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ON THE ROAD WITH BOB DYLAN
IN THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE

143 REVIEWS
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NEIL YOUNG

METALLICA
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PATTI SMITH
"STILL SEARCHING,
STILL CURIOUS."

THE NATIONAL
"IT'S A STRUGGLE TO
KEEP TOGETHER"

LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY
"ARE YOU MAD?"

RANKING ROGER R.I.P.





THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

ROLLING THUNDER REVUE

**ROLL UP, ROLL UP! LAYDEEEZ
& GENNELMEN! CHILDREN OF
ALL AGES! AQUARIAN & OTHERWISE!**

In the autumn of 1975 **BOB DYLAN** took a ragtag gypsy circus on the road. The aim: to rekindle his lifelong love of performance. There would be clowns in whiteface, musos flying by the seat of their pants, laughter and tears and an incomprehensible four-hour movie. As a Martin Scorsese-directed documentary and a 14-CD box set bring the Rolling Thunder Revue back to life, **MICHAEL SIMMONS** tracks down its survivors and feels its reverberations: "It was an amazing cultural event that we'll never see again."

PLUS! Bob Live through the ages by **PHIL SUTCLIFFE**, **JOEL SELVIN**, **ALAN LIGHT** and **G.E. SMITH**.

Stage banner by **BOB GRUEN**. Portrait by **KEN REGAN**.



Storm warning:
Bob Dylan energises
the Rolling Thunder
Revue, 1975.

“Did you hear about that BOB DYLAN concert?”

19-YEAR-OLD DYLAN DEVOTEE Jeff Friedman had to check he'd heard his friend Bruce straight. *What Bob Dylan concert?* Friedman had heard nothing in the press or on the rock grapevine, but Bruce booked concerts at Brooklyn College, New York, and had a friend at Southeastern Massachusetts University in North Dartmouth who'd been offered a Bob Dylan/Roger McGuinn show. It was an unheard-of combo of world-shaking rock artists and backwater New England venue.

Friedman, hyperventilating, grabbed a pile of coins and called SMU. “Finally I get the right guy and I say, Are you having a Bob Dylan/Roger McGuinn concert? And he says, ‘No we’re not.’ My heart *sinks*.”

But the guy hadn't finished his sentence. “...we're having a Bob Dylan/Joan Baez concert.”

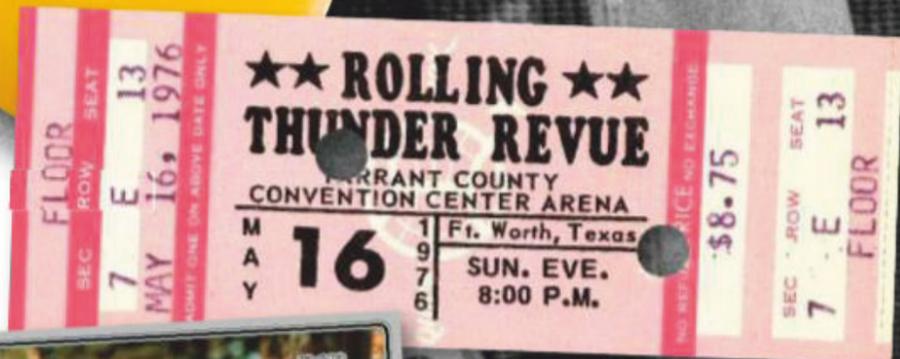
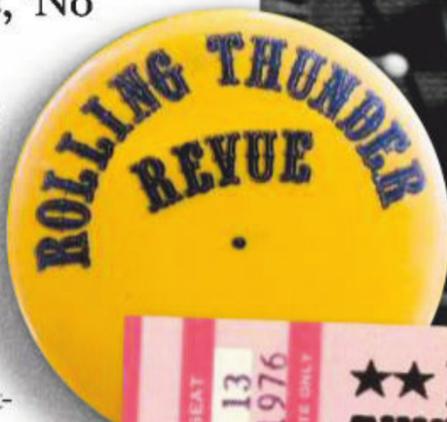
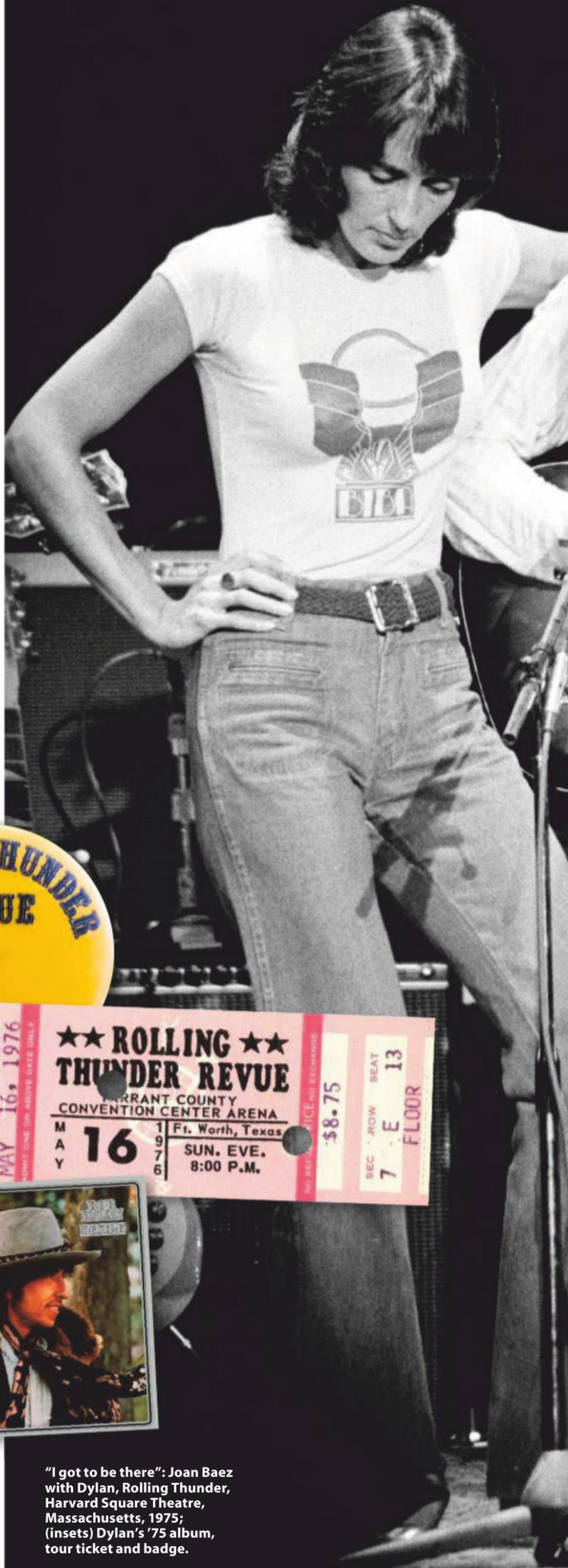
Friedman went from nerve-wracked to crushed to astonished in a matter of seconds. That Saturday, November 1, 1975, he borrowed his mother's car and drove with his friend Ruth to SMU. Queuing outside the college's gymnasium for four hours, he scored two tickets for \$7.50 each: “I'm like, Is this really happening?”

They entered the gymnasium and grabbed two folding chairs in the sixth row. The show – the tour's third – began with a sprawling band on-stage, none of whom Friedman recognised. “I was like, Is he gonna be here? Is he really gonna come out? And then that's it, he's fuckin' there!”

Dylan led with *When I Paint My Masterpiece*, a duet with Bobby Neuwirth; it would remain the opener for the entire 1975 leg of what was destined to become one of the most storied of rock tours. Dylan's performance was focused, dynamic. “And this was intimate,” says Friedman. “There was no distance between him and the audience. He was a different musician. Totally loose, not uptight at all.”

A half-dozen songs from Dylan's set would be on his forthcoming LP, *Desire*. The rest were classics including *It Ain't Me, Babe*; *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*; *Just Like A Woman*. Behind the singer, the ragtag band, including a mysterious woman playing gypsy-like violin, built a wall of sound. “Old songs that had been acoustic were now electric,” Friedman recalls. ➤

Getty



“I got to be there”: Joan Baez with Dylan, Rolling Thunder, Harvard Square Theatre, Massachusetts, 1975; (insets) Dylan's '75 album, tour ticket and badge.



“THERE WAS NO DISTANCE BETWEEN BOB AND THE AUDIENCE. HE WAS TOTALLY LOOSE, NOT UPTIGHT AT ALL.”

**EYEWITNESS
JEFF FRIEDMAN**

“BOB WAS SELF-ABSORBED, BUT THAT’S HIS NATURE”

JOAN BAEZ on 1975 Bob – a lot nicer than 1965 Bob. Although she’s not so sold on *Renaldo & Clara*, or *Fallen Angels*, as she tells **MICHAEL SIMMONS**.

