he's resigned to everything, prepared to admit his failures... but, you know what? 'They're doing the double shuffle/Throwin' sand on the floor...' And at the end of the day, it's all about doing the double shuffle. Life sucks, but, it's better that we're here and it sucks and we can do the double shuffle than we never got a chance. It's like Vegas, you know you're going to lose, but it doesn't mean you didn't have a good time. And some of it's so funny. (*Sings*) 'Well, my pa he died and left me /My brother got killed in the war / My sister she ran off and got married / Never was heard of any more.' You can tell now he's just having fun with these tales of mortality. He's getting smaller and smaller every day, and dealing with failure, age and ill-health and writing about them in a humorous and entertaining way. Who else is there doing that? Neil Young? No! Van Morrison's turned into George Melly. All we have left is Dylan."

DYLAN'S MUSES
#1 WOODY GUTHRIE

Many have spent their college years pretending to be working-class, but on his University of Minnesota campus, Dylan went further: emulating the straw-chewing, union-loving Dustbowl folkie Woody Guthrie. When drunk, he would often answer to no other name. By the time he left for New York, he was a Guthrie song repository – his first port of call was the folkie's house in Queens (Guthrie was in hospital and the babysitter didn't know what to do). Only when he heard of Greenwich Village character Ramblin' Jack Elliott performing the same function did he consider building his own identity. The spark for this infatuation was Guthrie's autobiography Bound For Glory. The book's style soon fed into his own songs: the lists like "stealers, dealers, sidewalk spielers" (see Subterranean Homesick Blues) or, more trivially, the way of spelling "blowing" as "blowin'". His recent Chronicles book saw him stealing tricks from his old hero even into his sixties. (SL)

87 It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry
(*Highway 61 Revisited*, 1965)

Dylan rides a coal-blazin', whistle-wailin', yakety-track loco all the way to gloryland.

It's Dylan showing off. Proving that he knows the blues, knows that roots equate with routes that find their way via rails just four-foot eight-and-a-half-inches apart. And it's a great ride as he recalls stanzas from old 12-bars – "Don't the moon look good, mama, shining through the trees", lines that blues-kids were fed at birth. He's having fun even though it's a mail-train, a slow train that's forever getting flagged down by brakemen. Woody rode the trains, Jimmie Rodgers rode the trains. And here's Bob doing it musically and doing it with such panache that you pray the terminus will never loom into view. (FD)

86 Fourth Time Around
(*Blonde On Blonde*, 1966)

"Everybody must give something back/For something they get." Dylan responds to Lennon's borrowings?

Win Butler (The Arcade Fire): "I've probably listened to it 50, 60 times trying to figure out exactly what's going on. The melody is really similar to Norwegian Wood and I love the repetitive classical guitar lick, the machine-gun drum beat, and the bass line that just keeps driving and driving. Dylan can talk about real emotions and then go way off and say something completely aesthetic. The end result is this really rich, interesting piece that you can dig into forever. This one's kind of a warning. The new girlfriend is being told how it ended with the last one, and if you're not careful... That line is really hard: 'I never asked for your crutch/Now don't ask for mine.' Or maybe it really is about The Beatles after all!"

85 Corrina, Corrina
(*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963)

Gently swinging *billet-doux* discreetly unveils Dylan in combo mode.

Corrina, Corrina's almost throwaway insouciance might have stood out amid the protest polemics and mordant anti-love songs of *Freewheelin'*, but Dylan's wholesale refurbishment of a traditional British folk ballad (previously looted by everyone from Red Nichols to Big Joe Turner) bears distinctive hallmarks. The loose-limbed backing of bass, drums and the tumbling guitar lines of future collaborator (and Mr Tambourine Man inspiration) Bruce Langhorne anticipates the sound of Dylan's still two-year off folk rock pomp, though his vocals would rarely, if ever, match the relaxed ingenuousness of his delivery here. Still arguably the prettiest song in Dylan's canon. (DS)

Dylan and Patti Smith schmooze in the East Village, October 1975.

84 The Man In Me
(*New Morning*, 1970)

Tipsy bucolic finds normally cagey guy caught off-guard.

"La la la la lalala la la!" Singing like he's adrift in some joyous, three-beers, summer-evening euphoria, a knocking-on-30 songwriter finally 'fesses up: he can't go it alone: "Take a woman like you / To get through to the man in me." If *New Morning* found Dylan ditching obfuscation and polemic for a shimmering everyday world (eavesdroppings, birdsong, bakery trucks) here's why: he's found himself, because someone found him. And oh, what a wonderful feeling. All woozy organ and jake-leg drums, it's a stoned surrender to companionship; but still cautious, like a junkyard dog offering a nervy paw. "The man in me will hide sometimes to keep from bein' seen." Quite. (AM)

83 Tomorrow Is A Long Time
(*Greatest Hits Vol 2*, 1971)

Premiered by Odetta in 1965, later essayed by Rod Stewart – Bob at his most crushingly forsaken.

Samantha Parton (Be Good Tanyas): "I was 19 when I first heard it. This guy I had a big crush on played it on guitar for me. It's such a love song, but it's also a strange, philosophical song, talking about the great mystery of life: 'I can't see my reflection in the waters / I can't speak the sounds that show no pain/I can't hear the echo of my footsteps/Or can't remember the sound of my own name.' At the time, being a gloomy teenager, I took it to be an existentialist song but now I just see him tortured by an unrequited love. I've always been inspired by what Dylan draws from traditional song, which itself draws from old English poetry. His songs have a sense of story, with a beginning, middle and end, and all the disturbing, mysterious qualities, the sickness and danger. He's like a shaman, reaching outside this world into the next, and bringing things back for us to wonder at."

82 I Believe In You
(*Slow Train Coming*, 1979)

The perpetual trial of religious faith… or the labour of love?

Many Dylanites' problem with his Christian period is a trading of lyrical subtlety/ambivalence for 2,000-year-old biblical dogma. This song, written with the convert's fervour still freshly blazing in his heart (note the passionate vocal delivery), is a worthy exception. Here, a believer affirms their faith in the face of doubting jibes and ostracisation. However, the faith's exact nature is never explicitly stated – this could easily be a Dark End Of The Street-type lover, especially given the line "I believe in you, even on the morning after". Jack White's a fan – check the melodic "referencing" on 2005's As Ugly As I Seem. (AP)

81 Standing In The Doorway
(*Time Out Of Mind*, 1997)

"I got ice water in my veins… I know I can't win… I've got no place left to turn": all Bob needs is love.

Johnathan Rice: "My favourite line is: 'Last night I danced with a stranger/But she just reminded me you were the one'. He's in the twilight of his life and it's like love is still a total mystery to him. In a previous verse he says: 'I would be crazy if I took you back/It would go up against every rule,' but he's not saying that he wouldn't… That's part of being a romantic, isn't it? Setting yourself up for a kicking. There's such a sense of his mortality on *Time Out Of Mind*. I heard that the histoplasmosis, the disease that threatened his life, lives in the fog that blows off the Mississippi Delta in summer, and Dylan contracted it riding through the fog on his bicycle. The doctors in Malibu had no idea how to treat it, but someone with a similar condition had been cured by a voodoo priest in Louisiana because they knew what it was and they knew the right roots. Whatever. Dylan's connected with his Muse in such a permanent way that it must prevent people getting completely close to him. It's like he holds the music and the message in such high regard that he would sacrifice his health and happiness for it. At the heart of his writing there's just this constant, impenetrable loneliness. Someone has to do that so that the rest of us can be happy." ➢

80 Changing Of The Guards
(*Street-Legal*, 1978)

Angels, witches, dog soldiers, merchants and thieves move through the scene as Dylan tells us "Eden is burning".

Patti Smith: "I've always cherished this song. The first time I heard it was when I'd just moved to Detroit and was living in a hotel room with Fred [the late 'Sonic' Smith]. I put on Bob's new record, and Changing Of The Guards was the first song… it just moved me to tears. I would never presume to know what his songs are about, but it has such a mix of tarot card and Joan of Arc imagery. The song starts, 'Sixteen years…', and Joan of Arc was 16 when they shaved her head and burned her at the stake. I'm actually hoping to record this song, so perhaps I'll have the chance to speak to him about it. No matter how bitter or melancholy his songs are, there's always so much resilience, a sense of him striking back. Like the line that goes, 'Gentlemen, he said, I don't need your organisation, I've shined your shoes.'… The downtrodden hero always manages to have the last word. I don't really analyse his songs, but I've been following him since I was 16 years old and I don't question what he does. He can do what he wants as far as I'm concerned."

79 Po' Boy
(*Love And Theft*, 2001)

Farce, tragedy, and old glorious love garnish the only Dylan song named after a sandwich.

The voice creaks like an unoiled hinge, but Po' Boy sashays dapper and so warm of heart, you know something's happened… kicking open the door to his years of age maybe (after all, Chronicles followed). His quietly rioting imagination leaps from Othello to a beloved uncle, a call to room service to send up a room – and this: "Time and love has branded me with its claws", and "All I know is that I'm thrilled by your kiss". So life – even the "Washin' them dishes, feedin' them swine" part – is OK. Like the man said, thing of beauty = joy forever. (PS)

78 With God On Our Side
(*The Times They Are A-Changin'*, 1964)

Masterful protest – written at only 21 – that echoes down the decades.

Linton Kwesi Johnson: "It speaks of the wickedness of the strong against the weak, of powerful nations and what they do – what the American settlers did to the Indians, the Spanish-American war, the American Civil War and the First World War. It goes to the heart of how little we value human life, how we kill for power, for greed, and invoke the name of God while doing so. In a way the song explores a kind of helplessness in the face of evil. It's the voice of the weak. He's obviously faced with a conundrum at the end and that's part of the song's power, that paradox – 'If God's on our side / He'll stop the next war'.

"You have to see it against the background of a world in turmoil – the proliferation of nuclear weapons, anti-colonial struggles going on in Africa and elsewhere, and the Cold War at its height – but the strength of the song is that it's relevant and still speaks to the conflicts of our time. For me, that's why Dylan is the greatest protest lyricist ever."

77 You're A Big Girl Now
(*Blood On The Tracks*, 1975)

Gut-wrenching honesty as Dylan accepts blame for the break-up.

Richard Hell: "Talking about Dylan is too complicated for just a few words. You can see why everybody writes books about him. It seems that anyone who likes him at all has a relationship with him, whether they admit it or not. He's been that useful, meaningful and exasperating all your life long. No wonder he resents his fans. And this song is the one for me that's the most revealing of his bewildering powers because it's the one that has the greatest distance between its emotional impact and its actual words. How does he make those silly words so affecting? 'Time is a jet plane, it moves too fast.' Where is the poetry in that? The metaphor is obvious and the observation commonplace. But in the song it breaks your heart. I think maybe it's something about both his openness and the way his mind skips around in his condition, somehow indicating the shape of everything, and I mean everything. It's how the lines turn into each other. For instance, the whole beginning of that stanza goes, 'Time is a jet plane, it moves too fast / Oh, but what a shame if all we've shared can't last / I can change, I swear.' No one line is much more than banal, but it's how they follow from each other that makes that 'I can change, I swear' choke me up every time. Or is it his delivery? Or the melody? Or the weird way saying 'You're a big girl now' is inherently sarcastic, when obviously what's going on is he wants her more than anything? It's all the currents, in something apparently so simple and ordinary. There's no explaining it."

76 I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine
(*John Wesley Harding*, 1968)

Muted hallucinatory tale in which Dylan's visions of the saint lead to feelings of overwhelming guilt.

Joseph Arthur: "When I heard this it blew my mind. First it was the production, so stripped down and bare, so radically different to what he'd done before. Then there was the lyric which revealed him to be so vulnerable. I took the St Augustine character to be a metaphor for Dylan himself, him feeling this immense guilt and this was killing him somehow. The song is so short yet contains so much lyrical complexity, but then in contrast and out of necessity to house such a lyric, the melody is so sweet and simple. And the lyrics, they read like a psalm. 'I put my fingers against the glass / And bowed my head and cried' – like he's trapped behind a window, maybe a comment on the trappings of fame, how he can't escape it."

75 Talkin' World War III Blues
(*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963)

Post-Cuban missile crisis political point-making masked by a daydream ramble.

Robert Plant: "(*Sings*) 'Some time ago a crazy dream came to me / I dreamt I was walkin' into World War Three.' I love where he goes, 'And I drove 42nd Street in my Cadillac / Good car to drive after a war'. For a guy who wanted to be in The Teddy Bears with Phil Spector, he's certainly moved some minds and mountains, hasn't he? I've got his autobiography, but I don't want to read it. I read something about him being a piece of work who lied and danced with Mimi Farina a bit too often. I thought, I don't need to know this; I just need to know A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall."

74 Things Have Changed
(*The Essential Bob Dylan*, 2000)

Missing link between *Time Out Of Mind* and *Love And Theft*.

Tacked onto the latest hits-and-more compilation by way of the soundtrack to Michael Douglas-as-stoner-author vehicle Wonder Boys, Things Have Changed is a perky, mid-paced and decidedly wry shrug of ambivalence from the edge of old age, as informed by Dylan's brutally dry humour and a fleeting mood of teenage abandon. Our "worried" protagonist "used to care but things have changed", so he considers taking dancing lessons, dressing in drag and steering a female stranger around in a wheelbarrow. Also contains, in the confessional spirit of his recent songs, the telling line: "I've been trying to get as far away from myself as I can." (TD)

73 Simple Twist Of Fate
(*Blood On The Tracks*, 1975)

The bard stripped emotionally bare.

Neko Case: "There are some moments here – like where the guy is sitting on the park bench having these weird realisations – that you can actually feel them as he's having them. The way he sings the lines – 'She looked at him and he felt a spark tingle to his bones / 'Twas then he felt alone and wished that he'd gone straight' – it's just devastating. There's so many moments like that which are so painful, but they're really honest and they're said in a way that I don't think anyone had said before… or since. I don't think Dylan even knows where songs like that come from. A lot of his songs seem born of that spirit."

