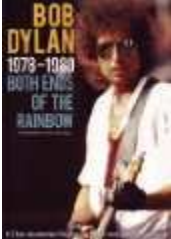


DVD Review: *Bob Dylan - 1978-1989: Both Ends Of The Rainbow*



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The years 1978 to 1989 were rough ones for Bob Dylan. *Both Ends Of The Rainbow* is a two-hour DVD featuring interviews with musicians and journalists about this period. It also features numerous video clips, including many live versions of songs written and recorded during this 11-year period.

The combination of interviews and performances on this DVD paint a vivid picture of an artist in crisis. It is unfortunate however that Dylan himself chose not to participate in this documentary in any way.

The DVD starts out with a brief discussion of Dylan's 1978 LP *Street Legal*, the disappointing follow-up to his acclaimed *Desire*. Following its lackluster tour, Dylan was introduced to the Vineyard Christian Fellowship by members of his band.

The reverberations of Dylan's conversion to Christianity have resonated in his career in various ways ever since. The most obvious results were the trilogy of "Born Again" records he released between 1979-82. *Slow Train Coming*, the first of the three, was positively received for the most part, and charted at number three on *Billboard*.

Interviews conducted for this DVD with journalists and former musicians make it clear that had Dylan stopped here, his audience would have most likely remained intact. But it was not to be.

Saved and *Shot Of Love* were vilified by critics and the public. In his on-screen interview about *Saved*, Johnny Rogan says simply: "It was a catastrophe." The third and final recording of this era, *Shot Of Love* was produced by Chuck Plotkin and he mentions how much better he thought the LP could have been had Dylan allowed him to actually produce it.

Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespear are both interviewed on the DVD for their contributions to Dylan's 1983 *Infidels* album. Although *Infidels* is by no means *Blood On The Tracks*, it certainly had its moments. The live footage of Dylan singing "Jokerman" at the time is a highlight.

For the following six long years Dylan seemed adrift. Whether it was his disastrous performance at Live Aid (which the footage confirms) or the rotating musicians and studios he utilized, nothing seemed to work.

Empire Burlesque, *Knocked Out Loaded*, and *Down In The Groove* lacked all sense of purpose, marking a troubling first for Bob Dylan. They were generic "Eighties" music in every sense of the word, and for the most part, pretty awful. The many interviews with musicians, journalists, and producers recorded especially for this DVD set testify to this, and to what might have been.

One day Dylan received a call from old friend George Harrison, who wanted to use his home studio to record a few demos with "some friends." The friends turned out to be Roy Orbison, Tom Petty, and Jeff Lynne. The five settled on The Traveling Wilburys as a name.

Their record was a smash in 1988, and showed Dylan the way back out of the wilderness. Rather than chase the MTV flavor of the moment as he had been doing, it was time for Dylan to get back to basics, and just be himself again.

The two-hour DVD ends on a positive note with the 1989 release of *Oh Mercy*, hailed as one of his all-time best by some. It was unquestionably his best since *Desire* at least, which the critical and fan response bore out.

The 1990s were just around the corner, and would present a whole new set of tribulations, and accomplishments. But that is a story for another documentary.

The few extras included in this set are fairly unimpressive. There is an eight-minute feature concerning some interviews Dylan gave in '79-'80 to various radio stations, and a text-only biography section for the 17 contributors who appear in onscreen interviews.

Both Ends Of The Rainbow is advertised as a two-disc set, which is technically correct. But the second disc is an audio-only CD featuring an hour's worth of radio interviews from '79-'82, the heavy-duty Christian era. Interesting but hardly essential.

For serious Bob Dylan fans however, I think the two hour DVD is essential. *Both Ends Of The Rainbow* sheds a lot of light on events that were somewhat bewildering at the time for many of us. In that regard, it is recommended