The first Rolling Thunder tour in 1975 was the first time you’d sung with Dylan in a decade. Was it fun? The first Rolling Thunder was absolutely fun – and beautiful. There were scarves and flowers – a delight really. My strongest memory is that I went out every night to watch Bob’s set – it was wonderful. On the second [leg], I don’t know what was going on. The flowers had gone away and the scarves had disappeared and there were headwraps and it just wasn’t as glorious.

In *Dont Look Back*, shot in 1965, he was aloof towards you... (Laughs) To put it mildly!

Did you have misgivings about doing Rolling Thunder because of that?

I probably did at the time, but it just sounded too exciting. I thought I’ll put the misgivings aside, and it went really well.

You’re a key character in *Renaldo And Clara* in the triangle between you, Bob and Sara. Was that uncomfortable?

Not at all – I got along really well with Sara. We’d hang out and she knew I could do an imitation of her and Bob (laughs).

Have you seen *Renaldo & Clara*? Yeah – I thought it was a terrible movie! (laughs) It’s like a boy scout wandering around with

a camera, shooting whatever they felt like shooting.

How was Dylan to work with by ‘75? Was he friendly?

He was friendlier – and fun. He was self-absorbed, but that’s his nature. I’m always somewhat on the outside because I don’t do drugs. That was the big problem in England [in ‘65] – everybody was out there. It wasn’t as severe a problem on Rolling Thunder. I was compatible with it, even though I never did any of it.

How do you look back on Rolling Thunder now?

I think, “Oh gosh, I got to be there!” There’s Woodstock, there’s the March On Washington in ‘63. It’s the same: I got to be there.

Have you heard Dylan’s recent work, like the Sinatra songs?

(Laughs) Please. I listened to two and I really couldn’t go on after that. [But] I appreciate that he doesn’t give a fuck [taking] that on with barely a voice. On the other hand, I love his Christmas album. And it’s close to the same voice.

How have your feelings toward Dylan evolved over the years?

I have a very simple answer to that and it came, oh, eight months ago when I was doing a commission of Bob, painting him. Go to my website [joanbaezart.com, click on ‘Paintings’] so you’ll know what I’m talking about. I put his music on and any remaining resentment evaporated like a gift from heaven. It was only then that I could only be grateful for having been his friend, for having had access to his music, for having been a part of those wild years. And so that is exactly how I am right now. There is nothing negative left at all. He gave us the absolute best.

"IT WAS AS INTENSE AS ROCK 'N' ROLL EVER GOT"



Eight's company: (from left) Roger McGuinn, Joni Mitchell, Richie Havens, Joan Baez, Dylan, Rob Stoner, Ronee Blakley and Bob Neuwirth, Springfield, Massachusetts, November 6, 1975.

T BONE BURNETT on the life lessons of Rolling Thunder, and how his new music is taking on the digital kleptocracy. **MICHAEL SIMMONS** listens in.

How did you get involved with Rolling Thunder?

I'd met Dylan at a friend's wedding. [But] here's a funny story. Soon after Janis Joplin died, [Dylan/Joplin manager] Albert Grossman called me up and asked if I'd come up to Woodstock to meet the Full Tilt Boogie Band and see if I'd be interested in continuing with that band – in essence taking Janis's place (*laughs*).

You don't resemble her at all.

A completely absurd notion! But I showed up there and the first night I met Bobby Neuwirth and he and I became fast friends. [Later] he was playing a series of shows at The Other End in New York and he called me up to be in his band. During those shows is when they began putting together the Rolling Thunder Revue.

Did Dylan seem energised by Rolling Thunder?

Bob energised Rolling Thunder rather than the other way around. If you watch Isis from Renaldo And Clara, that was about as intense as rock'n'roll ever got. That period of time was Dylan at the absolute height of his powers.

You sang *Werewolves Of London* in the show before Warren Zevon released it.

Warren and I were great friends and wrote together. Almost everyone would sing a song before Bob came out. That was just fun to play and it fit the carnival nature.

What made the music unique?

The people in the band were from all over. Howie Wyeth came from the Wyeth painting family – he was a brilliant pianist and drummer. Steven Soles was a singer-songwriter from New York. Scarlet Rivera – I don't know where Scarlet

came from (*laughs*). David Mansfield was in a pop-rock'n'roll band with Tony Bennett's sons called Quacky Duck. Mick Ronson was a brilliant lead guitarist, an incredible showman and had a real sense of drama. I was from Texas and playin' rockabilly music. So there were extraordinarily talented people and divergent influences. Then all of the artists we backed up like Joni Mitchell and Ramblin' Jack Elliott. And Kinky Friedman showed up for the second half – he was a character.

Why is Rolling Thunder still significant?

Bob had been through several lifetimes by the time Rolling Thunder happened and he brought people together – people he'd just met, people he'd found on the street, old friends he'd been travelling with for decades. Then Jacques Levy, the director of the show, was able to use different performers with different voices and different songs to tell a story. That's something I learned on that tour that I've applied throughout my life, with the Roy Orbison Black And White Night special, the Down From The Mountain shows after O Brother, Where Art Thou? and Another Day, Another Time shows after Inside Llewyn Davis. You have a different voice every 10 or 15 minutes and it's an interesting form of theatre and storytelling.

Rolling Thunder taught me how to pace a show. How to make a movie. How to write a poem – Allen Ginsberg was there. We had long conversations about poetry and literature. And theatre – Sam Shepard was there. It was a master class in art and show business.

Your new album *The Invisible Light: Acoustic Space* is a warning about "digital gangsters" and "surveillance capitalism." What is surveillance capitalism?

It's a new form of capitalism that believes it can

confiscate goods from other people without compensating them. If you're on Google or Facebook, they're scraping your data and selling it to other people without your consent. We actually give consent, if anybody bothered to read the contract you agree to by signing up. The more they can find out about you, the more they can predict what you're gonna do, the more they can charge for advertising.

How has this affected musicians?

Musicians were the canaries in the coalmine. Our work was confiscated by autonomous technology and distributed with no compensation. Music is a very valuable commodity. It was clear that as soon as the public started understanding that the same thing was happening to them that [had been] happening to musicians, there'd be a backlash. I think we're seeing that now. The tables have turned on the surveillance capitalists.

The new album's songs are primarily spoken word and electronic music – ironically, a critique of technology while using technology.

I started with electric guitar and recording studios from the beginning of my work. When you put a microphone in front of any instrument, it becomes an electronic instrument. Electricity brought light to the world and we need to make ethical decisions about what we do with it. Certainly with nuclear energy and now these digital weapons and artificial technology, we have to consider these dual-use technologies, which ones we pursue and which ones we keep under wraps. Even though it's hard to see, I believe we're moving towards a better world and a better life.

The Invisible Light: Acoustic Space, the first instalment of a trilogy of albums by T Bone Burnett with Jay Bellerose and Keefus Ciancia, is out now on the Verve Forecast label. Parts two and three are due later this year.

"BOB HAD BEEN THROUGH SEVERAL LIFETIMES BY THE TIME ROLLING THUNDER HAPPENED."

◀ “He turned them inside out and they fit the band perfectly.”

There were four duets with Baez – the first time in a decade The King and Queen Of Folk had sung together. And the show wrapped with the entire cast singing Woody Guthrie’s *This Land Is Your Land*. It was as if a fresh autumn breeze had blown Dylan’s problematic early 1970s away. “He wasn’t just going through the motions,” says Friedman. “He was taking his time with the material and going deep. And they were all clearly having fun.”

“THE STUFF OFF THE MAIN ROAD WAS WHERE the force of reality was,” Bob Dylan told interviewer Bill Flanagan in 2009. He recounted memories of carnival acts he was drawn to in mid-century Minnesota: “The side show performers – bluegrass singers, the black cowboy with chaps and a lariat doing rope tricks. Miss Europe, Quasimodo, the Bearded Lady, the half-man half-woman... I remember it like it was yesterday.”

In 1975, the appeal of the “main road” to Bob Dylan was limited. After virtually retiring from performance in 1966 at the height of his first wave of success and becoming “the Howard Hughes of rock” for eight years, he returned to live concerts in 1974 with a tour of stadiums with The Band. Yet he didn’t enjoy rock star touring, deriding it as “jets and limos”.

“Performing has always been his passion,” says his friend, the writer Larry ‘Ratso’ Sloman. “But getting back on the road with The Band wasn’t satisfying. It was an alienating experience, going from stadium to stadium, not knowing what city they were in. He’d always been connected to the street – there’s a part of him that’s a street guy.”

Dylan and first aide Bobby Neuwirth had years before discussed a no-pressure musical jaunt in a station wagon. “The idea for the Rolling Thunder Revue was hatched by the two Bobs,” singer-songwriter Steven Soles told MOJO in 2012: “This was spoken very clearly by Neuwirth to me.” But a good idea has many fathers. Dylan songwriting collaborator Jacques Levy said he’d also suggested “a tour like lowest-of-the-low theatre tours. Just call it Bus & Truck. We’ll hire a couple of trucks and equipment and just go on the road.”