72 Oxford Town
(*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963)

Dylan dishes racism at the University of Mississippi, aka Ole Miss.

When Dylan initially sprang onto the folk scene, he was a cocky, yet pithy commentator on all our social ills. James Meredith's 1962 attempt to integrate a public university – initially unsuccessful – was but one in a long stream of injustices that included Hattie Carroll's murder and Emmett Till's lynching. Dylan's adaptation of this tale is less fact-based than others, unwinding the lyrics in a homespun manner. Blithely offering up the two dead bodies basking in the moonlight, Dylan serves us a glib, yet mournful portrayal of the civil rights era, as strummed on acoustic guitar. (AL)

71 Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With You
(*Nashville Skyline*, 1969)

Superior country soul with a lascivious edge proving that – musically and otherwise – Dylan had the hips.

Beck: "I didn't get too deep into his music until I got into the Nashville records. Those are the ones that really got to me, because I was so into country music when I was younger and hearing those records for the first time… I always liked his kind of throwaway love songs. For somebody who's a giant like him, who writes those great cinematic songs like Visions Of Johanna that draw you into a strange world, to just toss out a good little tune…that's an aspect of Dylan I always really appreciated."

70 Queen Jane Approximately
(*Highway 61 Revisited*, 1965)

One of his pithiest put-downs. Joan Baez believed to be the target. Again!

Unlike some of Dylan's more vicious odes to stuck-up princesses, Queen Jane Approximately shoots its poison arrows with grace and an insistently singable chorus. The out-of-tune guitar somehow lends a nice touch of garage rock rawness to an arrangement otherwise dominated by the piano-organ blend his records of the period did so much to innovate. Dylan never spelt out the identity of his target, typically claiming Jane was a man. But well-known pacifist Joan Baez certainly seems a likely candidate, given the similarity of her first name and the line about the bandits Queen Jane turns the other cheek to. (RU)

69 Gates Of Eden
(*Bringing It All Back Home*, 1965)

Eden: Good. 1960s America: Bad.

Marc Carroll: "I was initially struck by the sheer weightiness of the song, the Biblical imagery and incessant rhythm. The whole song is so powerful it's actually unsettling, almost frightening. Bob often refers to the imperfect human state, the fall from grace and exile from Eden. Here it's on centre-stage. When he sings about the 'motorcycle black Madonna, two-wheeled gypsy queen', it's such a powerful, sexy image. Dylan is a very sexy writer who empowers the listener, which is why women love him."

Continued on page 64 ➢

"It used to be like that. Now it goes like this..." Dylan in photographer Jerry Schatzberg's New York studio, August 18, 1965.

Jerry Schatzberg/Corbis from the forthcoming book 'Touching Dylan's Edge' Genesis Publications.com

DAVE MARSH MARVELS AT AN AMERICAN CREATION MYTH

68

Bob Dylan's 115th Dream

(Bringing It All Back Home, 1965)

THIS "DREAM" might be very hard to interpret for those who didn't go to school in America, saturated as it is in historical and mythological references, beginning with the Pilgrims and Moby Dick, ending with Columbus and maybe Rio Bravo (some western that takes place in a jailhouse, anyhow). If you want to understand how Dylan integrated the disparate cultural influences he cites in Chronicles Volume One, this lyric would be a hell of a place to start.

115th Dream also refutes the myth that Dylan abandoned politics when he began playing with rock'n'roll bands. The music here rocks wilder, if not harder, than anything else on *Bringing It All Back Home*, but not one of the song's cultural referents is placed casually: the cops are cast as useless, stupid and thuggish; Captain Arab's immediate reaction to landing in America is to start "writing up some deeds" (nice pun) and set up a fort; Dylan's pantless fugitive gets his ass kicked in an alley, and asking for help under the sign of the Stars and Stripes earns him the threat of another bashing.

In fact, there's nothing about Bob Dylan's 115th Dream that isn't calculated, including the false start, which gives a hint that he'll play it solo, before the band cuts in on the second take – as if to say, "It used to be like that. Now it goes like this..." Did Dylan already know, six months before his triumphant fiasco at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, what the reaction of the folk crowd would be? Certainly, he's not above jibes at folkish liberal hand-wringing – that whole bit about undertakers in the eighth verse, for instance, smacks of a swat at the folk Philistines. He also travesties several folk tropes: sea shanties in the first verse, the "three ships a-sailin'" in the last, and in-between, all the surreal detail, from the Guernsey cow to the pay-off with the pay phone, harkening to the weird occurrences in traditional ballads (and Chaplin movies).

Wordplay is secondary here, though. The narrative is perfectly coherent, even given the dream logic. He carefully scrambles the detail, not the sequence of events (as he pretty much always has).

All of that makes the song and the record great, but here's the capper: humour. Wit has always been Dylan's secret weapon, and 115th Dream ranks with his wackiest, most deadpan satires, looking back at I Shall Be Free and I Shall Be Free No.10, and forward to the unappreciated comedy elements in songs from Highway 61 Revisited to All Along The Watchtower. Tom Wilson's hearty laugh, as he cues that second take, remains the truest review of the show Dylan's putting on. Hell, Woody Guthrie would have laughed at most of this inspired nonsense – after all, it owes as much to Woody, no stranger to inspired nonsense himself, as any song Dylan ever came up with.

"HIS WACKIEST, MOST DEADPAN SATIRE. WIT IS DYLAN'S SECRECT WEAPON."

"I LOVE LAY LADY LAY, IT'S, SO SEXY" NORMA WATERSON

67 One Of Us Must Know (Sooner Or Later)

(Blonde On Blonde, 1966)

From the The Snidey Bastard Years, a semi-apology to one who got away.

The thankless experience of being dumped has inspired some of Dylan's best – and worst – songs. This kiss-off to a casual-sounding liaison is definitely among the former – a delicious attempt at saying, Look, it wasn't all my fault, you know. In fact, maybe one day you'll realise I had been seeking a deeper connection than you. And, really, how can anybody know each other anyway? Slightly rich, perhaps, but, aided by a sharply stirring band recording, incredibly alluring. Despite flopping as an early '66 single, Dylan wisely took the sound – the half-cut dance between Robbie Robertson's guitar and Al Kooper's organ – as the template for new album *Blonde On Blonde*. (SL)

66 Drifter's Escape

(John Wesley Harding, 1968)

Law and nature do battle, to the benefit of a Steinbeckian hobo.

Joey Burns (Calexico): "I heard *John Wesley Harding* maybe 15 years ago, for the first time. As a fan of Dylan's work there's such a repertoire and catalogue, it's a never-ending process of discovery. And the thing you come to realise about Dylan is how over time certain songs kind of shine through, they have more meaning in different parts of your life. Drifter's Escape is one of those. Each song on the record is pretty much three stanzas. It's almost like this perfect exercise in form and craft. But it's also an exercise in content, the song has this story, and then there's a moral behind it as well. Then you start getting into the performance aspect: the looseness of his delivery, the band's playing – which is just phenomenal. It's not overdone, it's not over-thought. It's just very organic and completely beautiful."

65 Lay Lady Lay

(Nashville Skyline, 1969)

A brand new voice – creamy, seductive – and horizontal schemes in mind.

Norma Waterson: "I just love Lay Lady Lay. It's a real working-class song, a really sexy song, too. It reminded me as soon as I first heard it of Lady Chatterley's Lover. 'His clothes are dirty, but his hands are clean' – you can imagine he's a gardener or a blacksmith who falls for this grand lady. He wants to keep her, and it's like bridging the class divide. That line, 'Whatever colours you have in your mind, I'll show them to you and you'll see them shine", it's always made me think of Gertrude Jekyll, those upper-class ladies with their colourful gardens… and their gardeners!

"Why's his voice so different? Dylan over the years has had trouble with his voice, you can tell. And when a singer has trouble with their voice, they do tend to try and sing from a different area. So here he is singing from his diaphragm for a change. Or it could have been that one day he was in the bath and he made a funny noise and thought, 'Ah! I like that noise! I'm going to do a song with that noise…' That happens, too."

64 Song To Woody

(Bob Dylan, 1962)

Dylan doffs his peaked cap to his primary influence, as road- and world-weary as his idol.

Donovan: "I particularly like this song because I was so influenced by Woody Guthrie before I heard Bob's first record. I was 16 and living rough on the road with my best friend Gypsy Dave. I went home for a bit and Gyp wrote to me and said he'd found a record of a new American folk singer who was doing what I was doing, singing Woody Guthrie songs and wearing a cap and a harmonica harness. I was already kind of committed to the mission before I heard Bob, but Song To Woody confirmed to me that I was not alone in wanting to bring true poetry and new, meaningful, social lyrics back to popular culture.

"Joan Baez introduced me to Bob. The famous scene in Don't Look Back where we're both playing our songs, you've got to look closely. There's a drunk in the room who's berating Bob about him stealing the tune for With God On Our Side from Dominic Behan. Then Bob turns to me and I sing To Sing For You. Notice he takes not one drag of his cigarette all the way through… he's listening. Then I ask him to sing a song for me and he does [It's All Over Now, Baby Blue]. What people miss is that he listens all the way through to my song, acknowledges that it's good, but not with too many words. He was a bit curious and a little amazed that there was another Guthrie disciple arising out of Europe. But we were no threat to each other. When they used to say I was the British Bob Dylan, I used to quip, 'No, I'm the Scottish Woody Guthrie.'"

DYLAN'S MUSES

#2 ARTHUR RIMBAUD

The life of this 19th century French poet reads like a fervid Dylan lyric: he made a fortune gun-running and had an Abyssinian mistress before getting his leg amputated and dying mysteriously. Aside from the startling Symbolist verse, Rimbaud also bequeathed the idea that literary creativity was best unlocked by getting utterly off your face – his own preference in this "dérèglement de tous les sens" (derangement of the senses) was absinthe and hashish. Introduced to the *enfant terrible*'s work either through Dave Van Ronk or Suze Rotolo, Dylan was getting rigorously pissed/stoned to unlock the beast within. In his case, it actually worked. Among numerous debts, one poem – The Drunken Boat – hangs heavy over Mr Tambourine Man. He also inspired Dylan's identity games: "I came across one of his letters called 'Je est un autre', which translates into 'I is someone else.' When I read those words the bells went off." (SL)

63 If Not For You

(New Morning, 1970)

A plain and simple Valentine to the one Dylan loved most.

"I wrote the song thinking about my wife," Dylan revealed. The lyric was fashioned to mean something to just one person. There were no messages to be imparted, though the world was invited to listen in to what were really whispers meant for Sara's ear. Lyrically, the song came spare and simplistic, Tin Pan Alley-like in its use of "blue…" "you…" "too…" rhymings and lines that almost descended into mush. But the genius of Dylan somehow turned this melodic love poem into something completely endearing to all who heard it. A triumph of heart over head. (FD)

62 Most Of The Time

(Oh Mercy, 1989)

"I don't even care if I ever see her again," he lies.

David Gray: "I got into Dylan when I was 13, and I loved the early, simple stuff best. By the time of *Oh Mercy* in 1989, I'd stopped buying Dylan albums and I only got it on a friend's recommendation but, as soon as I heard Everything Is Broken, I knew he was back. Most Of The Time is a beautifully simple song. You get this central idea that most of the time he's on the case, stronger than all the bullshit he has to deal with, but then it becomes a love song and you get this sense of a man with a deep sense of longing, thinking of someone he lost long ago. It's not a pop song, but it's getting that way. I talked to [Daniel] Lanois about making that album and he said Dylan spooked him, he felt Dylan was inhabiting him like some ghost."

61 Quinn The Eskimo (The Mighty Quinn)

(Biograph, 1985)

Lovable nonsense about how our pigeon-attracting hero will make everyone "jump for joy".

Mark Mulcahy: "I knew the song as a Manfred Mann song. And then when I was at college in the early '80s I met this very eccentric fella called Roger whose whole record collection was jazz and Dylan, and one day he put on Quinn The Eskimo. Roger and me were 'experimenting' at the time with things and a couple of days after hearing the song I was walking round Connecticut with him hallucinating and we just decided to get into this guy's car. And we turned on the radio and Dylan comes on doing Quinn The Eskimo and we couldn't stop laughing.

"It works on a very natural dream-like level, like magical realism." Dylan on The Rolling Thunder Revue, 1975.

57 One More Cup Of Coffee
(*Desire*, 1976)

Brooding wonder as Dylan contemplates a sleeping lover and her mysterious family before venturing into the unknown.

Rennie Sparks (The Handsome Family): "It's a cliché festival of psychic knife-throwing gypsy outlaws and it sounds corny on paper, but when you hear it, it works on this very natural dream-like level, like magical realism. It's almost like a little opera about coffee! He's singing these soaring harmonies with Emmylou Harris and they make this little line about one more cup of coffee seem like the most important romantic statement you could make to a lover.

"I spent a summer of love here in New Mexico 20 years ago with [husband] Brett and there was lots of drugs and not a lot of clothing and much of it involved running around graveyards and singing this song at the top of my lungs. We came from the generation that had to hate hippies so we never listened to Dylan that much. But this song and this album just transported us to something bigger than everyday life.

"There's no Bob Dylan in it anywhere as such. It's not a page from his diary. It's something more mysterious – a little dream that fell from the sky. He's sitting there drinking coffee in this weird mountain empire of psychics deciding whether to go back down to the valley below. Perhaps the valley below's death but I think he's talking about going back to the real world, which is a kind of death really. I think he decides in the end that he doesn't belong up here in this realm of what seem like immortals."

58 Rainy Day Women #12 & 35
(*Blonde On Blonde*, 1966)

The ultimate party starter and a statement of defiance and rebellion, all in one song.

Bob – being Bob – once described it as "a Portuguese folk song". The symbolic stoning is certainly biblical in nature, and Dylan was getting hit with plenty, be they cast from the press or fans screaming "Judas!" Scholars have come up with various interpretations: one claims it's about Dylan's mother, whose maiden name was Stone. But Bob reportedly heard Ray Charles's Let's Go Get Stoned right before writing it. Time magazine (mistakenly) claimed a "rainy day woman" was a "marijuana cigarette". The 4 am recording sounds like one helluva party. So the simplest interpretation remains the world's gonna getcha… so you might as well get stoned. (BH) ➢

Then this guy comes up and knocks on the window. 'What are you doing in my car?' And we said, 'Dude. Quinn The Eskimo.' At the time, I just wished I played in a band and Roger got me my first gig a couple of days later. So in a way Quinn The Eskimo was a weird bridge into everything I wanted to do.

"The lyrics make no sense and you feel he's just making them up, but they stick – that disgusting line about a 'cup of meat', for instance – and everybody's coming in when they want. When I analyse it, I really dig it as a musical piece because to me the song represents how he plays. He doesn't necessarily play with the people he's with. He's kind of opposite in a way, doing his own thing over the band."

60 Romance In Durango
(*Desire*, 1976)

Rattling Mexicana propelling a tale of doomed lovers fleeing on horseback.

John Cooper Clarke: "It's a movie isn't it? The mariachi accompaniment (those trumpets!) and even the way he pitches his voice (a bit like Alfonso Bedoya, the leader of the bandits in Treasure Of The Sierra Madre) conjures the Mexican desert – 'Hot chilli peppers in the blistering sun' – you're straight there! The picture of him and that girl on the one horse makes me think of Marlon Brando and Pina Pellicer in One Eyed Jacks. I wonder if the whole Spanish milieu that he likes could be a device by which Dylan can leave the patrician world of North America with its Judeo-Protestant values and enter the more elemental Catholic-Latin world where he's the impulsive doomed hero, in trouble by his own actions.

"He's obviously shot her husband or something and although he's made it across the desert he's clearly about to die but he's blinded by love (and optimism, and shit frightened underneath it all) and the present tense is shot through with both this beautiful regret and projections into the future. He's dying not only of a fatal gunshot wound but with the mortal sin of murder on his soul ('the face of God… with his serpent eyes of obsidian'). In Romance In Durango, like all the best westerns, the people are complex, but the morality of the Old World they inhabit is clearly defined."

59 Stuck Inside Of Mobile With The Memphis Blues Again
(*Blonde On Blonde*, 1966)

Redneck inbreed picaresque crawling with "neon madmen" sung *molto fortissimo* by a man having the time of his life.

Frank Black (Pixies, etc): "There's a lot of beauty in this song. I don't know what it's about, and I've never bothered to work it out, but even though it's about being stuck somewhere with the blues, it's a triumphant song, with a really powerful chord progression. So when you've got that going for you, with the killer lyrics and the band going for it, it's defiant blues, very exhilarating. At the moment, I'm so in love with the drummer: Kenny Buttrey. Sometimes get choked up, literally, just listening to the drummer, the way he does a little snare roll, or something. I know it sounds silly, but I love that song and how it pulls me in, but once I'm in there I always focus on the drummer. It's a song with so much soul, but the more I listen, I always go back to those killer drums."

Woodstock, 1968, outside his Byrdcliff home, Saturday Evening Post-session: Dylan's words met Richard Manuel's chord changes.

TOBY LITT IS TRANSFIXED BY A YOUNG FATHER'S TERROR

56

Tears Of Rage

***(The Basement Tapes*, 1975)**

IN MAY 1967, Dylan told Michael Iachetta, a reporter who'd tracked him down to Woodstock, that since disappearing from public view he'd been "seein' only a few close friends, readin' a little 'bout the outside world, porin' over books by people you never heard of…"

Which makes you wonder if Iachetta had the balls to ask, "And exactly which books would those be, Bob?"

A little unlikely, as he was halfway through a world-exclusive interview. Dylan lives! Dylan talks! It's also unlikely that Iachetta hadn't heard of one William Shakespeare, author of, among a few other trifles, King Lear.

More than a few writers have noted the debt owed by several of Dylan's *Basement Tapes* songs (Too Much Of Nothing, This Wheel's On Fire) to this play. But Tears Of Rage is the song which comes closest to achieving the kind of emotional devastation of King Lear. "Oh what dear daughter 'neath the sun / Would treat a father so / To wait upon him hand and foot / And always tell him 'No'?"

If accounts are to be believed, this is how the song came about: Richard Manuel of The Band was fooling around at the piano one day at Big Pink when Dylan came in with the lyrics already written. Which may explain why the chords have that aching, arching quality – similar to Manuel's In A Station. They're not Dylan changes, though they owe a lot to the gospel that always comes out when he sits at the piano.

In Chronicles, the reasons for Dylan's post-motorcycle crash retreat are made pretty clear: this 26-year-old man was scared of what his fame might do to his family. He's written other songs to and about his children, among them Forever Young and Lord, Protect My Child, but it's Tears Of Rage which captures the terror of being a father.

It's my favourite Dylan song (today, at least) simply because I find it so moving – and more than moving. The American poet Emily Dickinson said, "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?"

Is there?

"WRITERS HAVE NOTED THE DEBT OWED BY THESE SONGS TO KING LEAR"

55 I Threw It All Away
(Nashville Skyline, 1969)

Regretful balladeering of the highest grade that triumphs in spite of an adenoidal vocal style.

Nick Cave: "This is my favourite Dylan song. The production is so clean, fluid and uncluttered, and there is an ease and innocence to Dylan's voice in its phrasing, in its tone that is in no Dylan recording before or after. There is a perfectly measured emotional pull to the singing. This is a guy doing the job God put him on Earth to do, and doing it well. This song is about craft; Dylan removes himself, the burden of his history, his myth, from the process of songwriting to craft a song unparalleled in its gorgeousness. It's mathematics, music by numbers, and all the more affecting for it. It's Mozart man up against the wracked Beethoven of his other work. *Nashville Skyline* was an audacious record, lyrically and musically, flying in the face of those who thought it was Dylan's moral duty to be the drum major of his generation. I can put this song on first thing in the morning or the middle of a dark night, and the song will serve me as a song should, lift me up, make me better, make me want to carry on. The song serves the listener as it should and that's its genius."

54 To Ramona
(Another Side Of... 1964)

Love song to Southern belle – possibly active in the civil rights movement – lost in the metropolis.

Lucinda Williams: "The first time I heard Bob Dylan – it was 1965, and a young poet, a student of my dad's, came over to the house with a Dylan record – it changed my life. Here was someone who had taken both of the worlds I was from – the traditional folk music world and the creative writing world – and put them together and made it work. From that moment on, I decided I wanted to write songs like that. I'm still working at it. To Ramona is just a love song, not one of those intensely heavy, metaphorical songs, but it's the ultimate love song. And there's just something about it – the rhyming, the imagery, everything is wonderful. That was Dylan at his inimitable, quintessential best, right there. Awesome and beautiful."

53 She Belongs To Me
(Bringing It All Back Home, 1965)

"She's got everything she needs" and she doesn't need you, chum.

Bruce Johnston (The Beach Boys): "I heard about Dylan from Jack Nitzsche's wife Grazia who made me listen to *Freewheelin'*. It wasn't his voice, which was difficult to get comfortable with, it was his songs. What we were hearing on the radio at that time was great, highly-polished pop, like Goffin-King kind of songs, but Dylan was 180 degrees in the other direction. Then, when I heard She Belongs To Me, I was struck by the fact that it has such a natural groove. To me, a natural groove record would be something like Little Richard, R&B stuff, but here's this Greenwich Village folkie, who has turned the lyric-writing thought process upside down, and suddenly he's making songs with a natural groove. You could finger-pop to this track. Dylan's melodies can be difficult to digest sometimes, because he's not a singer who writes, he's a writer who sings, but this has a great tune. Carl Wilson and I really loved She Belongs To Me. I remember in the Hilton Hawaiian Village hotel when we were playing Hawaii, and we had a record player in the suite and we just played it over and over and over."

52 You Ain't Goin' Nowhere
(Greatest Hits, Vol. 2, 1971)

Country-fied existentialism and one of the most melodic glances into the abyss ever.

Roger McGuinn – who's name-checked in Bob's best-known rendition for botching a lyric on The Byrds' version – claims Dylan wrote it while recuperating from his motorcycle accident. It sounds like the Old West, with Happy Traum's banjo and references to mail order brides (McGuinn claims Zimmy was simply waiting for Sara to come home). Still, characters like Ghengis Khan's brother Don had the hallucinogenic imagery we expected. Some think it's about this mortal coil, a glance into the void... hey, you ain't goin' nowhere. Or it could simply be about being stuck – and stoned – immobile, in that "easy chair". (BH)

51 I Don't Believe You (She Acts Like We Never Have Met)
(Another Side Of... 1964)

Dylan sets out to prove that there's more to love than boy meets girl.

John Sebastian: "I'd already had my world as a songwriter completely rearranged by Masters Of War and Chimes Of Freedom. But with I Don't Believe You, Dylan established an unprecedented relationship between man and woman in song. Before Bob, things had been pretty benign, often one-dimensional, between the sexes. It was absolute love or utter heartbreak. What little shading there was usually came from the woman's point of view, laying out the case against her man. Dylan turned the tables in this sense, offering romantic critiques of women, and he did it with a degree of emotional awareness and insight. He made it more real, and opened up vast new territories for songs to explore."

50 I Pity The Poor Immigrant
(John Wesley Harding, 1968)

New England meets Old Testament in Dylan's resigned but ambiguous hymn to the migrant's lot.

This oracular, gravely beautiful highlight of 1968's ascetic album finds a sanctified Dylan at his most ancient-sounding. Borrowing an aching melody from arcane Scottish ballad, Tramps And Hawkers, Dylan imparts lyrics of unflinching solemnity on which neither his rudimentary acoustic guitar, nor spartan, 6/8-time bass and drums, intrude. A slow, quiet song with mighty reverberations, some see it as Dylan playing God, ironically rebuking the white American settler, "Who falls in love with wealth itself/And turns his back on me." A cryptic, allegorical finger to the American Dream disguised as an abstinent hymn. (DS)

49 Only A Pawn In Their Game
(The Times They Are A-Changin', 1964)

Remembered by a man who knows a good protest song when he hears one...

Pete Seeger: "Back in 1963 I got together with Bob and Theodore Bikel for a voter registration rally in Greenwood, Mississippi. A friend of mine was making a little documentary film there and the mayor told him, 'We never had a nigger problem here, it's outside agitators cause the trouble.' Well, we had a little song festival in a cotton field and Bob sang Only A Pawn In Their Game which he'd just written about Medgar Evers, the Mississippi civil rights activist who was murdered three weeks earlier. The song says just putting the murderers in jail wasn't enough. It was about ending the whole game of segregation. It was the first song I heard that connected the position of the black field hands with that of the poor whites in the South: 'He's taught in his school / From the start by the rule / That the laws are with him / To protect his white skin / To keep up his hate / So he never thinks straight / 'bout the shape that he's in'.

"Generally, Bob wanted to make a record that would make people think. He was very curious and quick to learn. He told me he'd seen me singing when he was at university [University Of Minnesota, 1959-1960]. I remember that was a night when we were picketed by the American Legion – which got us a lot of free publicity. But I must have first met him in New York up in the Broadside magazine's office [Dylan's Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues appeared in the first edition, Feb, 1962]. I remember sitting there and Bob and Phil Ochs played their songs and I was thinking, I'm in the same room as two of the greatest songwriters in the world! Two weeks later I had Bob on at a Carnegie Hall Hootenanny and there were so many artists on I had to tell everyone they were limited to 10 minutes and he smiled and said, 'I've got one song that lasts 10 minutes' – and he did A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall. I was always impressed by his independence. He wasn't going to be any child of the lefties. One night someone introduced him saying, 'He's one of ours,' and Bob got up and said, 'I don't belong to anyone.'

"I realised he was a genius turning out one great song after another. Blowin' In The Wind is still one of the greatest songs of the 20th century. I used to sing Masters Of War occasionally myself and Hard Rain. Bob had drawn lessons from Woody, he knew a good song tells a story or paints a picture and, like Woody, he could combine tragedy and humour. And he didn't try to be too specific or too clear. I have a little skating rink in my yard and when *John Wesley Harding* came out I remember skating around listening to it over and over on the outdoor speakers thinking, What does this mean? A good song is like a basketball backboard, you bounce your life against it and you catch new ideas rebounding back at you.

"There are a lot of reports of me being against him going electric at the '65 Newport Folk festival, but that's wrong. I was the MC that night. He was singing Maggie's Farm and you couldn't understand a single word because the mike was distorting his voice. I ran over to the mixing desk and said, Fix the sound, it's terrible! The guy said, 'No, that's how they want it.' And I did say, If I had an axe I'd cut the cable! But they didn't understand me. I wanted to hear the words. I didn't mind him going electric."

48 If You See Her, Say Hello
(Blood On The Tracks, 1975)

A masterwork of emotional turmoil that reveals itself layer by layer.

Robert Fisher (Willard Grant Conspiracy): "I was a teenager working in this LA record store when *Blood On The Tracks* came out. I took it home that day, it stayed on my turntable for weeks. It's easily one of the formative records in my life and this is the stand-out track. In Dylan's delivery you've got this amazing transformation, from the opening verse where he's looking at this love almost casually and kind of going, 'Yeah well it wasn't that big a deal', to the final verse where we see it's obviously a huge deal. But it's very complex because that lovely fingerpicking carries so much melancholy and gives the lie to the gunslinger swagger he's affecting. There's definitely anger too but the song's opening line is delivered in a wistful way: 'If you see her, say hello, she might be in Tangier.' It's the genius of Dylan's performance that his reading of the song contains all these conflicting emotions. In the beginning, Dylan's songs were jammed with words. By now, he's allowing more to be filled in by the listener."