With his marriage to Sara Dylan increasingly rocky, the 34-year-old Dylan was in the south of France in May ’75 with painter pal David Oppenheim. Ratso Sloman remembers Bob’s account of “sitting on the back of a cart in Corsica, and he realised his

destiny was to be performing in front of people.” He was soon headed back to America.

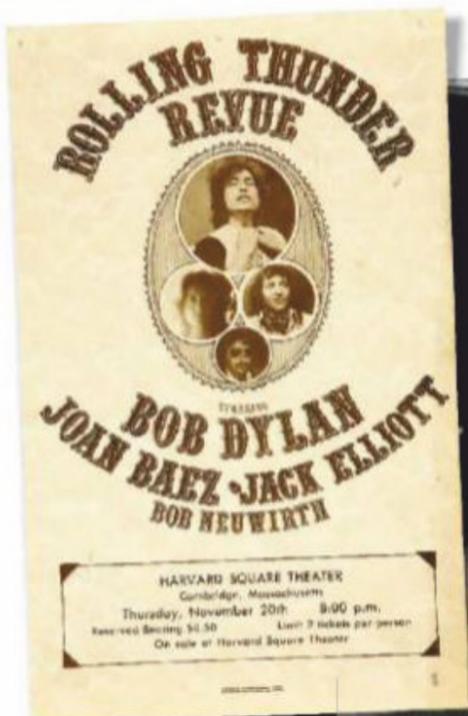
ONE HALLMARK OF GENIUS IS THE ABILITY TO realise one’s wildest dreams. Throughout Dylan’s career, he’s moved backwards in order to move forward, as if time is fluid. By June ’75, he was hanging out in Greenwich Village in New York, the scene of his early ascendance, seeing old friends and making new ones.

Theatrical director Jacques Levy had already co-written songs with Roger McGuinn, notably The Byrds’ *Chestnut Mare*. He lived on LaGuardia Place, around the corner from The Other End, a hub for singer-songwriters on Bleecker Street. Dylan and Levy ran into each other on the street and Bob suggested they collaborate. Levy unleashed Dylan’s theatrical inclination and worked with him to create songs that worked visually. Meanwhile, he met an artist friend of Dylan’s named Claudia Carr, and they soon fell in love. When Bob and Jacques’ work was done, they’d head over to The Other End to drink and hang out.

“I bumped into Bobby Neuwirth,” recalled Steven Soles. “He said, ‘I’m playing The Other End next week,’ and he asked me if I’d play with him.” An article in the July 22, 1975 edition of *The New York Times*, headlined “Dylan Makes Other End Scene”, describes Neuwirth’s residency and mentions folk vet Ramblin’ Jack Elliott and Bowie guitarist Mick Ronson as two guests. An unnamed friend was quoted as saying that Dylan “was elated to find that he could once again walk into a club and play music without being mobbed or distracted.”

Neuwirth also enlisted bassist/singer Rob Stoner, drummer/pianist Howie Wyeth and eclectic multi-instrumentalist David Mansfield. Then there were a string of guests who’d show up and play. “That was Neuwirth’s idea,” says Soles. “He’d have a band of people who could sing their own songs and people could come sit in.” One night, singer/songwriter/actress Ronee Blakley – widely acclaimed for her role as a depressed country singer in Robert Altman’s *Nashville* – played four-handed piano with Dylan. After another show, Soles, Neuwirth, Stoner, Levy and Dylan went over to painter Larry Poons’ crib, joined by poet/rocker Patti Smith and Texas musician T Bone Burnett. “We all played songs,” says Soles. “Dylan played a number of songs that would appear on *Desire*.” ➤

“BOB SAID, ‘I DON’T CARE IF WE MAKE A PROFIT AS LONG AS WE BREAK EVEN... I WANNA SHOOT A MOVIE TOO.’” LOUIE KEMP



Bob in the driving seat: with Sara Dylan; (inset) poster for the Harvard Square, Massachusetts show.



"...ON HARMONICA AND GUITAR, BOB DYLAN"

WHERE: SNACK BENEFIT, KEZAR STADIUM, SAN FRANCISCO
WHEN: MARCH 23, 1975
EYEWITNESS: JOEL SELVIN

ALTHOUGH HE broke a four-year absence from public performances on the previous year's tour with The Band, a surprise appearance by Bob Dylan still rated as an electric thrill that put a high-voltage jolt through the Kezar Stadium crowd in San Francisco on March 23, 1975 when producer Bill Graham, announcing the members of the next band, reached "... on harmonica and guitar, Bob Dylan." The place exploded in cheers so loud they practically obliterated Graham's final intro: "And on guitar and piano, Neil Young..." Dylan's new album, *Blood On The Tracks*, had only been released two months before. He and Young had never appeared together in public.

The performance by Dylan, Young and three members of The Band – Rick Danko, Levon Helm and Garth Hudson (along with Tim Drummond and Ben Keith) – climaxed a historic day-long benefit concert that also featured Grateful Dead, Santana, Jefferson Starship, Joan Baez, Tower Of Power, The Doobie Brothers, Graham Central Station and Eddie Palmieri – at the time, the most successful benefit in rock, the five-dollar tickets raising emergency money to support the after-school sports programme in San Francisco public schools.

Graham swung instantly into action after reading in the news that school district budget cuts would eliminate all after-school activities. He announced his SNACK Concert (Students Need Athletics, Culture and Kicks) alongside rock stars Jerry Garcia and Carlos Santana, and baseball immortal Willie Mays of the San Francisco Giants.

Days of rain ended only the night before the show, but early next morning thousands of fans trooped into the soggy old football field on the edge of the Haight-Ashbury district. After Latin jazzer

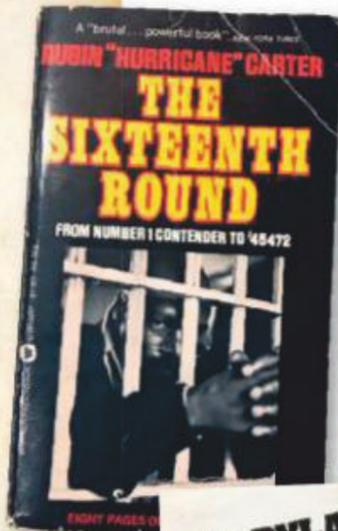
Eddie Palmieri made an unscheduled opening performance, followed by funkateers Graham Central Station, the temporarily reunited Grateful Dead – currently on hiatus, billed as 'Jerry Garcia and Friends' – did a half-hour jam based on one chord. San Francisco stalwarts Tower Of Power and Jefferson Starship were followed by The Doobie Brothers, who with their latest single, *Black Water*, firmly ensconced in the Top 10, were the most eagerly anticipated act on the bill.

Rumours of a special guest had been circulating for days and when Bill Graham introduced actor Marlon Brando, fresh from his triumph in *The Godfather*, many in the crowd assumed they had seen the special guest of the day (the actor would later join Bob and Sara Dylan for dinner at the home of film director Francis Ford Coppola) – so when Dylan slipped onto the stage for the Neil Young finale, the place really went crazy.

Young opened with *Are You Ready For The Country*, Dylan adding harmonica and background vocals. Young did two more songs and Rick Danko sang the old Four Tops tune *Loving You (Is Sweeter Than Ever)*, as Dylan blended in the background. He stepped forward for *I Want You* and lent harmonies to Danko and Helm singing *The Weight*. Young's *Helpless* segued into Dylan's *Knockin' On Heaven's Door*, the lyrics mysteriously altered to *Knockin' On Dragon's Door*. Brando and Baez watched from the wings.

The group huddled briefly on the edge of the stage to return with a rough-hewn encore of *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*, only to have Dylan forget the lyrics to the second verse, which Garth Hudson covered with a keyboard riff. Will Dylan and Young cap their upcoming Hyde Park double-header with a reprise, 44 years on? If so, here's hoping they've rehearsed it.

ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS #1



According to Soles, Dylan stayed up all night and the next morning visited boxer Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter in prison. Carter and another man named John Artis had been convicted of the 1966 murder of three patrons in a bar in Paterson, New Jersey. Carter wrote a memoir called *The Sixteenth Round* and had begun to amass supporters who believed he and Artis were innocent. One sent Dylan the book. He was moved by it and resolved to help Carter, declaring that "...the man's philosophy and my philosophy were running down the same road."

Sessions for Dylan's next album began on July 14 at Columbia Recording Studios. Dylan and Levy co-wrote most of the material – including a plea for Rubin Carter's exoneration called *Hurricane*. Despite initial traffic jams in the studio, a core band of Stoner, Wyeth and violinist Scarlet Rivera emerged. The album *Desire* was released the following January and reached Number 1 on the US charts and Number 3 in the UK.