47 Jokerman
(*Infidels*, 1983)

Slippery central character – false prophet? cult leader? terrorist? – beset by snaking reggae groove.

Sly Dunbar: "Bob Dylan always do songs in different keys, like he'll change three, four different keys in a song, and he will change the lyrics on the fly, so when we cut Jokerman, we recorded it and then we had a break overnight. He came in the morning and said, 'Oh, gentlemen, could you just run Jokerman for me again?' Nobody know the tape was spinning; we were just running down the music and he said, 'OK, that's it' – it was the take we didn't know we were taking that he used. It was a surprise; I think we were playing the run-down a bit looser, 'cos it was just a run-through, but he probably liked something about it."

46 Don't Think Twice, It's All Right
(*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963)

Poignant song of leaving – shot through with air of righteousness – written for and about Suze Rotolo.

Romeo Stodart (The Magic Numbers): "That song's really special to me because it's one of the first songs I learned to play on the guitar. It's a really simple song, a simple melody – but the lyrics are really hard-hitting and moving. It's definitely an early morning song, the first song of the day. It also helped the band because it's just acoustic guitar and vocal and when we write songs we try and do that. Even though we go crazy and orchestrate lots of big arrangements, we usually try to come back to that same source of words and one accompaniment. He's helped me as a songwriter like he's helped everybody else. He's walked the line and he's shown everybody else how to do that."

45 Lay Down Your Weary Tune
(*Biograph*, 1985)

Written in 1963 with a Wordsworthian lyric: "The water smooth ran like a hymn / And like a harp did hum."

Chris Hillman (The Byrds): "This has always, always been a favourite Dylan song of mine. The Byrds got an acetate because our manager Jim Dickson knew Bob. At the time I didn't like it, but Roger, then known as Jim McGuinn and always an insightful guy, picked it to record on *Turn! Turn! Turn!*. Such a great opening verse, really a beautiful lyric all around. It is kinda like Dylan Thomas poetry, as if he wrote lyrics for popular music."

44 Forever Young
(*Planet Waves*, 1974)

Dylan waxes simple, sincere. "May you build a ladder to the stars..." Not a dry eye etc.

Roddy Woomble (Idlewild): "As hard to pick favourites as it is, Forever Young is probably my favourite song ever written. Allen Ginsberg said something along the lines that this song should be sung every morning by every child in every school in every country. Which is such a nice idea, because the song is so hopeful, hardly cryptic whatsoever, very plainly encouraging people to find their own truth. The Band are here, so the whole thing has an inspired, effortless feel to it. The fact that there's two versions back to back says a lot about the way The Band and Dylan worked together, and also a lot about how secretly important they thought this song was. Like A Rolling Stone might be Dylan's masterpiece, but Forever Young is his national anthem."

43 Million Dollar Bash
(*The Basement Tapes*, 1975)

Like Pink's Get The Party Started. Only not worthless.

Chuck Prophet (Green On Red etc): "Whenever I hear that song, I always picture Dylan on the balcony of some high-rise Manhattan penthouse, kicking it with Marlon Brando and Lenny Bruce and a gaggle of long-legged socialites, taking it all in and just dreaming of fishing by a stream somewhere. Now here he is in Woodstock with his friends – look at *The Basement Tapes* cover: what a joker Bob is, how are you gonna play a mandolin with a bow? And they look like the kind of guys you'd want to invite over to your parents' for a barbecue and a softball game. This was one of the times, I think, when Dylan knew he was going to have to take an interest in his own music, and seized the moment to just play with his friends. Perhaps he's looking back on all those interchangeable people at the million dollar bash and nursing the motherlode of all hangovers – the '60s."

42 All I Really Want To Do
(*Another Side Of...* 1964)

A cheeky Dylan does his best Jimmy Rodgers - albeit after what sounds like a few tokes.

Dylan had already been cast – as he puts it in Chronicles – as "the high priest of protest." Keen to let some of the air out of his mythos, he opens the transitional *Another Side* with what's ostensibly a love song, although one filled with half-rhymed comic wordplay and wrapped in a singing brakeman's yodel. Such is Dylan's magic that fans and critics have variously argued the tune is among his most heartfelt and pure piss take. It's fitting then, that by the time he starts snickering during the final chorus, we're not sure if he's laughing with us or at us. (BM)

41 Not Dark Yet
(*Time Out Of Mind*, 1997)

Hospitalised with heart-threatening histoplasmosis in March '97, Dylan returns flicking the vees at Death.

Andy Gill (Gang Of Four): "I first heard Not Dark Yet about three years ago, on holiday in Sri Lanka, at Christmas. Somebody had the album and I just got obsessed with that track. In some respects, it's not as brilliant lyrically as some earlier songs, but those have an air of pretentiousness to them. Like on Blonde On Blonde, you think, is that *exactly* what Dylan wanted to say? I don't think he needs allusions to intellectual content to convince us he's clever. But the lyrics to Not Dark Yet are really simple. It's exactly what he is: an old man and he's tired. It's Dylan speaking authentically from where he is now, in this time of life, looking at what he's been and seeing where he is at, and expressing it in terms which resonate with many people: "Shadows are falling and I've been here all day / It's too hot to sleep, time is running away". I don't think I've ever heard music quite as languorous. It feels very big-old-river, moving very slowly, like the Mississippi when it gets very close to the sea, edging along. It's very Louisiana, hot and sweaty. It's the most incredible atmosphere that you get drawn into. You absolutely sense that the sun is just beyond the horizon, it's not quite dark, but it's just going down, and he's sitting there, hot as fuck, and it's the end of his life. The drums and the bass and the guitar lick is all so very simple, but every time I hear it, I think, how did they get to play that so well? How many times did they rehearse that? It sounds like they played that song 200 times because of the finesse and the relationship between the instruments. Nothing slips. And then his voice on the top, which sounds amazing. He's croaking away like he's about to pass out but in the most extraordinary musical way."

40 I'll Keep It With Mine
(*The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3*, 1991)

Gently ruminative love song favoured here in its scratchy publishing demo form.

Devendra Banhart: "To me, the folk scene immediately after Bob Dylan was a lot of Bob Dylan impersonators, impersonating someone who was already impersonating someone else. Then, immediately after that, Bob became Bob and did something so completely Bob that no-one could imitate him. I got *The Witmark Demos* bootleg from Currituck Co.'s Kevin Barker and I love the sound of that version [from June, 1964] too. It sounds like it was recorded on a Radio Shack hand-held tape recorder. They were recorded for Witmark Publishing, not for Dylan to release but for other people to listen to and hopefully record. I'll Keep It With Mine was written for Nico and like all of Dylan's tunes it's perfect. To go with the song, Kevin, a musicologist extraordinaire, also showed me some footage of a party where The Byrds are doing keg stands and, over there in the corner, you can see Dylan and Nico making out."

39 Dear Landlord
(*John Wesley Harding*, 1967)

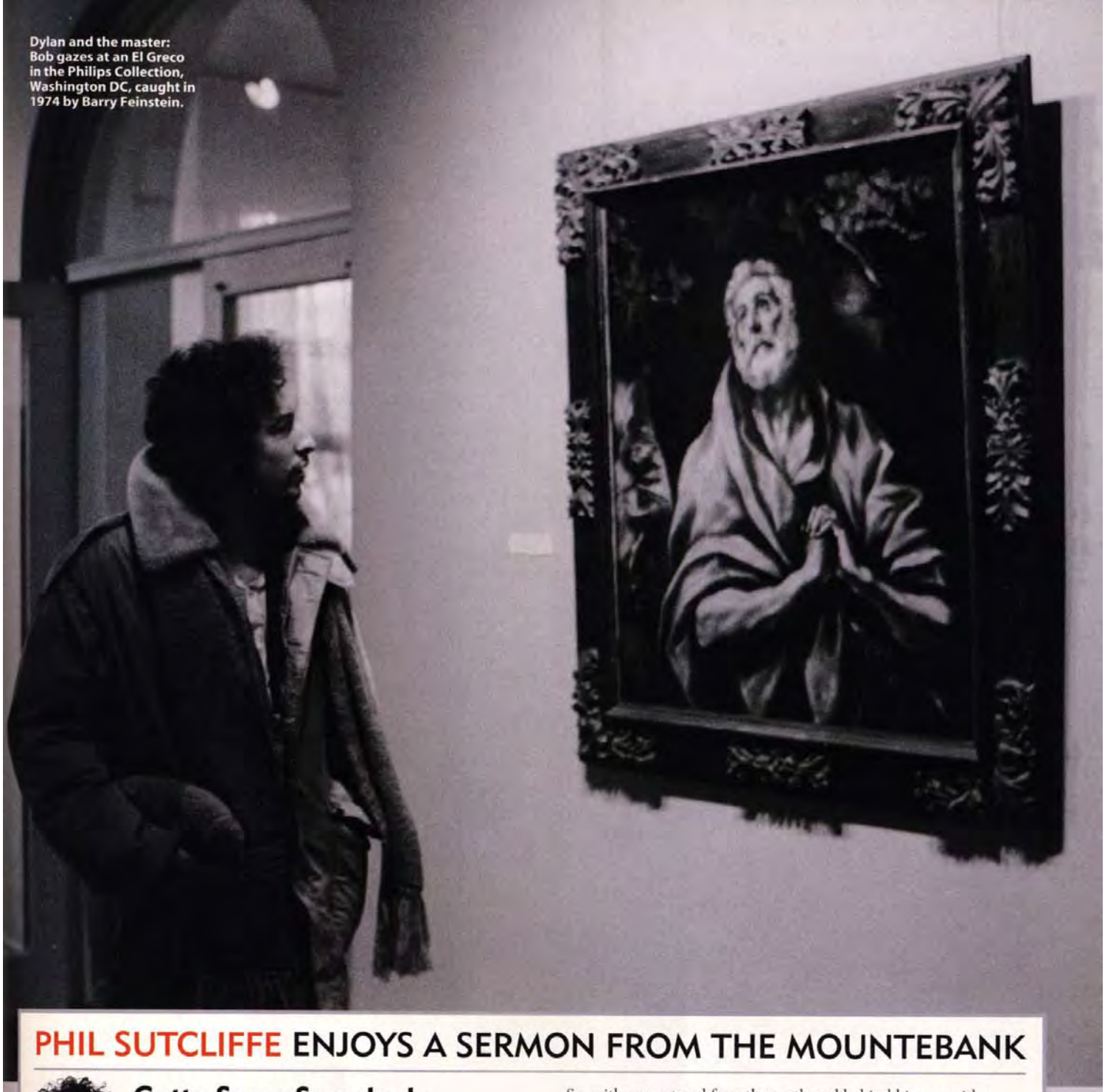
An open letter to big cheeses everywhere. The message: don't step on my blue suede shoes.

Amid the riddling ballads of 1967's *John Wesley Harding* came this, his first real "sticking it to The Man" song in ages. Like the best blues, it swings nicely while also seeming weighed down with woes both spiritual and economic. Every element here sounds magnificent: the pattering drums, the bubbling bass line, Dylan's own righteous piano chords and suppressed-anger singing (both bearing hints of Ray Charles). So who is this "landlord"? Well, he might be Dylan's own pushy manager, Albert Grossman, possibly the big man upstairs or even, conceivably, a landlord. Whatever, by now his take on authority is less livid than bruised and rueful. (SL)

38 Knockin' On Heaven's Door
(*Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid*, 1973)

Peckinpah atmosphere captured in song form as the darkness closes in on a retiring gunslinger.

Rachid Taha: "It's one of those songs that gets stuck in your head and never comes out. You'll be walking down the street or sitting in a café watching the girls go by and there it is again – damn. I don't know what the verses mean. I was just a teenager when that song came out and didn't speak a word of English, nor did any of my friends, but we could all sing 'Knock knock knockin' on heaven's door'. We didn't know what it meant but we liked the sound of it."



Dylan and the master: Bob gazes at an El Greco in the Philips Collection, Washington DC, caught in 1974 by Barry Feinstein.

PHIL SUTCLIFFE ENJOYS A SERMON FROM THE MOUNTEBANK

37 Gotta Serve Somebody

***(Slow Train Coming*, 1979)**

ELECTRIC PIANO? A warm-old-glowy cabaret-jazz thing surely. But when Jerry Wexler's co-producer, Barry Beckett, met Dylan at Muscle Shoals he searched keyboard and soul to find three glowering, angry notes bleak enough to announce Gotta Serve Somebody, the *Slow Train Coming* album and Dylan's whole Bible-bashing born-again period.

That day in May, 1979, from Dire Straits' Mark Knopfler and Pick Withers to the black female back-up singers, everybody got Dylan, everybody got the song. No matter what they knew of Dylan's recent travails – the divorce, the critical pounding he suffered over Renaldo & Clara, how unfathomably hard he took Elvis's death - they felt to the bone marrow his terror and confusion, his parallel needs for musical and moral discipline, and the fervour of new faith with which he recovered equilibrium.

"TRUE DYLAN, HEARD ABOVE A RUMBLE OF OLD TESTAMENT THUNDER."

So, with respect and fear, they gathered behind him as, with a voice reaching back to the cold-rage moral ferocity of his protest era, he delivered his rigid arguments, rigidly phrased and rhymed: "You may be an ambassador to England or France / You may like to gamble, you might like to dance"; "You may be a construction worker, working on a home / You may be living in a mansion or you might live in a dome". The chorus hammered the point, you gotta serve somebody – "it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord", but ego must bend the knee and the choice must be made.

Gotta Serve Somebody grinds. It haunts. It lasts because it's straightforward, yet also multi-dimensional, even enigmatic. It wears a hellfire frown, yet carries some typically sidelong Dylan laughs down the years. That "You may call me Bobby, you may call me Zimmy" line. Or the hilariously banal "You may be workin' in a barbershop / You may know how to cut hair".

Gotta Serve Somebody is true Dylan, heard above a rumble of thunder from the Old Testament.

"HE WOULDN'T LET US WORK IN DAYTIME" DANIEL LANOIS

36 Brownsville Girl
(*Knocked Out Loaded*, 1986)

Opium reverie where films, desires and reality collide and collude.

Bono: "Brownsville Girl, I would suggest, is a song that altered songwriting. It's a completely new kind of song and also has this spectacular line (because he can always make you burst out laughing): 'If there's an original thought out there, I could use it right now.' Brownsville Girl is a beautiful rhapsody about this Hispanic woman with her teeth like pearls, and then, in the middle of the song he says, 'She ain't you, but she's here and she's got that dark rhythm in her soul.' So this song is not really about the Brownsville Girl, but rather it's addressed to this other woman who seems to be his muse. And his muse, of course, he refers to obliquely in Tangled Up In Blue, where he talks about the Italian poet whose every word came off the pages like burning coals. And at some point you realise that – of course! – this Italian poet is Dante. Every word that Dante wrote was for his muse, Beatrice, and there's a Beatrice there in most Bob Dylan songs. Whether she's real or imagined isn't important to me, but it's extraordinary. In your twenties you're not so much interested in ideas like that: you're more interested in The Times They Are A-Changin'. But Bob Dylan is there for you at every stage of your life."

35 Isis
(*Desire*, 1975)

Pyramids escapade prompts "Can't live with 'em/Can't shoot 'em" wisdom.

The first song completed for *Desire*, written with Jacques Levy (previous work: Chestnut Mare with Roger McGuinn). He nailed down Dylan's increasingly back-to-narrative songs to graspable linearity. By contrast with the anguished break-up themes of *Blood On The Tracks* the previous year, Isis is playful, and ultimately leads to reconciliation. It's a hair-raising yarn à la Bob Dylan's 115th Dream, where the "I" character ditches his new bride, rides off by horse to grave-rob a pyramid, but returns home to rejoin Isis. "What drives me to you is what drives me insane," he concludes – a pleasant change from all-out warfare. (AP)

34 Blowin' In The Wind
(*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963)

Dylan adapts slave-era spiritual No More Auction Block.

Mavis Staples: "Blowin' In The Wind was the first song I heard from Bobby. I fell in love with it because of the message. We could really relate to that, especially my father [Pops Staples]. Pops couldn't understand how someone like Bobby could write such heavy songs as such a young man. He'd say 'Where did this little guy come from writing a message like that?' But that song had an effect on a lot of people. When Sam Cooke heard Blowin' In The Wind he said, 'Now if a young white guy can write a song like that then I got to get my pen in hand.' And that's when he wrote A Change Is Gonna Come.

"I remember my sister and I were walking down the street one summer evening coming back from the store and heading home, and there was a man, a beggar, on the sidewalk. And this man, he hailed us, and he started singing in the most beautiful voice: 'How many roads must a man walk down…' It stopped us dead in our tracks. We just looked at each other, we couldn't speak, it was so glorious. That's the thing about Bobby's songs, he can touch everyone. It doesn't matter if it's a Sam Cooke or some poor man on the street, they all feel him."

33 You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go
(*Blood On The Tracks*, 1975)

Shaken awake by a new affair: "Yer gonna make me give myself a good talkin' to."

Madeleine Peyroux (jazz diva, Dylan covertrix): "Bob Dylan is someone I grew up with. I used to sing his songs when busking on the Metro in Paris and I always had a huge aspiration to record something of his one day. I chose You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome… because it's a love song and Dylan's love songs are special because there's often a twist of bitterness. On this one he admits that things are not going to be perfect either now or any time. It's amazing the way Dylan can take something very simple and turn it into something that's very important. I loved the melody too. That was another reason. I think that Dylan often doesn't get enough credit for his melodic strength.

"My version [on the album *Careless Love*] ended up a little slower and with a little more backbeat than Dylan's original, so we could hear the poetry seep through. The lyric provides references like "Queen Anne lace/Crimson hair across your face" that seemed to make it a purely male song. And in the beginning I had a few questions about whether that would matter. Finally I felt that it didn't. The song ends up being a beautiful expression of feelings for just anybody and the details just add to the story. You just wonder who this person might be."

DYLAN'S MUSES
#3 SARA DYLAN

Dylan has not been above using his songs as emotional blackmail. His 1976 epic Sara was, perhaps obviously, written for Sara, his estranged wife previously known as Shirley Noznisky and Sara Lownds. Jacques Levy recalled her visiting the *Desire* sessions when he sang her this new song through the studio glass, begging forgiveness, reminiscing about holidays, recalling other songs she had inspired (Sad-Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands) before finally pleading, "Don't ever leave me, don't ever go." She was, apparently, "absolutely stunned". After a temporary reconciliation, the pair divorced. Oddly, Dylan had already written his divorce album, getting in early with 1975's *Blood On The Tracks* around their initial separation. Throw in a score of other songs, including 1970's If Not For You, and the conclusion is clear: if not for her, he'd have been a few songs short. Not bad for a former Bunnygirl.

32 Love Minus Zero/No Limit
(*Bringing It All Back Home*, 1965)

One of his sweetest love songs – apart from the brothel, death and Apocalypse references.

"My love she speaks like silence." Tricky, but then she is quite a woman: true, morally elevated, yet winking and laughing like the flowers. The very scent of her swirls through this honeyed river of song, borne along on gentle tumbles and ripples of guitar. Frankly, we're all enamoured… Until that bastard bridge at midnight trembles, the wind howls like a hammer, and she's suddenly a raven at the window. So – what? – she's death? With a broken wing too? Now we're confused, now we're in a bit of a pickle. Romance over? What happened? What does it mean? Sigh. (PS)

31 Man In The Long Black Coat
(*Oh Mercy*, 1989)

Woman runs off with a man with "a face like a mask". Is that wise?

Daniel Lanois (producer, *Oh Mercy* and *Time Out Of Mind*): "We spent a lot of time getting the ambience right, recording the neighbourhood crickets – the genuine sound of the New Orleans night. It's a song that was directly inspired by the environment and mood of the city. Bob came to the recording of *Oh Mercy* with a number of songs fully written but Man In The Long Black Coat was composed entirely in the studio. It was a hot steamy time down there – and that's exactly how the song sounds. On *Oh Mercy* Bob is generally standing inside the songs but on this one he's standing outside, observing. It's a fascinating subject for a song, the idea that someone might escape the confines of the ordinary world by a sudden impulsive act. It's a song about a turning point, one moment that might change a life for ever – like running away to join the circus.

"On day one of recording he showed up with a few pieces of paper, no instruments, not much of anything. Everything was waiting for him. I basically gave him a package price. For $150,000 he got everything: musicians, equipment, mixing… the works. We started to get good results right away – but Bob was not used to the stripped down way I wanted to work. There were a few moments

Getty

Dylan signs for Chelsea! "This was in the meat packing district of New York known as Chelsea," says photographer Jerry Schatzberg. "Two of the images were out of focus – Dylan chose one of them for the *Blonde On Blonde* cover."

28 I Want You
(*Blonde On Blonde*, 1966)

Proof that even Dylan's pop songs are confusing.

Jeremy Vine (BBC Radio 2): "There's a particular experience I associate with the song. I used to do hospital radio when I was 16, at a psychiatric hospital in Banstead, Surrey. Occasionally patients would wander up with requests, and this guy hung around for 90 minutes, clearly deep in thought, and just said 'I Want You by Dylan', so I played it, which was the first time I'd heard the song.

"There are two sides to the track the patient could have keyed into: the uplifting effect if you were feeling troubled, or the disturbed lyrics. Lyrically, it's like a gag, a cartoon, a feature film or a colourful painting. It feels like a bucket that's been tipped out. There are so many images, so much going on, from that first line, 'The guilty undertaker sighs/The lonesome organ grinder cries…' It's fabulous. You don't know what these characters are doing. It's like a circus and everyone is jumping around. There's this great combination of confusion and the real purity of Dylan's sentiment. It feels to me like the lyrics are showing off to someone he didn't know that well, like someone he spent an evening with and it didn't work out, because there's a sense of sustained unfulfilment. It's not something you write for a wife. The trouble with a lot of his lyrics is that when you start digging, they fall apart, which isn't always bad because they're amazing glass constructions. Here, you're caught between the artifice and the real emotion. He dribbles the ball in a fancy way and then scores with a tap in! I like the way the lyric doesn't drown in its own complication. But most of all, I love I Want You because it makes me feel happy. The melody is wrapped in tinsel, like turning on all the fairylights, all bouncy and joyous. The chord changes all go to the right place, down and up, and it's beautifully structured. Did it take him five minutes to write or five weeks? I know his answer, which is five minutes."

when he got discouraged, when things got more pared down than he would have liked. A lot of his best work from the past had been in the presence of a band – getting things live off the floor – and the way I was working, overdubbing and stacking tracks up, was not even a consideration for him.

"But what got captured on *Oh Mercy* went beyond the trickery that was being pulled out of the toolbox. There were some important environmental factors. For instance, Bob would never let us do any work in the daytime. It was a purely night-time record. As I understand it, human beings are satisfied with a different musical tempo after dark than is the case during daylight hours. A slightly exotic, slow groove will sound correct at midnight but at lunchtime the next day will sound like it needs to be sped up. Bob seemed to be in tune with that idea; he knew exactly what kind of mood he wanted to get across."

30 I'll Be Your Baby Tonight
(*John Wesley Harding*, 1968)

Beautiful, easy-rhyming love song in the spirit of Hank.

The shades are drawn, the bottle uncorked and Pete Drake's lilting lap steel provides the flickering shadows in this succinct and deceptively simple tune with a major Grand Ole Opry vibe. Further evidence that Dylan was wilfully out of step in '68, I'll Be Your Baby Tonight might easily have been written and, given the unfussy nature of its recording, even recorded 20 years before. Gone are the twisty, cryptic lyrics of the period with the return of Bob the laidback romanticist and – as if to further confuse the hardcore – "moon/spoon" couplets underlining the song's appreciation of earthly pleasures. (TD)

29 Girl From The North Country
(*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963)

Scarborough Fair recast "where the winds hit heavy on the borderline".

Paul Buchanan (The Blue Nile): "I must have heard it at a time when I dressed like he does on the cover of the *Freewheelin'* album. I wanted my life to be like that cover. There is something of the same romance about the song; a straightforward enough reminiscence of a lost love, without any cynicism or defeatism. I like the mentions of the girl's hair and coat and, I guess, the third person thing works nicely because it's all kept so simple and defenceless."

27 All Along the Watchtower
(*John Wesley Harding*, 1967)

A riddle without an end, waiting for a Hendrix guitar solo?

Terry Callier: "To write songs about things that are close or painful, you have to be at a level where you can say something about it that everybody will be able to identify with. You can't always take your most personal experiences and do that, but Bob Dylan was good at it. As a matter of fact, he was the one that showed us that your personal ruminations and experiences, if put in a vibrant enough context, were valuable. Because people hadn't been doing that before: people had been saying 'Yes, I love you, you love me, we will be together, 1, 2, 3.' But you start talking about 'There must be some kind of way out of here, said the Joker to the Thief'… Well! *Now* we're getting *down*! We're talking about neuroses, psychoses, and other 'oses! He showed us that if you put these things in the right context, in the right emotional patterns and the right combinations of words, this is as valuable as anything else on this earth."

Continued on page 76 ➢

Jerry Schatzberg/Corbis, from the forthcoming book 'Touching Dylan's Edge', Genesis Publications.com

26 Shelter From The Storm
(Blood On The Tracks, 1975)

...because everyone needs a bosom for a pillow.

Sheryl Crow: "I got into Dylan and The Band at high school [in Kennett, Missouri] about 1976 when all my friends were Boston fans. I wanted to be a songwriter. I'd studied piano and I could play by ear. At first, I didn't like Dylan's voice so I started *reading* him. Then when I began writing my own songs I realised that his ability to construct the arc of a melody is *perfect* – Shelter From The Storm was one of the first songs where I saw that.

"I've thought about that perfection of his a lot. It's the intervals – the note choices – that set an artist apart. Usually they're completely identifiable. Look at Sting or Sam Cooke, or Bono, or Thom Yorke, or now the way Chris Martin will go up a sixth on the end of a phrase. But Dylan doesn't have that kind of trademark, he is just a guy who knows what intervals to pick to grow our emotions, to manipulate us into *feeling*. And Shelter From The Storm is also an example of how good he is at making a verse melody so circular it becomes the hook and he doesn't have to use a chorus. It's almost like a nursery rhyme. "'Come in, she said, I'll give you shelter from the storm.'" You never really know who *she* is. A spiritual figure? Is she a prostitute who took him in after he took his woman 'for granted, got my signals crossed'? Although with all of his relationship songs I've assumed they're about Sara. Maybe that's wrong, but that touches the music for me.

"I read one Dylan interview where he said the perfect song for him would be where every line could be the first line of a new song. And I think there's just so little fat in lyrics like Shelter From The Storm that really is true."

25 Hurricane
(Desire, 1976)

A slight return to protest with stinging plea for imprisoned boxer Rubin Carter.

A whirlwind of a song, later dispensed by the Rolling Thunder Revue in a rough-and-tumble manner begetting a natural force, Dylan's snarled quatrains predated the advent of poetry slams by decades. "Three bodies lyin' there does Patty see/And another man named Bello, movin' around mysteriously/'I didn't do it,' he says, and he throws up his hands/'I was only robbin' the register, I hope you understand.'" It's pure poetic passion delivered via the screaming headlines of a scandal sheet, with no detail left untold. The punchline comes a few lines later, Dylan dryly noting, "If you're black, you might as well not show up on the street/'less you wanna draw the heat." Malcolm X couldn't have said it better. (AL)

24 I Shall Be Released
(Greatest Hits Vol 2, 1971)

Gospel succour for the trapped and jailed.