By October, the basic line-up for Dylan's "travelling variety carnival-type show" was set in stone, a combination of established stars, Neuwirth's Other Enders and strays: Joan Baez, McGuinn, Ramblin' Jack, Blakley, Stoner, Wyeth, Rivera, Soles, T Bone, Ronson, Mansfield and drummer/percussionist Luther Rix. Neuwirth was master of ceremonies and Beat daddy Allen Ginsberg was road poet. Joni Mitchell would join up in November and Gordon Lightfoot, Arlo Guthrie, Richie Havens, Robbie Robertson and Rick Danko would sit in along the route. With all these humans coming on-and-off-stage, Jacques Levy would oversee transitions and lighting.

Dylan hired Duluth childhood pal Louie Kemp to manage the entire operation. Kemp had made a fortune with his seafood business and Dylan trusted him.

"Bob said, 'I don't care if we make a profit as long as we break even,'" recalls Kemp. The singer added a rider: "As long as we're going out, I wanna shoot a movie too." So we hired a movie crew." Playwright and future movie star Sam Shepard was enlisted to write the screenplay. There was also a tour astrologer, herbalist, and the baggage handler was poet/Ginsberg companion Peter Orlovsky. Ratso Sloman became the embedded reporter. Dylan told Ratso he came up with the name 'Rolling Thunder' after hearing a series of booms in the sky.

Rehearsals that month were loose. "Dylan would start playing a song and the band would fall in behind him," says David Mansfield. "There were no band directions. It was great training as an accompanist because he was so unpredictable. As we rehearsed more, the arrangements became finely honed. It was a band dynamic as opposed to a leader-and-musicians dynamic."

While there were some excellent players in the Rolling Thunder band – particularly Mansfield and bassist Stoner – flexibility and a checked ego were more valued than virtuosity. By the end of October, everyone was ready. It was an audacious combination: musical tour, film shoot and political cause to free Hurricane Carter, with a legend at the helm. But as Dylan made clear to Kemp, the F-word was foremost in his thoughts: "I want the audiences and musicians to have fun."

THE FIRST TWO SHOWS WERE IN PLYMOUTH, Massachusetts on October 30-31, 1975. It was historically symbolic as the location of Plymouth Colony, one of the earliest European settlements in what would be termed North America. Kemp chose the route. "I'd always found New England enchanting. I thought starting this magical mystery tour there as well as on Halloween amusing and apropos. We combined the pilgrims and the goblins."

The area is also renowned for its breathtaking autumn ➤

Dylan and Neil Young (right) at Bill Graham's SNACK Benefit, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, March 23, 1975.

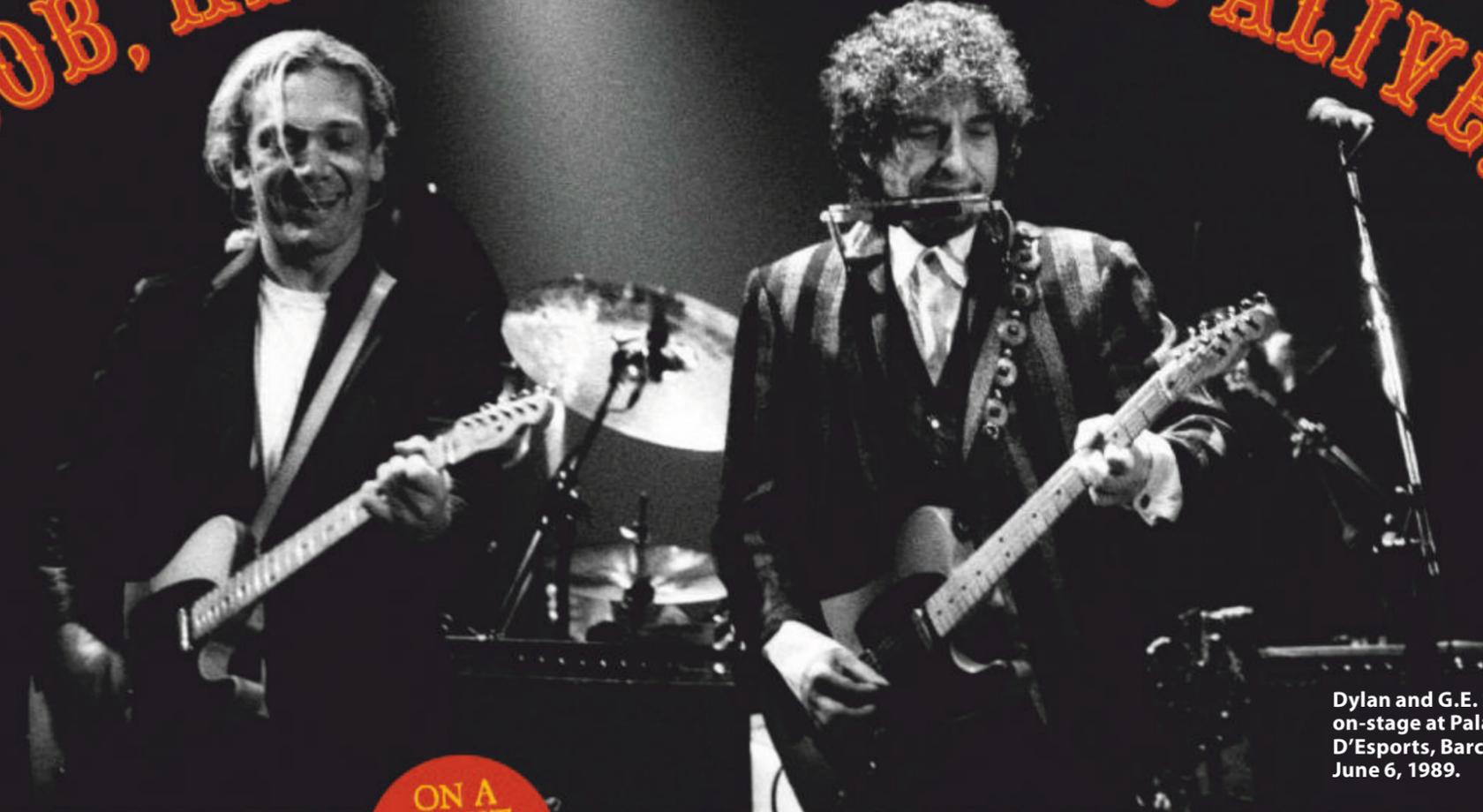




On The Road: Dylan in November 1975 visiting Jack Kerouac's grave in Lowell, Mass, at the Edson Cemetery; (insets left) Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter's story, and Dylan's angry single.

**“NEW ENGLAND
WAS BEAUTIFUL. IT
WAS IN THE FALL AND
THE LEAVES WERE
TURNING. THE TREES
LOOKED LIKE FIRE.”**
ROGER McGUINN

"BOB, HE KEPT THE MUSIC ALIVE."



Dylan and G.E. Smith, on-stage at Palau D'Esports, Barcelona, June 6, 1989.

ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS #2

WHERE: THE NEVER-ENDING TOUR
WHEN: 1988-1992
EYEWITNESS: G.E. SMITH

How did you land the Dylan gig?
 Elliot Roberts, who manages Neil Young and Joni Mitchell, and at that time was managing Bob, also managed me for a while. I was playing on the Saturday Night Live show, and Elliot called me at work one day and said, "Hey, can you get a bass player and a drummer tomorrow night and be at this rehearsal studio called Montana? Bob's coming to New York and he wants to play."

So I call [bassist] T Bone Wolk and [drummer] Chris Parker and we're meant to be there at 10 o'clock in the evening. And it was a little strange: when we got there, there was no one there. There wasn't even a greeter at the door. And the lights were way low. But we saw, in this great big room, the gear laid out. We plugged in and we were ready. There's still nobody there.

Then, about half an hour later, maybe more, out of the darkness at the back of the room, steps Bob. I don't know how long he's been there. So he comes up and picks up an electric guitar and starts to play. And we start to play along. There's no conversation or instructions or anything. We're just trying to follow along.

Then at some point he turns to me and T Bone and says, "Do you guys know Pretty Peggy-O?" Me and T Bone say, "Sure!" And he said, "You do?"

And he starts playing it. And this was a song we knew because me and T Bone knew the traditional stuff. After we played Pretty Peggy-O we continued on for maybe a couple of hours, pretty much non-stop, and again with no talking at all. He'd just go straight into another song. Almost all old stuff – traditional songs, country stuff, some rock'n'roll, no Bob Dylan songs I can recall. So we played for several hours, he put down his guitar, said thanks and he was gone, and we went home going, Wow, that was fun. We got to play with Bob Dylan.

Then the next day, Elliot rings me and says, "You got the gig. You have to be in California on May whatever for rehears..." And I'm, Hang on, what gig? And Elliot says, "Oh! Didn't I tell you? That was an audition." No Elliot, you didn't tell me it was an audition. Which is probably just as

well, because then I would have been really nervous."

The first show was at the Greek Theatre, Berkeley...

Neil Young played the whole show with us. He just turned up with a guitar in one hand and his amp in the other. It was great for me as I was pretty scared and Neil kind of took the heat off me. I got to play the show *and* watch the show.

What was the gig routine with Bob, generally?