Tom Robinson (Tom Robinson Band, BBC 6 Music): "Our version [on *TRB*, 1978] was pure pragmatism. Everyone knew it. It was the standard left-wing benefit-for-somebody-who's-in-prison song, with the great advantage that it has the same chord sequence running all the way through, so you can teach it to a scratch band in five minutes flat. We were supporting the Free George Ince [wrongly charged with murder, 1973] campaign, so it seemed appropriate.

"Coming out of the *Basement Tapes* sessions, Dylan's version has those other-worldly textures. You also get that sense of him "walking out of the machinery", as Peter Gabriel sings in Solsbury Hill. I think, having read Chronicles, where for the first time you get his version of that period, he just could not have carried on any more, regardless of the motorcycle accident. There was a madness in the expectation, the pressure, the people breaking into the house and ruining his marriage with Sara.

"The songs from this period use these amazing metaphors for explaining, or coping with his situation. So on *John Wesley Harding*, Dear Landlord is for his manager Albert Grossman, and in I Shall Be Released he's talking about being in prison but perhaps a prison of other people's expectations.

"What I envy most about Dylan is his lightness of touch. Like rhyming 'language' with 'sandwich' [on Sign Language, duet with Eric Clapton on the latter's *No Reason To Cry*, 1976]. He'll put in an absurd or meaningless line just to get the song going and to get on to the next bit. You get to the essence of the song without ever getting tied down in the mechanics of the rhyme scheme or the business of musical structure. Which is why he's so great to cover. His songs are not arrangement-dependent. Anyone can interpret them."

23 A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall
(The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, 1963)

An early masterpiece turns protest singing metaphysical.

Based on the English folk ballad Lord Randall, Hard Rain is constructed as a series of questions and answers about the protagonist's travels through an apocalyptic world of pestilence, famine, war and deceit. Yet despite the horrors he's witnessed, he's "Goin' back out, 'fore the rain starts a-fallin'", to do what he can: even if that's just to write a song, to "tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it/And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it". Both Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell have said they became songwriters after hearing this: it still retains every ounce of that inspirational power. (AB)

22 The Times They Are A-Changin'
(The Times They Are A-Changin', 1964)

The forces of history mass at our hero's back. Outtathaway!

Billy Bragg: "I locked onto The Times They Are A-Changin' at a time when I was looking for music that had some kind of meaning. I was about 13 or 14 years old. I swapped my copy of the Jackson 5's *Greatest Hits* with a mate at school for *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. It was his Dad's copy, the vinyl was about as thick as my finger. I took it home and listened to that track, and I really found it inspirational. To go from 'A-B-C, 1-2-3' to that was a seismic sea change in my appreciation of music.

"It started with the picture of Dylan on the cover. He's got his head to one side, not looking out. He's asking a question, saying: 'Look, all this is happening around the world. What are you going to do about it?' Every track reflects that – Ballad Of Hollis Brown, The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll, Only A Pawn In Their Game.

"And the track The Times They Are A-Changin' just summed it up. Everything's in there. 'Come mothers and fathers throughout the land, and don't criticise what you can't understand.' God, that was incendiary. There's an incredible starkness to the song. It says: are you part of this, or are you going to sit on your butt and do nothing? And that to me was a clarion call.

"I was in Canada about 10 years ago, watching TV and it was used for an advert for a bank. I was fucking furious. About two or three days later I was doing a gig – a union rally in the centre of Toronto. I went up there and whacked the shit out of it with all the venom that I got from The Clash. The place went mad. So whenever I do it now I'm not gentle with it, I don't think you should be gentle with that song.

"He always has been, and always will be, an outsider. He makes outsider music and that's tough to do. I really respect him for that. For me, The Times They Are A-Changin' remains a really key record in the development of Billy Bragg as we know and love him. Without that... I would still be here, but I'd be doing a very poor impersonation of the early Jackson 5. You don't wanna see that."

Nas: "I first heard The Times They Are A-Changin' in a [1979 street gang] movie called The Wanderers, which I saw when I was about 14 years old. The song came at a very important point of the movie, where the characters had been runnin' the streets forever, and had gotten old. It had come full circle with their lives, so they had to make a change.

"The verse that blew me away was 'Come senators, congressmen/Please heed the call/Don't stand in the doorway/Don't block up the hall/For he that gets hurt will be he who has stalled." The words he's saying are words of awakening, but when you add that to the conviction in his voice, you can hear that this is a man fighting to get the truth out. To make a record like that, you have to genuinely have it in your heart to not just love your music and your cause, but to be a part of it, and that's what he does. You can't fake that record."

21 Visions Of Johanna
(Blonde On Blonde, 1966)

Put another fifty pee in the meter. It's the ghost of 'lectricity.

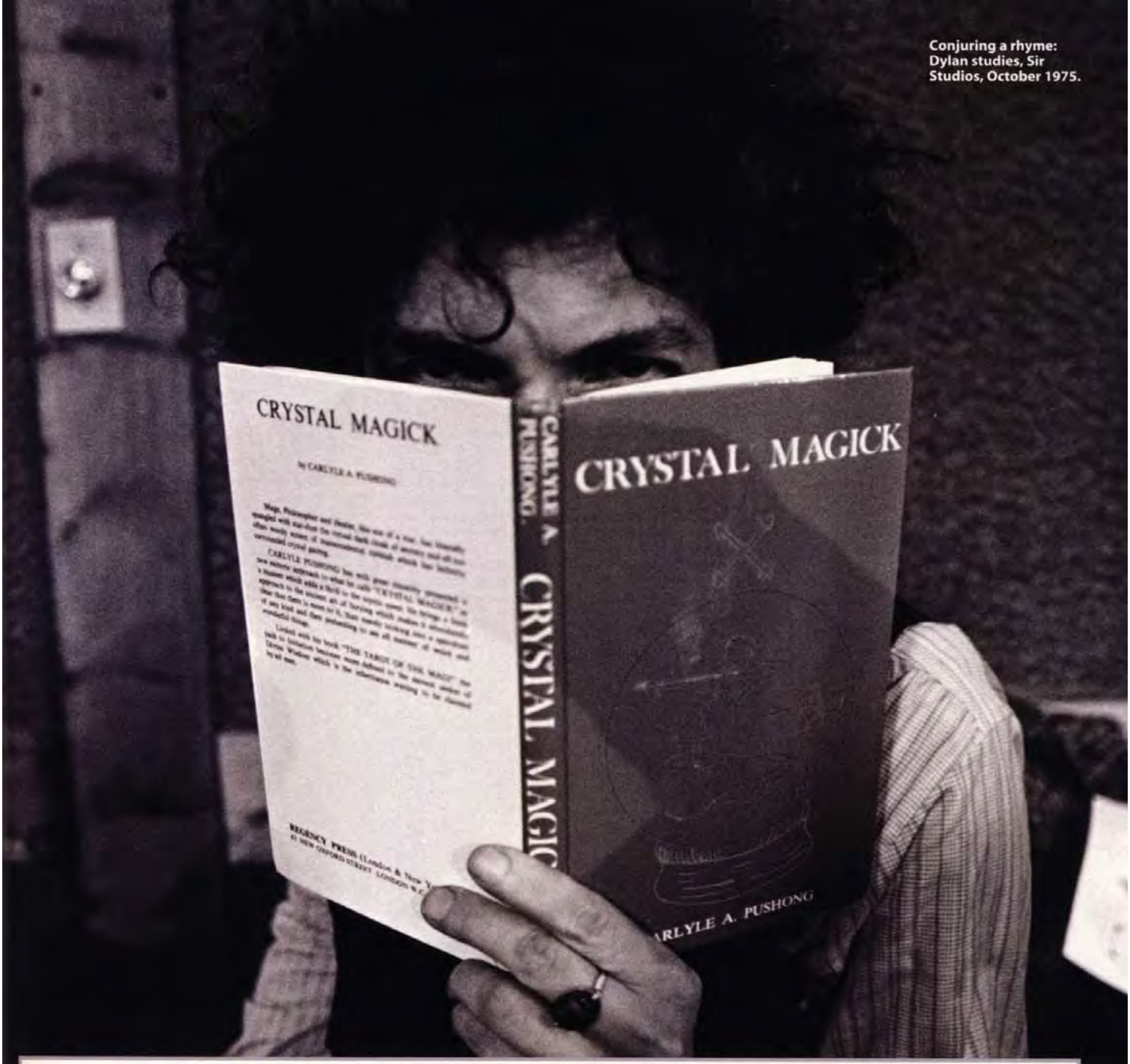
Steve Harley: "This sparkles with that dreadful mystery that's Dylan's own. Hearing it for the first time has never left my mind. Suddenly I wasn't a 15-year-old listening to music anymore; I was hearing poetry. "Lights flicker from the opposite loft/In this room the heat pipes just cough/The country music station plays soft." And there's a pay-off line with Dylan. He says: "But there's nothing, really nothing to turn off." You listen and think, What the fuck was that? All the time this young man of 24 was thinking of a lost love. Maybe apocryphal, maybe genuine – but he's a poet and he has licence to create. Every pay-off at the end of every verse just says there's nothing here. Nothing exists. It's all fantasy. Am I awake? Am I asleep? All I've got is visions of Johanna, which keep me up past dawn. The man can't sleep! He's lovesick. But is he really? Or is this poetry? This isn't Wordsworth or Keats. Dylan is beyond them."

20 Ballad Of A Thin Man
(Highway 61 Revisited, 1965)

Funereal sneer-a-thon vs "one-eyed midgets" (think about it) everywhere.

Al Stewart: "'You walk into the room/With your pencil in your hand/You see somebody naked/And you say Who is that man?/You try so hard/But you just don't understand/Just what you'll say/When you get home...' I haven't played it in years but I can still remember the words. At the time, all us London hipsters assumed it was about the Melody Maker's Max Jones. It's an unspoken rule that the trade-off for fame and fortune in the music business is that you have to be able to accept criticism, but not every artist subscribes to that, and Dylan obviously didn't. With Positively 4th Street around the same time, it was clear Dylan was pissed off about a lot of things – and he was writing like a maniac.

"Musically it's beautiful. I love the skinny sound of the record – it suits the title. When I saw Dylan at the Albert Hall in 1966 he played it, and I think it was the only song that he played on piano. There's no swing in the way Dylan plays it, and that gives it this old-fashioned barrelhouse feel, which works really well with the words. And when the organ comes in on top... that's wonderful." ➢



Conjuring a rhyme: Dylan studies, Sir Studios, October 1975.

SYLVIE SIMMONS SURVEYS THE MARITAL ROADKILL

19

Idiot Wind

(*Blood On The Tracks*, 1975)

OF ALL THE songs of love and hate on *Blood On The Tracks*, none is as painfully direct or as inscrutably mystifying as Idiot Wind. On the one hand as blatant a chunk of divorce porn as has been committed to vinyl. On the other a riddle, featuring as many unexplained characters and locations as howls of vengeance and pain. It's hardly news that Dylan uses words as swords and smoke screens to defy interpretation and keep his audience at bay. But on an album considered his most confessional, this elusiveness is so remarkable that many seem simply to have ignored it. When people sing along (and they do) to Idiot Wind, they focus on the man crawling past his loved-one's door, or raging at unnamed betrayals, or picturing her – as the song crescendoes in contempt and loathing – dead in a ditch, flies buzzing around her eyes.

As for the swaggering cowboy – an escapee from Lily, Rosemary & The Jack Of Hearts – who sings the opening verse and provides much of the imagery, or the murdered Gray, his millionaire wife, the crucified soldier, the fortune teller, or the priest by the burning building, they remain as mysterious as the tramp in Like A Rolling Stone, and insofar as the impact of the song, of as much individual importance. Because what makes this a great song is its passion – so uncontainable at times it seems to take off on its own, podding verses as it goes – and the authority of Dylan's voice.

Maybe it's the relative frailty of his backing band that makes his singing feel so apocalyptic – the way he spits "sweeeeet lady" and "iiiidiot wind" (before ending with the unexpectedly inclusive "*we're* idiots, babe") – but apocalyptic it remains. Whether Dylan is exorcising personal relationship angst, or simply writing a contemporary American love-hate-murder ballad, he certainly gorges himself here.

"AS BLATANT A CHUNK OF DIVORCE PORN AS HAS BEEN COMMITTED TO VINYL"

18 Subterranean Homesick Blues
(*Bringing It All Back Home*, 1965)

Songwriting as an amphetamine-fuelled, existentialist car chase.

James Blunt: "I must have heard this first when I was about 14 or 15. I didn't have any Bob Dylan records of my own, but another kid at school who played the guitar was heavily into him and he kept playing me this track. I remember thinking how flippant it sounded, lackadaisical in many ways. The sense of movement in the song is so infectious, and to me Subterranean Homesick Blues sums up this sense of moving through life. The guitarist in my band has Subterranean Homesick Blues as the polyphonic ringtone for his phone; someone rang him during a rehearsal and I just thought, 'Shit… how does one even start writing a song like that?'"

17 Every Grain Of Sand
(*Shot Of Love*, 1981)

Death and judgement stalk our hero. They're behiiiiind youuuuu!

Sheryl Crow: "Every Grain Of Sand was the first religious song I'd heard which transcended all religions. It asks the universal questions that lead all people into exploring God, eternity, mortality. I first heard it when *Shot Of Love* came out and I loved it right away, but then I sang it at Johnny Cash's funeral so it has a special meaning for me. It was my choice, but his family wrote to tell me how important that song had been to Johnny. It's always been interesting to me to think of Dylan's Christian phase. I'd done the born-again thing when I was about 17. There was a youth movement I got wound up in until it started to really bug me that some of my friends were going to heaven and some weren't. I became what they call a backslider pretty quick.