In the afternoon, about 4, we'd do a soundcheck. Bob didn't usually come to that. Then I would go in the dressing room and Bob might say, "Right, let's start with Maggie's Farm," which we started with a lot. We did a good rocking arrangement of that. Then we'd put down about 12 to 15 songs, but that was just a suggestion. You never *really* knew what he was gonna do.

How stressful was that?

Well, obviously, I was a huge fan of Bob. I could play every song on the first 10 records already. And I love that kind of seat of your pants playing. In every other band of that size I've played with it's always been planned out, moment to moment. But with Bob, he kept the music alive. He kept me guessin'. But I think really it was for himself.

In the middle of the set, you did an acoustic duo spot...

It was always pretty powerful. I remember one time, we were in London, playing at Hammer-smith Odeon, a lot of very well-known British musicians were there. George Harrison was there at the side of the stage. We did the acoustic bit and we did Mr Tambourine Man. He got to that line: "...to dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free..." There were tears on my face, I was overcome. That was one of the highlights of my life.

Some of those shows were epic in length. There was one at Toad's Place, in New Haven CT, where you played 50 songs...

It's funny, 'cos in the '70s I'd lived out near New Haven. I was very familiar with Toad's Place. You know, it's a bar, a joint. We got up there, we're

gonna do one set, about an hour or something. I guess he was having a good time 'cos he just kept going and going. He would play anything. He asked me, "Do you know that Springsteen song, Dancing In The Dark?" And I was, *Kinda...* I heard it on the radio. He would do stuff like that time to time. Once we were playing the Hollywood Bowl. The lights go down between songs and he comes over to me and says, "You know Moon River?" And I'm, Yeah. So he's... "In C! 'Moooooon Riverrrrr...!" Whoa, look out!

You quit in 1992 to concentrate on SNL, but Tony Garnier, who was playing bass at the end of your period, is still with him. What do you make of the shape Dylan's in?

I last saw him at Desert Trip [2016]. It's different now – it's a bigger band and it has to be more arranged, but it's still visceral. That kind of swing sound he has now goes back to some of the influences he talked to me about when I was in the band – Bob Wills, Spade Cooley – guys who were country but they were also

jazz. But he likes all kinds of different things. I remember one time I was on his bus, and he played me this bootleg tape. It was distorted, nasty, punk rock, fantastic. I thought it was The Clash, but it was Gene Vincent.

He still plays more shows than anyone else of his stature – does that surprise you? Is he a man on a mission?

I don't know I'd call it a mission. But you know, he would talk a lot about Ernest Tubb. And he'd say how Ernest Tubb just kept workin'. Because you know, a musician never retires. The object of the game is to die on the bandstand. Seriously! I hope that's what happens to me. I think he might feel the same way.

You know, we took a break one time around Christmas, because the guys wanted to get back and see their families. It was Christmas Day and my phone rings, and it's Bob: "Hi, how you doing..." And it's not like Bob called all the time. "I'm good man, where are you?" "I'm outside Meridian, Mississippi." "On the bus?" "Yeah." We were on a 10-day break and he was just riding around in the bus, waiting for the next gig.

"BOB WOULD SAY HOW ERNEST TUBB JUST KEPT WORKIN'."

Interview by Danny Eccleston

◀ scenery. “New England was *beautiful*,” remembers McGuinn. “It was in the fall and the leaves were turning. The trees looked like fire – orange and red and yellow. It was crisp and cold. We’d stop at these little theatres, do this four and a half hour show, jump on the bus and do it again.”

The band rode in a bus procured from Frank Zappa, dubbed ‘Phydeaux’. The film crew and others had a separate bus and Dylan had a camper to himself and invited guests. An advance team had been sent out to scout the gigs and distribute leaflets announcing the shows. Road manager and Beatles/Stones vet Chris O’Dell edited an in-house newsletter that disseminated news, gossip, in-jokes – and the location of the next gig. Ronee Blakley: “Our destinations were secret. We didn’t know our itinerary. We’d do a show and sometimes head straight to another place without knowing where.”

Shows would begin with an eclectic band set in which all the singer-songwriters took turns. Highlights included Stoner’s sleek rockabilly tunes; Blakley’s powerhouse vocals; T Bone’s rendition of Warren Zevon’s *Werewolves Of London* (before the author’s release); Ronson’s *Is There Life On Mars?* (not the Bowie song); McGuinn’s *Eight Miles High*; and Ramblin’ Jack’s masterclass in Folk 101. Then Dylan would materialise to the audience’s audible glee and perform a short set. After an intermission, two anonymous voices in harmony were heard in the dark. As the lights came up, the fans were ecstatic to recognise Baez and Dylan, who would perform four or five songs as a duo. Baez followed with her solo set, then Dylan solo acoustic, finishing with band.

The theatrical touches, like the Dylan/Baez lighting, were the work of Jacques Levy, with input from the star, and included Dylan’s whiteface make-up, a mask, an ever-present flower-bedecked gaucho hat and mysterious arm gestures (such as crossing his clenched fists during *Isis*). The latter gave rise to baffled gossip among onlookers, but Sloman explains them simply: “These were epic songs and Dylan was performing in character and dramatically gesticulating.”

Levy’s future-wife Claudia Carr Levy was there for the tour’s duration. “It was very romantic,” she says now. “The arc of the tour Bob had in his mind was going to be this drama. That’s when he started wearing whiteface. Jacques worked with him to deal with the way he moved on-stage. Bob is very graceful, he moves like a dancer.”

Since the 1967 film release of *Dont Look Back* had made public the friction between them, Dylan and Baez’s professional relationship had been considered as finished as their romantic one. But here they were, sharing a stage once more. “The audience went crazy,” says Claudia. “Here was Bob and Joan performing together again. It was very dramatic! Jacques was trying to keep this drama going and he lit it like a drama.” But there was humour as well. “At one gig, Bob and Joan came out dressed identically, both in hats and whiteface – you couldn’t tell who was who!”

THE MUSIC EVOLVED ORGANICALLY AS THE TOUR progressed, but for de facto bandleader Rob Stoner it was a leap in the dark. “I picked up the baton,” says the bassist. “If you listen to the bootlegs of our first show in Plymouth and you compare them to a show a few weeks later you’ll notice that all kinds of things were added – intros, endings, instrumental figures that complement the vocals. Much was accomplished by me staying up all night with cassettes of the rehearsal or gig.”

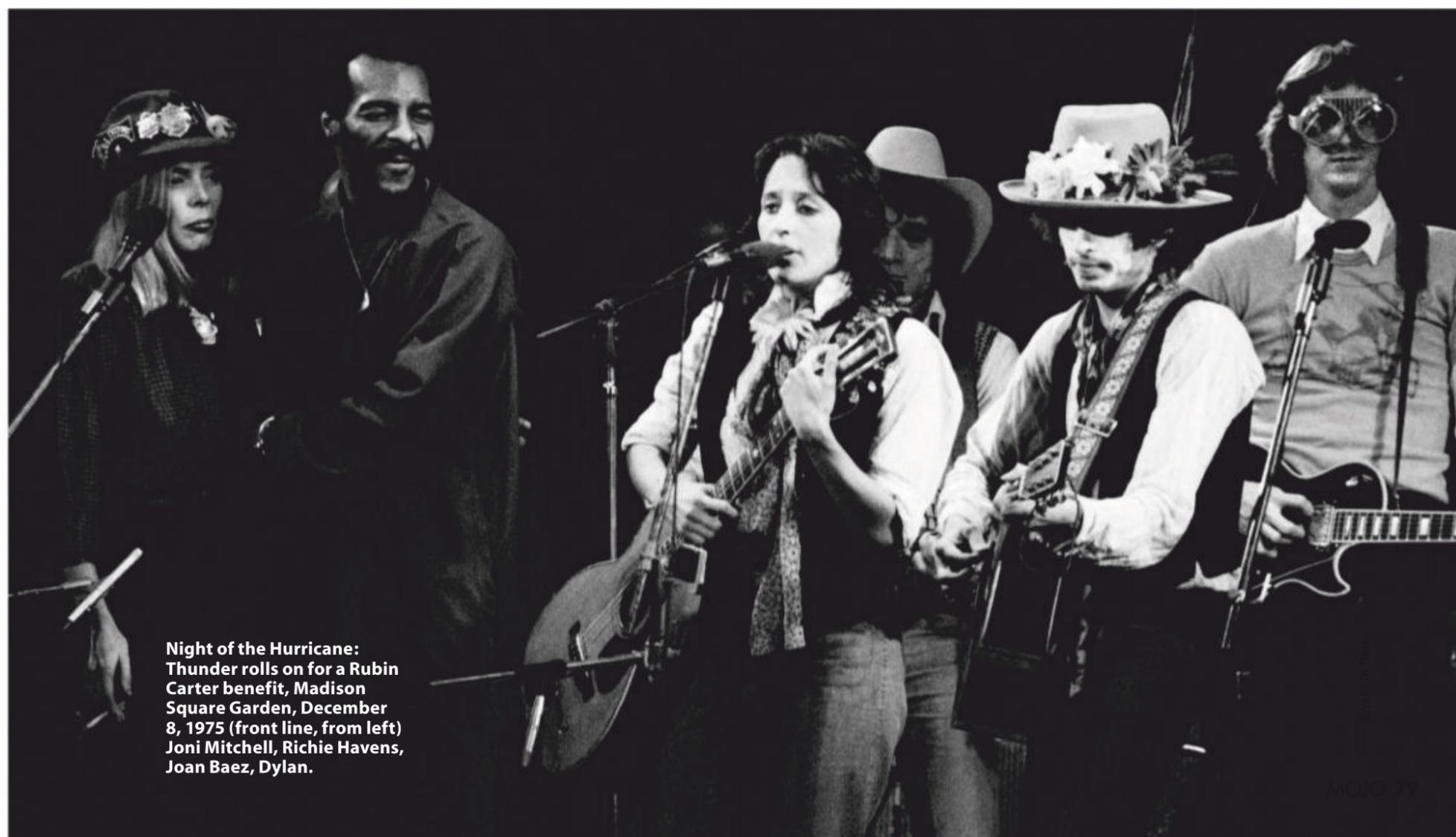
But the mercurial star could be a challenge. Stoner: “Bob was enamoured of arrangements that would stop and start, that would intentionally go out of tempo, like the bridge at the end of *O Sister*. *Maggie’s Farm* was another one. *Romance In Durango*. Every time the song stopped, I’d be sweatin’: *Jesus – I hope everybody comes back in at the same place!* There were no train wrecks, but there were a lotta close ones.”