"The music to Every Grain Of Sand ebbs back and forth – it's almost a waltz – but the song's great strength is the text: 'Like criminals, they have choked the breath of conscience and good cheer' – it's almost Dickensian. I've called him on a couple of occasions to talk about songwriting and he's been amazing. On *The Globe Sessions* [1998] I'd recorded some songs – including Redemption Day which was definitely inspired by A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall, the flow and the fury of it and the striving to be completely economical and lean with the lyrics. But I got stuck and I called him. He told me to get the band together and play all the old R&B tunes we knew and just start to change them a little and something would happen. Then he sent me this unreleased song – Mississippi. A Bob Dylan tune nobody's heard before! I did a kind of Byrds or Pettyish version and just hoped I would get it near to what Bob was thinking. Recording Mississippi was so inspiring it was the catalyst for me writing three more songs. It's like playing tennis with someone who's better than you, it brings your game up."

16 Masters Of War
(*The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, 1963)

Not in our name spits a Dylan in angry-young-man-full-of-portent mode.

Loudon Wainwright III: "Writing protest songs is difficult because they often have a very limited life-span. But when Dylan sings, 'you can hide behind walls, you can hide behind desks, I just want you to know, I can see through your masks', you instantly think of The White House and Downing Street today. He attacks the biggest targets going, and there's nothing polite about it. It's a young man's rage – outrage really – not Where Have All The Flowers Gone? There's no choruses, and the guitar playing is… it's unrelenting. His guitar playing swings and rocks really hard.

"The writing itself is great. He'll take a word like 'world', which from the perspective of someone who writes songs is a very hard word to rhyme. But he rhymes it with 'hurled', and that's a way around the problem, and it's not just a way around the problem, but it's a great couplet too.

"I remember seeing him for the first time at the Newport Folk festival at about the time this song came out. He was just this young guy stood on stage with a guitar, but he had balls, and any young person will admire someone who has balls. Let's hope so anyway."

15 Tangled Up In Blue
(*The Bootleg Series Vol 1-3*, 1991)

Doomed love, Dante, a titty bar and the death of the '60s dream.

Gaz Coombes (Supergrass): "I have to say I prefer the demo versions that are out there [one on *The Bootleg Series Vol 1-3*, another on the *Blood On The Tapes* bootleg] to the one on *Blood On The Tracks*. They're quite slow, downbeat versions of the song and that's what I love about them. They're just acoustic

"A young man's outrage." Dylan on the roof of photographer John Cohen's flat, 3rd Avenue, Manhattan, spring 1962. ©John Cohen

"FOLKIES SAID HE'D SOLD OUT!" PAUL McCARTNEY

guitar, bass and vocals, and they're just beautiful. They sound more emotional, more contemplative, whereas the version on *Blood On The Tracks* is quite bouncy. He changed a lot of the lyrics after this version. The demos are written in the third person, like he's telling a story about someone else, then when you hear it on *Blood On The Tracks* he uses 'I', which makes you wonder whether it was actually about him all along. But musically, I prefer the versions on *Blood On The Tapes*. I discovered *Blood On The Tapes* when a MOJO writer told me about it! So thanks for that..."

14 Mr Tambourine Man
(Bringing It All Back Home, 1965)

You invent an entirely new kind of song and get called "corny". You can't win with some legends...

Paul McCartney: "I know it's corny, but I heard him do it at the Albert Hall [May 9, 1965], and I was aching for him to do it and knowing Dylan I thought he might not do it. Just to be awkward, just to be perverse. It was the infamous show where all the folkies thought he'd sold out. How crap is that? It was fantastic. First half is folky, and then the second half was electric with The Band – it was the all-time concert. But then of course, somebody starts going, He's deserted the folk world! Yeah, no wonder, look at you mate. So he did it there, the first time I'd ever heard it live. A really good song, very much of the period. Totally nailed that year. I was lucky to be there."

Brian Wilson: "My favourite Bob Dylan song is Mr. Tambourine Man because my wife and I sing that to our baby boy, Dylan, every day."

13 Highway 61 Revisited
(Highway 61 Revisited, 1965)

The bible, race and World War III played out along America's jugular vein.

Jon King (Gang Of Four): "When I was 11, at Sevenoaks school, the A level boys in the art classes were allowed to play whatever music they liked, which was *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde On Blonde*. We didn't have a record player at home, and I'd never heard anything like it. It led me to being absolutely focused on art and music. What got me was the sound of his voice: suddenly you had someone who put songs together that played with words – I wasn't sure what he was saying, but I knew he was being brilliantly sarcastic and clever, and sneering at the people who were boring, and I loved it. Highway 61 Revisited itself was just so funny. Highway 61 bisects the American North and South, and represents an escape, particularly from where Dylan lived, the tedium of living a constrained, pre-defined life. But in that text, I saw so much. Like the way he plays with the story, and the whole issue of race. And how Dylan was embracing rock'n'roll, when he was being accused of being a Judas – what was that all about? It was almost segregationism in the folk scene. With my Gang Of Four lyrics, I'd always try and make something internally contradictory, constructing narratives out of words that seem to be logically inconsistent, which is what Dylan so cleverly did. He wasn't trying to be obvious, which is easy. He was being complicated without being necessarily vague. There was this sense that you were involved in a cultural conversation. Dylan created the conversations to beat all conversations."

From Young Bob: John Cohen's Early Photographs Of Bob Dylan (Powerhouse Books). Michael Ochs Archives/Redferns

12 Love Sick
(Time Out Of Mind, 1997)

Slashing, Rumble-type chords lacerate poor old Bob. Darn it, he's in love again.

Marianne Faithfull: "I heard *Time Out Of Mind* pretty much as soon as it came out; I'm a 'rush out and buy Bob' kind of person. I love the whole record, but Love Sick is my favourite. Beautiful. Everything. The words, the melody, the passion in the singing. I loved it immediately. For the longest time I thought it was called I'm Sick Of Love, because that's what he sings. But being love sick and being sick of love are two entirely different things. And yet obviously the same to an old romantic like Mr D. And that is such a brilliant writer's thing to do. Love is hard for all of us but it's very, very hard for an artist. He talks about being tired and hearing the clock tick – this is someone with lots to do, lots of work, he's got no time for anything and on top of that there's this *love*, and he can't do a thing about it. The lyrics are actually very straightforward. Someone else singing it might make them sound sappy, but the way Dylan sings – very intense and strong and not at all detached – it's a statement, and a great one, about love."

DYLAN'S MUSES
#4 BLIND WILLIE McTELL

Devoted to all the early blues greats, Dylan owed McTell particular debt. Born Willie Samuel McTell in 1901, the Georgia guitar maestro made his name playing medicine shows and carnivals throughout the South. He had a fondness for aliases – he recorded under many names, including Pig'n'Whistle Red and Georgia Sam (dropped into 1965's Highway 61 Revisited). Intriguingly, was often noted for his nasal vocals. Listening to his bawdy, blackly comic songs, it's startling how "Dylanesque" they often seem: see East St. Louis Blues ("I laid my head in a New York woman's lap / She laid her little cute head in mine / She tried to make me bleed by the rattlings of her tongue"). Rough Alley Blues even features the line "Lay across my big brass bed" (purloined completely for Lay Lady Lay). In 1983's Blind Willie McTell, Dylan gave him one of the greatest musical eulogies ever written. (SL)

11 The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll
(The Times They Are A-Changin', 1964)

Socialite whips black servant to death. Is sentenced to hell.

Bill Fay: "Just before I started writing, in 1964, I started playing the guitar to myself by practising The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll. I heard it purely by chance up in Bangor as a student, we played him all the time, listening to early Dylan before he'd really filtered into the mainstream. He was so powerful melodically. His voice was amazingly mature for such a young man but with tracks like Hattie Carroll he was trying to say something with lovely tunes and a great vocal sound. Before the protest they were actual songs that you could get lost in. Take away Dylan's persona and they still stood out. Over the years I've come to realise that his music is about access. Hattie Carroll? It's five chords. Even in 1964 I knew four of them. When you first start out, you can play Dylan. His songs are about the people and for the people so it makes sense that they're accessible, that they're easy to play. Even a recent track like Mississippi, you can climb inside. There are gems scattered throughout."

10 Just Like A Woman
(Blonde On Blonde, 1966)

Baby's got new clothes, but Bob can see right through them. Or at least he *claims* to.

Jimmy Webb: "This was when I understood how deep Dylan's well really was. It wasn't a folk song, it wasn't protest, it was just a great love song, which of course had an immediate impact on me. I had just dropped out of college to commit to what I hoped would be the life of a songwriter. I was very much in love with a girl who was inspiring a lot of the music I was writing, and this song seemed to cut right to the heart of what I was feeling emotionally at the time. All these years later I still marvel at what an absolutely stunning piece of writing it is.

"What a fortuitous nexus of rhyme and purpose is the chorus: 'She takes just like a woman / She makes love just like a woman / Then she aches just like a woman / But she breaks just like a little girl.' As songwriters we live for the moment when words to fall together like that, as if they've been waiting for just that arrangement. The way everything leads toward that last line is masterful. That would be enough for most writers, but the third verse reveals Dylan's strategy to be much larger. When he says 'Please don't let on that you knew me when / I was hungry and it was your world,' he steps on-camera and addresses this person directly to deliver one final twist. There's a lifetime of listening in these details and layered subtleties. Any serious student of songwriting will find a complete education in this one composition." ➢

Dylan in Telluride, Colorado, August 2001.

JOHN HARRIS ADMIRES HEROISM, OPTIMISM AND LONELINESS

Mississippi

(*Love And Theft*, 2001)

MISSISSIPPI WAS recorded for *Time Out Of Mind*, put to one side, and re-cut for *Love And Theft* – and it was while he was explaining the song's stop-start journey that Dylan shone a few rays of light on what might have inspired it. Daniel Lanois, he reckoned, had wanted its treatment to be "sexy, sexy and more sexy" – but Dylan surmised that such ideas did precious little justice to "knifelike lyrics trying to convey majesty and heroism".

If those words suggested some anthemic, vainglorious conceit, Mississippi's crystallisation of such qualities is way more complicated. There is majesty in here, for sure, but it's bound up with the power and grace of simple honesty, as laid out in the first bridge: "Got nothing for you, I had nothing before / Don't even have anything for myself any more." And heroism? It's not exactly the knight-on-a-charging-stallion kind. Instead, Dylan offers no end of defeats and setbacks ("My ship's been split to splinters, and it's sinking fast"), at least one sighing apology, and the quiet triumph of merely having made it through.

Crucially, however, he's not beaten; though you can easily get lost in the stanzas rooted in the crepuscular dread that defined much of *TOOM*, there are glimpses of a new beginning. "Stick with me baby, stick with me anyhow," he implores, perhaps with the start of a smile creeping across his face. "Things should start to get interesting, right about now." And note that upward melodic glide, the redemptive sound of the process the Americans call Starting Over.

"WHAT DID WE EXPECT? HARD AND FAST ANSWERS ARE NOT DYLAN'S BUSINESS"

The strange thing is, just as that silver lining starts glinting, he finishes with some of the most barren thoughts he has ever put to tape. First, he charms his quarry like an old romantic: "Give me your hand, and say you'll be mine." And then, before there's even been an answer, the door slams shut: "Well, the emptiness is endless, cold as the clay." If we're left confused, what else could we expect? Hard-and-fast answers are not Bob Dylan's business.

8 It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)

(Bringing It All Back Home, 1965)

And if his thought-dreams could be seen, they'd put his head upon the guillotine...

David Crosby: "When I first heard Dylan in New York I didn't like his singing. I thought, Why doesn't everybody like me more? But then I went to see him perform and I got it... his songs! They were so good and there was one after another after another. Asking for a favourite is like asking a parent, Hey, which is your favourite child? Bob Dylan a good three dozen flat-out sterling pieces of material that we can safely refer to as classics. But when I first heard It's Alright, Ma it really was such a knockout. 'Darkness at the break of noon / Shadows even the silver spoon' – hey, that's the apocalypse coming, nothing less."

7 It's All Over Now, Baby Blue

(Bringing It All Back Home, 1965)

Stately vocal carries a warning from history.

Richard Thompson: "Sounds like it's curtains for Baby Blue, which has led some to speculate that this is an updating of the story of Mary, Queen Of Scots; Bob may have heard 'Mary Queen Of Scots' Lament' on his visit to England in the winter of 1962, or perhaps he's just a history buff. She was fond of blue stockings – indeed, she was wearing sky-blue hose with an interwoven silver thread when she was beheaded in 1587. The orphan (or soon to be) 'crying like a fire in the sun' might be her son, and the 'empty-handed painter' her secretary-lover David Rizzio, also a fine musician, and composer of outstanding ballad tunes. One might also speculate about the presence of the Earl of Bothwell and her husband, Lord Darnley. The action, we imagine, is shifted to Greenwich Village, and is beautifully and skilfully updated and made immediate by imagery and street language. A great song by someone who knows the tradition, innovates in it, and builds on it."

6 It Ain't Me, Babe

(Another Side Of... 1964)

She wants Bob. Is she crazy or sumpin?

Tom McRae: "This is no gentle let-down to a former lover... it's virtually a health warning. 'Go away from my window and leave at your own chosen speed,' he sings in a lilting voice, when what he actually means is 'I'm an asshole, you better run'. The crunch comes with the killer line... 'There's nothing in here moving, and anyway I'm not alone', it's so harsh as to almost make the listener flinch. You can picture the poor ex-girlfriend eavesdropping at the door while he's getting busy with someone new. But that's musicians for you. What did she expect? I defy any lyricist to listen to Dylan and not feel like auctioning his typewriter on eBay and heading to South America to open a bar... the sheer joy in the manipulation of words, the oblique rhymes, the savage intent and remorseless honesty. The fucker said it all."

Charlie Sexton (Dylan sideman): "In the past when I've seen B D do a show or when I played with him, at times it seems as if there was a circle of light surrounding him regardless of what the lights in the show are doing. Everything just goes away and you just sit there, taking in everything he says. Certain songs really bring out that kind of focus and this is one of those songs. I played it a lot when I was out with him, and while some songs would go through changes and various arrangements, this one changed very little. Except there was always something new from Bob vocally, in phrasing, phrasing that could dazzle Miles Davis... But all in all, It Ain't Me, Babe stayed pretty much the same, and I was always happy to listen. Often when it was played there would be the same reaction from some of the fans, a sort of celebration – which is interesting when you listen to the words. It's shadow and light."

5 Blind Willie McTell

(The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3, 1991)

Out of Dylan's difficult '80s, a gem buried for a decade.

Martin Carthy: "It blows this massive hole through the romantic notion of the South. It's about corruptibility. And it has an amazing emotional impact, which counts for everything. When he sang Hard Rain in The Troubadour in London in 1962 the audience was fucking thunderstruck. They'd never heard anything like that in their lives. To take a songwriting idea like you find in Nottamun Town – a 'song of life' in the folk lingo – and to develop it like he did in Hard Rain was absolutely awe inspiring. I was absolutely stunned. And Blind Wille McTell had the same effect on me. It's everything a song should be. It's concise, it's eloquent and it also happens to be a beautiful piece of music. I love the position of the narrator in the song – sitting in a New Orleans hotel room contemplating the whole history of the south, the murder amid the magnolias, but not with anger for a change. It's a... rumination. A great word for a great song."

4 Desolation Row

(Highway 61 Revisited, 1965)

Post-messianic stress leads to despairing 11-minute state-of-the-nation address.

Roy Harper: "Desolation Row, I thought when I first got hold of the record, That's exactly where we're at. It contained all the elements of where we'd felt civilisation had been for years. But it wasn't delivered with the overt sense of humour of his more accessible earlier songs. Times had changed for Dylan. He was no longer the carefree young vibe thief of the freewheelin' age. He was now expected by everyone under 20 to become the next messiah, just as he was becoming more human. There were rumours of hard drugs and self-examination. Like a lot of us, he was on the verge of floundering. There were no easy solutions any more.

"The more I thought about it, the more Desolation Row appeared as a collection of impressions thrown at a page. It was riveting, it was desperate. I could very readily identify with that. It called the world to account, but it wasn't bold, the humour was almost hidden. The song was a delineation. Like a final notice of departure. We all know the characters the song describes. The Millais painting of the drowned Ophelia lingers in my mind, dead in the head at 22, living vicariously, peeping into Desolation Row for moments of delicious embarrassment, only to resume her role in some Salvation Army equivalent. Robin Hood, Cinderella, Bette Davis etc, they're all there along with a million inferences about the humdrum of seedy human life, usually set at midnight and beyond, while daytime insurance men check that no one escapes to Desolation Row. And then there's the last verse written by someone on the outside. A token note from someone who's no longer part of the scene, who misses the freedom, but who perhaps couldn't handle the hand-to-mouth abandonment, or perhaps the grime. We never get to find out. And it doesn't matter. It never did. And it never will." (*Read the full version of Roy Harper's essay at www.mojo4music.com*)

3 Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands

(Blonde On Blonde, 1966)

Eleven minutes-plus of serpentine psychodrama. Like jazz and Byron, it goes on and on and on.

Al Kooper (Dylan sideman, philosopher): "To me, this is the definitive version of what 4am sounds like. It may very well be because we recorded it at that hour – but many tracks have been transported to tape in the earliest of am's and yet none actually proclaims its birthtime as saliently as this track does. It's an amazing song with a brilliant reading by its incandescent author. And when had we heard of a mercury mouth, a magazine husband, warehouse eyes, streetcar visions that you place on the grass, sheet metal memories of Cannery Row, and of course, your Arabian drum? Never before, I believe.

"Using simple chords in deceptively new patterns, he wove his tale – a ballad fer chrissakes – for over 11 minutes, but I defy you to stop in the middle to answer the phone, check the ball scores or use the restroom. It's just downright riveting: that voice and harmonica, the intricacies of musicians who had previously laboured for the likes of George Jones and Tammy Wynette suddenly challenged to provide musical sets for a play they'd never seen or heard before, and rising to the occasion with a bravado I had never witnessed before in all my years as a studio musician in New York City.

"Dropping the new Bard into the screaming bastion of redneckland seemed like a stroke of genius from Bob Johnston, Dylan's new producer, but I suspect Johnston just longed for the comforts of home. Whatever. The results will last forever."

Robert Wyatt: "For years I promised Alfie [Wyatt's wife of 30 years, Alfreda Benge] that I'd cover it for her. I think she knows I'll never do that now but maybe, when Alfie's forgotten all about it, I will. One of the things I like about jazz is that jazz goes on and on and on. This song has got that kind of momentum. It builds and grows, builds and grows, and it's a simple structure. Another thing that's so great about it is the band playing on it, Al Kooper's on Hammond, and they roll along, beautiful. Alfie read somewhere that (*laughs*) he didn't tell them how long the song was going to be, so they keep thinking they're coming to the ending, surging towards an end, which is brilliant, Miles Davis-like in its wickedness. And then he'll drone away another verse! So they're playing as if... they keep building towards the climax, all the time! I suppose it's like very clever sex, really."

2 Positively 4th Street

(Greatest Hits Vol.1, 1967)

Dylan's most shocking put-down: "You'd rather see me paralysed"!

Johnny Echols (Love): "It deals with the duplicity of human beings and the nebulous nature of friendship. It's an incredibly important thing to cling on to in life, if you can. I knew that even back in 1965 when this came out. I immediately connected with Dylan's take on humanity and the nature of hypocrisy. He spoke to me. It's a very New York song but it made perfect sense out on the West Coast. After Dylan went over big you could feel the style of music changing everywhere. Previously, songs sort of went from C to A minor to F to G in a prescribed pattern but with Bob coming from folk music, the songs started to follow wherever the vocal melody went. That had a huge effect on everybody." ➢

"Like a complete unknown" – Dylan in Jerry Schatzberg's New York studio.

GREIL MARCUS GETS LOST IN THE SWIRLING VORTEX OF DYLAN'S CRYPTIC FAIRY TALE, AND GREATEST EVER SONG

Like A Rolling Stone

(*Highway 61 Revisited*, 1965)

AS SONGWRITING, what's different about Like A Rolling Stone is all in its first four words. There are other songs that begin with "Once upon a time" – but none that in a stroke takes the listener into a fairy tale, suddenly demanding that all the paltry incidents in the song and all the impoverished incidents in your own life that the song reveals as you listen now be understood as a part of a myth: part of a story far greater than the person singing or the person listening, a story that was present before they were and that will remain when they're gone. But the entry into the realm of fairy tale, of dragons and sorcerers, knights and maidens, of princes travelling the kingdom disguised as peasants and girls banished from their homes roaming the land disguised as boys, would mean nothing if the singer's feet were on the ground.

There is that stick coming down hard on the drum and the foot hitting the kick drum at the same time, this particular rifle going off not in the third act but as the curtain goes up. "The first time I heard Bob Dylan," Bruce Springsteen said in 1989, inducting Dylan into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, "I was in the car with my mother listening to WMCA, and on came that snare shot that sounded like somebody'd kicked open the door to your mind." Then for an expanding instant there is nothing. The first sound is so stark and surprising, every time you hear it, that the empty split-second that follows calls up the image of a house tumbling over a cliff; it calls up a void.

That first shot will be repeated throughout the performance, on Dylan's own electric rhythm guitar, as for every other measure a hard, percussive snap seals a phrase, cuts off one line of the story and challenges the moment to produce another. That first announcement is brought inside the sound, so that it becomes a signpost, reappearing every other step of the way: a mark of how far the story has gone,

which is to say a mark of how much ground that can never be recovered has been left behind. The silence, too, is repeated, in breaks in the sound too brief to measure but that in their affective force can seem enormous: the entire ensemble rising up and then stopping at the top of a surge, just after the first "How does it feel" of the final chorus, as if the song itself has to pause to catch its breath for the final chase; Dylan himself, in the time it takes the last word of the song to leave his mouth and his mouth to reach the harmonica on the rack on his chest for the slashing phrase that seals the end of the song as fiercely as the stick on the snare opened it. In these moments of suspension there is a kind of ghost, the phantom of a comforting past, where everything remains the same. In the maelstrom of the performance itself, in each step forward on the fairy-tale road, where when you look forward you see mountains too high to climb and when you look back you see nothing, it is the sense that you could take it all back, that you could retrace your steps, that you could go home, that it's not too late.

As a sound the record is like a cave. You enter it in the dark; what light there is flickers off the walls in patterns that, as you watch, seem almost in rhythm. You begin to feel that you can tell just what flash will follow from the one before it. But the longer you look, the more you see, and the less fixed anything is. The flickers turn into shadows, and the movement the shadows make can never be anticipated. Suddenly the dark, the light, and the shadows are all speaking to you, each demanding your attention. You can't look in all directions at once but you feel you must. The room begins to whirl; you try to focus on a single element, to make it repeat itself, to follow it, but you are instantly distracted by something else.

This is what happens in Like A Rolling Stone. The sound is so rich the song never plays the same way twice. You can know that, for you, a certain word, a certain partial sound deep within the whole sound, is what you want; you can steel yourself to push everything else in the song away in anticipation of that part of the song you want. It never works. You lie in wait, to ambush the moment; you find that as you do another moment has sneaked up behind you and ambushed you instead. Without a chorus the song would truly be a flood, a flood that sweeps up everything before it – and yet as the song is actually sung and played, the chorus, formally the most determined, repeating element in the song, is the most unstable element of all.

"THE SOUND IS SO RICH THE SONG NEVER PLAYS THE SAME WAY TWICE."

There are drums, piano, organ, bass guitar, rhythm guitar, lead guitar, tambourine, and a voice. Though one instrument may catch you up, and you may decide to follow it, to attend only to the story it tells – the organ is pursuing the story of a road that forks every time you turn your head, the guitar is offering a fable about a seeker who only moves in circles, the singer is embellishing his fairy tale about the child lost in the forest – every instrument shoots out a line that leads to another instrument, the organ to the guitar, the guitar to the voice, the voice to the drums, until nothing is discrete and each instrument is a passageway. You cannot make anything hold still.

With Like A Rolling Stone, its six minutes – six minutes to break the limits of what could go on the radio, of what kind of story the radio could tell; at first the label on the 45 read 5.59, as if that would be less intimidating – is the beginning and the end of what the record is about and what it is for. When the record is over, when it disappears into the clamour of its own fade to silence, or the next commercial, you feel as if you have been on a journey, as if you have traversed the whole of a country that is neither strange nor foreign, because it is self-evidently your own – even if, in the first three minutes, the journey only went as far as your own city limits. The pace is about to pick up.

WHEN LIKE A ROLLING STONE SMASHES INTO ITS third verse everything is changed. The mystery tramp who appeared out of nowhere at the end of the second verse has left his cousins all over this one. Everyone has a strange name, everyone is a riddle, there's nobody you recognise, but everybody seems to know who you are. "Ah, you – " Dylan shouts, riding over the hump of the second chorus and into the third verse; the increase in vehemence caused by something so tiny as the adding of a syllable of frustration to the already accusing "you" is proof of how much pressure has built up.

Special A- and B-side 45 split the six minutes of Like A Rolling Stone for radio airplay (from the collection of Charlie Gillett).

As the band seems to play more slowly, as if recognising the story in the song for the first time – a congress of delegates drawn from all over the land, all speaking at once and all giving a version of the same speech – the singer moves faster, as if he knows what's coming and has to stop it. He reaches the last line of the verse, holds the last word as long as he can hold his breath, and then as the song tips into the third chorus everything shatters.The intensity of the first words out of Dylan's mouth make it seem as if a pause has preceded them, as if he has gathered up every bit of energy in his being and concentrated it on a single spot, and as if you can hear him draw that breath. "How does it feel" doesn't come out of his mouth; each word explodes in it. And here you understand what Dylan meant when he said, in 1966, speaking of the pages of noise he'd scribbled, "I had never thought of it as a song, until one day I was at the piano, and on the paper it was singing, 'How does it feel?'" Dylan may sing the verses; the chorus sings him.

With this moment every element in the song doubles in size. It doubles in weight. There is twice as much song as there was before. An avenger the first time "How does it feel" takes him over here, the second time the line sounds Dylan is despairing, bereft and sorrowful, but by now, moments after he himself has blown the song to pieces, the song has gotten away from him. Al Kooper's simple, straight, elegant organ lines are breaking up, shooting out in all directions, as if Dylan's first "How does it feel" was the song's Big Bang and Kooper is determined to catch every fragment of the song as it flies away. As the chorus begins to climb a mountain that wasn't in the chorus before, Kooper finds himself in the year before, in the middle of Alan Price's organ solo in The Animals' House Of The Rising Sun, a record that to this day has lost none of its grime and none of its grandeur. Price's solo was frenzied, its tones thick and dark; it was a deep dive into a whirlpool Price himself had made, and Kooper is playing from inside the vortex, each line rushing up and out, nailing the flag of the song to its mast.

Nothing could follow this. In the fourth verse, everyone's timing is gone. The "Ah" that swung the first line of the third verse is here a long "Ahhhhhh" that flattens its own first line. Bobby Gregg, whose drum patterns in the first verse had given the song shape before the other musicians found the shape within the song, fumbles as if he has accidentally kicked over his kit. Everyone is fighting to get the song back – and it's the words that rescue it, that for the first time take the song away from its sound. The words are slogans, but they are arresting, and if "When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose" sounds like something you might read on a Greenwich Village sampler, a bohemian version of Home Sweet Home, "You're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal" is not obvious, it is confusing.

Confused – and justified, exultant, free from history with a world to win – is exactly where the song means to leave you. There is a last chorus, like the last verse spinning off its axis, and then Dylan's dive for his harmonica, and then a crazy-quilt of high notes that light out for the territory the song itself has opened up.

This is an extract from Like A Rolling Stone by Greil Marcus, published by Faber & Faber, at £12.99.