According to Stoner, not everyone was musically indispensable. “There were entirely too many guitar players, man,” he says, chuckling. “You had 10 guys playin’ a fuckin’ G chord! But it looked good to have an army of guitar players up there.”

“Occasionally arrangements got cluttered,” says David Mansfield. “But most of these rhythm guitarists were also singer-songwriters or producers. They had a knack for staying out of the way, never elevating their own position at the expense of the arrangement. Mick Ronson was known as a guitar god, but he was a really good producer-arranger and he would never clutter up an arrangement for self-aggrandisement.”

By the middle of the tour, the RTR band were a well-oiled machine. The lion’s share of credit – according to everyone – was ➤

“OUR DESTINATIONS WERE SECRET. WE’D DO A SHOW AND HEAD STRAIGHT TO ANOTHER PLACE WITHOUT KNOWING WHERE.” RONEE BLAKLEY



Night of the Hurricane:
Thunder rolls on for a Rubin Carter benefit, Madison Square Garden, December 8, 1975 (front line, from left) Joni Mitchell, Richie Havens, Joan Baez, Dylan.

◀ the ringmaster's due. "Dylan was in great shape – probably the best I've ever seen him," notes McGuinn. "His energy level was really up. His vocals were in tune and on time. He did trills. Like his vocal gymnastics on One More Cup Of Coffee – it's hard to do."

Stoner concurs: "I've never heard Bob's chops as good as in the mid-to-late-'70s. He had amazing power, he conveyed a lot of emotion, his range was great – he could hold a note for a long time. As the main harmony singer, I'll tell you the guy was great to sing with. He pushed me to not only stay with him because of his unpredictable phrasing, but to try and match his raw emotional power. When you have anything to do with him, you bring your best game."

Dylan was also directing a feature film, with musicians doubling as actors, and friends and professional thespians like Harry Dean Stanton joining in. Bob portrayed a character named Renaldo and Sara Dylan played his beloved Clara. Despite Shepard's work, the scenes were improvised based on concepts by Dylan and others (legend has it the musicians weren't learning their lines). Fiction alternated with reality, including exchanges between Dylan and Baez that reflected back



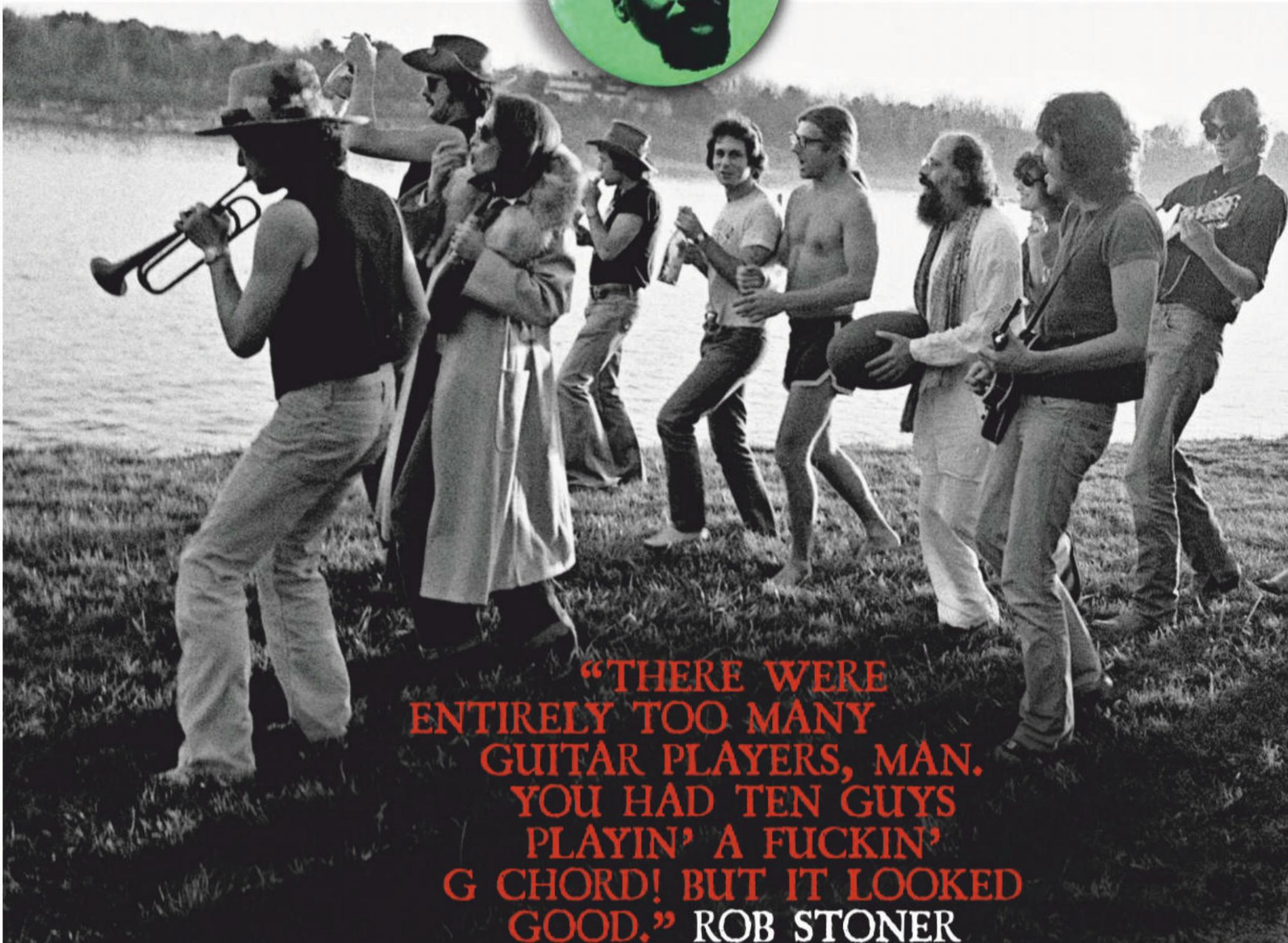
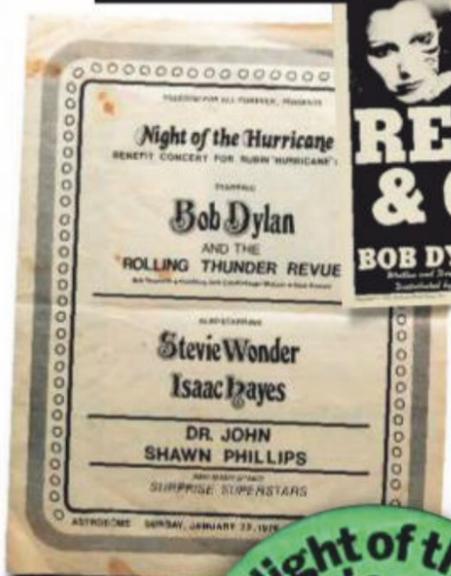
on their '60s romance (Baez did the same on-stage with her autobiographical song Diamonds And Rust). "They'd shoot movie scenes before and after he went on-stage," says Sloman. "It was amazing that he had the stamina to do all this."

As the tour wended its way, small halls made way for the arenas Dylan had so deplored in '74, the hike in takings needed to fund the movie and offset rising expenses. On December 7, the RTR played for prisoners, including Hurricane Carter, at the Clinton Correctional Institute in New Jersey. The following day was the Night Of The Hurricane at New York's Madison Square Garden, a benefit for the boxer's defence fund. With 30-odd shows under their belts (special commemorative belt buckles courtesy of Bob and Sara), the gang rested over the holidays.

Dylan had been in a good place, something remarked on by everyone.

"Bob was very happy," says Claudia Levy. "He was accessible and having a real good time." Uncharacteristically garrulous on-stage, he repeatedly dedicated songs to friends and joked with fans. When one loudly requested Just Like A Woman, he responded with "What's just like a woman? [There's] *nothing* like a woman!" Dylan's enthusiasm helped maintain the mood. "The spirit of camaraderie was very intense," recalls Mansfield. Dylan had realised his dream of a "different" tour with "fun" for all – including himself. Things would soon change.

It's certainly not a mainstream movie: Renaldo & Clara still and poster; Night Of The Hurricane handbill and badge.



"THERE WERE ENTIRELY TOO MANY GUITAR PLAYERS, MAN. YOU HAD TEN GUYS PLAYIN' A FUCKIN' G CHORD! BUT IT LOOKED GOOD." ROB STONER

THE FIRST GIG OF THE ROLLING THUNDER restart began in Los Angeles on January 22, 1976, but was primarily a tour of the American South. While Ramblin' Jack, Ginsberg, Joni and Ronee were all gone (with occasional return appearances by some) – and Texas country singer/humourist Kinky Friedman joined up – the line-up was otherwise the same, but the mood was not. A frustrated Sam Shepard had left after his movie script was discarded. David Mansfield: “It felt like we were trying to recapture what we did in '75, with varying degrees of success.” The region may have had something to do with it. “The South wasn’t enamoured of Bob the same way the North-east was,” notes Claudia.

But it was Dylan’s personal life that was the biggest problem: his marriage was falling apart. The fun, accessible Bob was gone. “Bob’s interactions with the band were sometimes difficult,” says Mansfield. “He had a black cloud over his head – the band could feel that. And the music had a more aggressive, harder-edged sound than '75.”

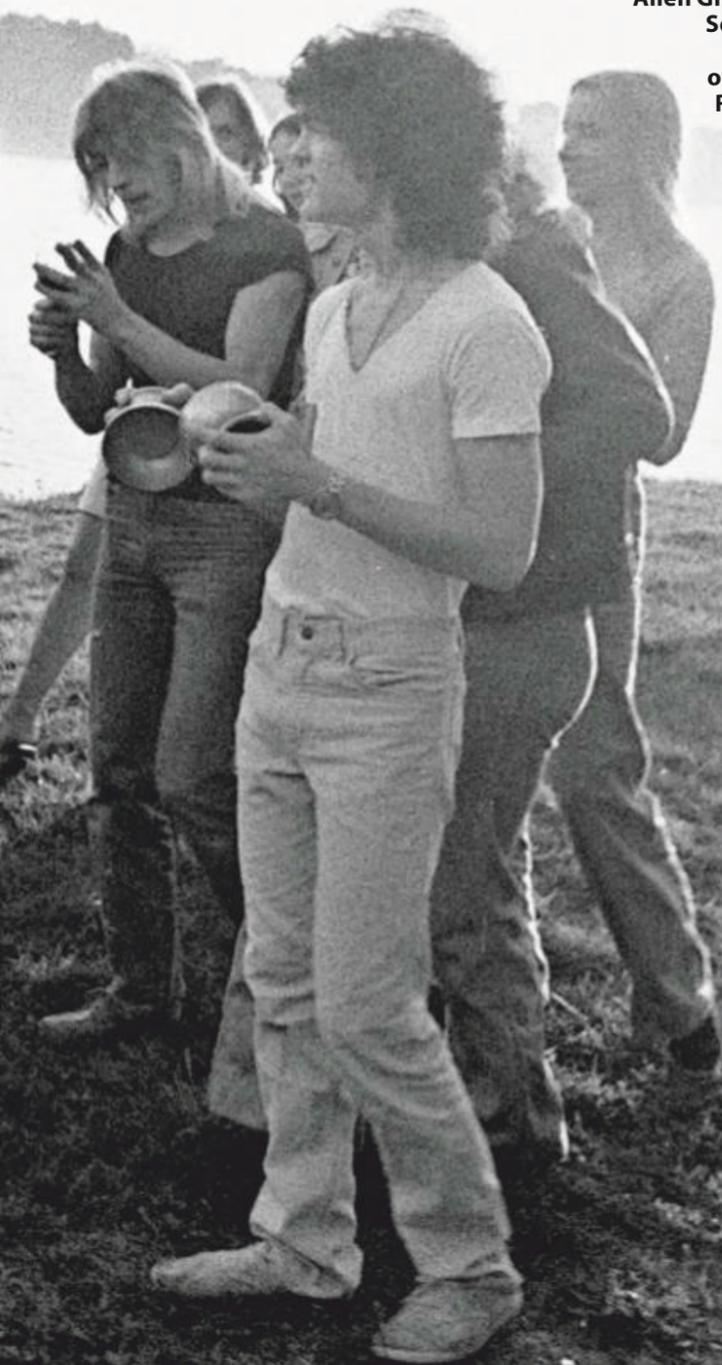
That sound is evident on the *Hard Rain* TV special and album that was filmed/recorded in Colorado at the end of the tour on May 23. Channelled anger can make for compelling art, and the music remained first-rate, yet that black cloud hovered throughout.

Claudia Levy recalls one night on leg two: “I was backstage and it hadn’t been a good performance. And Bob had a towel and he was wiping his face. There was something about the way that he was. And I said something about it being a really interesting performance. He looked at me and said,

‘Ya think so?’ And then he just walked away. Bob took a chair and moved it away from everybody and sat by himself. ➤



Blow your horn: Bob, on trumpet, leads The Band Of Merry Players with (from left) Ronee Blakely, Bob Neuwirth, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Rob Stoner, Unidentified, Allen Ginsberg, Lola Cohen, Steve Soles, T Bone Burnett, Mick Ronson, David Mansfield, others hidden, at Newport, Rhode Island in November 1975 (inset left) Rolling Thunder belt buckle.



A precious time: Dylan at Blackbushe, July 15, 1978.

“THE DAY DWARFED HIM, AND HE BESTRODE IT”

WHERE: BLACKBUSHE AERODROME, HAMPSHIRE, UK
WHEN: JULY 15, 1978
EYEWITNESS: PHIL SUTCLIFFE

A big slow roar rolled across the aerodrome as we told one another Dylan had arrived and binocular connoisseurs added news of his top hat – like... Philadelphia, 1964. Signifying... what?

ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS #3

YOUR FIRST avowed intent... to be a pilgrim? Felt like it as we explored our way through the woods from Fleet M3 services towards Blackbushe, Dylan’s “biggest gig since the Isle Of Wight”. But we 60-250,000 (figures vary wildly) didn’t look like devotees of anything. Skirts, jumpers, neat hair. No punks that I saw and no other ‘culture’ high-viz either. A lot of us had lived through the ‘60s. And here we were, mostly music fans who’d lost their place and time. What’s the new LP called, *Street-something?*

The scene: a grey day, a flat aerodrome. Still mustn’t grumble – it’s Dylan. A fellow pilgrim was Wilko Johnson, then a Solid Sender, post-Dr. Feelgood. Like me, he was seeing Dylan live for the first time.

“I’d loved him since I saw that TV play he was in, Madhouse On Castle Street [BBC, January 13, 1963],” says Johnson today. “He’s this guy with a cap and a guitar who plays *Ballad Of The Gliding Swan*. I’d never heard anything like that. I’d just got my first guitar and I ran to my bedroom and tried to play it and of course I couldn’t... He took your breath away.”

The backstage scene was described (by Hugh Fielder and me, in *Sounds* magazine) as “a sumptuous liggers’ playground”. RSO’s marquee had chandeliers. And Bianca Jagger. Out front you couldn’t see much from anywhere. A band called Lake were playing when we arrived and enjoyed the day’s saving grace – astonishingly good sound. Ditto Graham Parker & The Rumour, Eric Clapton and Joan Armatrading: we all heard every word and grunt, fine detail, guts too.

Meanwhile, Wilko sought a decent vantage point...

“I turned up near the stage,” he says, “and there was a big fence to safeguard the liggers. I didn’t want to make an exhibition of myself, but I couldn’t see much so I climbed on top of that fence and I didn’t care...”

The day dwarfed him. And he bestrode it. All of Dylan in that cinemascope sound from the tiny, intense figure leaning into the mike. He poured out each song in the fervour of the moment he wrote it. Baby Stop Crying cried with quarrelsome grief at grief and being the cause of grief. Third song in and he said, “We’re starting to get going...” Every dot in the mass teetered his way.

He spat out chopped-up chunks of *Shelter From The Storm*. *Girl From The North Country* melted with love. Then, *Like A Rolling Stone*. “When everyone sang ‘How does it feel!’... It was great, it was great, it was great,” says Wilko. “I was entranced, I was transported.”

Everyone bellowed choruses, shouting and moaning pleasure. Until Dylan solo’d *The Gates Of Eden*, same as way back. *I Want You* he slowed to near immobility, frustration on a slab. *Masters Of War* to the Louie Louie riff? *Okaaay*. All *Along The Watchtower*: the world gone wrong and I’m only bleeding. *Twilight* brought the last encore, *The Times They Are A-Changin’*; after 14 years of turmoil and never any less of a *Kumbaya*.

Over. Not enough. Just start walking... And thinking. Of the loaded words, the lovely tunes, the grab-your-shirtfront voice. Later I’d experience his erratic ways, the nights when enigma and blank face made you question your fandom. But *Blackbushe* was precious time.

“Afterwards I climbed down off the fence and sat on the ground in a bit of a daze,” remembers Wilko Johnson. “Joe Strummer was right there. He said, ‘Do you want to get backstage and meet him?’ and offered me a pass. I took it. But I sat there and I looked at it and wondered what I could say to him... I didn’t dare. I’ve still got the pass but I never did get to meet him – he remained a mystery and I like that.”

Wilko Johnson’s album Blow Your Mind is out now on Chess/Universal.



“ROLLING THUNDER TAUGHT ME EVERYTHING I NEEDED TO KNOW TO SURVIVE FOR 50 YEARS IN SHOW BUSINESS.”

T BONE BURNETT

“Nobody would talk to him and he didn’t want anybody near him.” There were still some good times. “I remember singing I’m Proud To Be An Asshole From El Paso with Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell singing on either side of me wearing big sombreros,” says Kinky Friedman. “That was classic.” McGuinn recounts the troupe’s visit to swamp rocker Bobby Charles’s house in Louisiana. “He had this alligator on a platter in his hallway and kegs of beer. Beer and alligator for breakfast!”

The Rolling Thunder Revue ended in Salt Lake City on May 25. Bob and Kinky flew to Yelapa in Mexico to unwind. Kinky chuckles at the memory. “There was no first class. Bob was sitting next to a civilian – this woman. And she starts shouting, ‘I’m sitting next to Bob Dylan! I can’t believe it! I’m sitting next to Bob Dylan – I can’t believe it!’ And without missing a beat, Bob said: ‘Pinch yourself.’”

The four-hour film *Renaldo & Clara* was eventually released in 1978 to disparaging reviews. A combination dramatic art film, surreal documentary and rock concert, the *New York Times* called it “a film no one is likely to find altogether comprehensible.” (T Bone Burnett half-jokes that “Everybody was playing [variations of] Bob or Sara.”) It’s certainly not a mainstream movie, just as *Tarantula* was not a mainstream novel. “I made it for a specific group of people and myself, and that’s all,” Dylan told Jonathan Cott in 1978. “That’s how I wrote *Blowin’ In The Wind* and *The Times They Are A-Changin’*. They were written for a certain crowd of people and for certain artists. Who knew they were going to be big songs?”

Opinions of the film were mixed even among the participants. “It was misbegotten,” says Claudia Levy. “It was a good effort that didn’t coalesce. It lost the trajectory of what it was supposed to be.” Ratso Sloman, on the other hand, dug it. “While it may have been a little too long, I respect the ambition that went into it. It completely transcends the usual music documentary about a tour and raised huge issues about identity, fidelity and mortality.”

FOOTAGE SHOT FOR *Renaldo & Clara* can be seen in the forthcoming documentary *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* by Martin Scorsese. The long-awaited film will debut on Netflix globally in the next month or so. A veil of secrecy has prevented the few who’ve seen it from discussing it. As MOJO went to press, a lone announcement de-

scribed it as “part documentary, part concert film, part fever dream”. We know many original participants were interviewed and that the concert footage of Dylan is rumoured to be extraordinary.

Meanwhile, a 14-CD companion box, *Bob Dylan – The 1975 Live Recordings* is due soon. As well as rehearsals and rarities, most of the discs capture entire Dylan sets, unlike 2002’s *The Bootleg Series Vol. 5: Bob Dylan Live 1975* in which performances from four cities

were cherry-picked. Sonically superior to the bootlegs in circulation, the recordings are thrilling evidence of Dylan and band’s relentless energy and commitment to the music night after night (dig the transformation of *The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll* from its topical folk origin to spitting-mad hard rocker on December 4 in Montreal). “As effortless as Dylan makes it seem, it’s *not* magic – you have to fuckin’ put in the work,” notes Ratso Sloman.

As well as giving Dylan a shot in the arm, Rolling Thunder boosted the careers of many of the tour’s other musicians. “It was an act of deep generosity by Bob [when] he opened his stage up to us,” says T Bone Burnett, pointing to the “collaborative nature” of the project. “Rolling Thunder taught me everything I needed to know to survive for 50 years in show business.”

Scarlet Rivera agrees: “I can draw a direct line from Bob to each of the many things I have accomplished both in my continued music career and personal evolution. He saw who I could be before I did.”

Forty-three years after the last clap of Rolling Thunder, its reputation as a singular tour lives on. Ratso: “It was an amazing cultural event that we’ll never see again.” Roger McGuinn: “My take on the whole thing was the music business had gone very bland and commercial in the mid-’70s. It wasn’t like the excitement of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones and the ’60s we all had.” As a veteran of that era, ex-Byrd McGuinn would know. “There’s always a balance between art and commerce and commerce had taken over in the ’70s. Bob restored the art side of the balance.”

Today, Rolling Thunder still resonates powerfully. Dylan may not have been the first megastar to loathe the soulless barns that commercial success decrees, and he won’t be the last. But he created an alternative, however short-lived, for subsequent musicians to learn from. Ultimately, the spirit of the Rolling Thunder Revue informed the music and we’ll have the music forever. **M**

Louie Kemp’s memoir of life with Bob, written with Kinky Friedman, Dylan And Me: Our 50 Years Of Adventures, will be published in September.

“HE’S FEELING ENERGISED AND ENGAGED”

WHERE: EUROPE / HYDE PARK / KILKENNY
WHEN: MAY-JULY, 2019
PROGNOSTICATOR: ALAN LIGHT

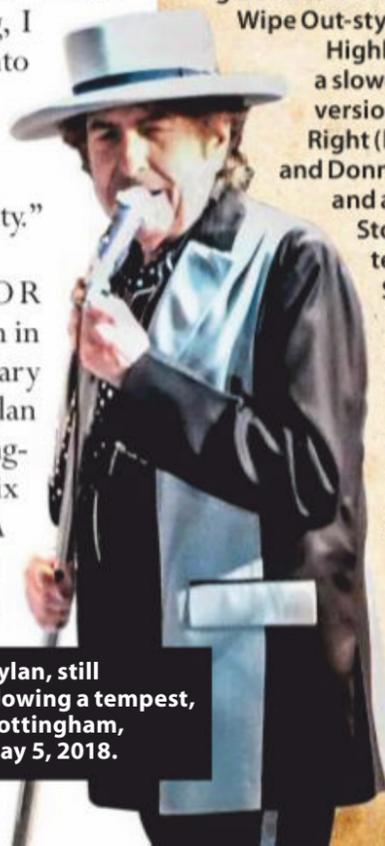
ON A NIGHT LIKE THIS #4

MAKING PREDICTIONS about a Bob Dylan show has been a fool’s errand since – well, since the guy first picked up a guitar. But based on the final shows of his 2018 tour, including a seven-night stand at New York City’s Beacon Theatre, he’s feeling energised and engaged, with changes in his band, his song selections, and his arrangements all contributing to some of his finest performances in years.

Most notable is the absence of Stu Kimball, who played more shows with Dylan (over 1,300 since joining the band in 2004) than any other guitarist. Reducing the band to four members has aired out the songs and breathed new life into some of the overfamiliar choices.

Though Dylan’s last three studio albums focused exclusively on songs recorded by Frank Sinatra, none of that material turned up in these most recent shows. A different moment in pop history appeared in a few spots, though – *Cry A While* was delivered over the music of Link Wray’s immortal *Rumble*, and *Thunder On The Mountain* was given a surf-rock makeover, complete with *Wipe Out*-style drum break.

Highlights at the Beacon included a slowed-down, heartbreaking version of *Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right* (backed only by Dylan’s piano and Donnie Herron’s plaintive violin) and a majestic *Like A Rolling Stone*, with a lurching, surging tempo that lit up the crowd. *Scarlet Town*, from 2012’s *Tempest* album, was an unlikely dramatic powerhouse, and *Gotta Serve Somebody* had an entirely new set of lyrics (“They might call you Peter, they might call you Paul...”). Of course, not everything worked – a reggae version of *All Along The Watchtower* was as misguided as it sounds – but at age 77, our favourite Nobel Prize Winner remains a miraculous and unparalleled creative force.



Dylan, still blowing a tempest, Nottingham, May 5, 2018.