

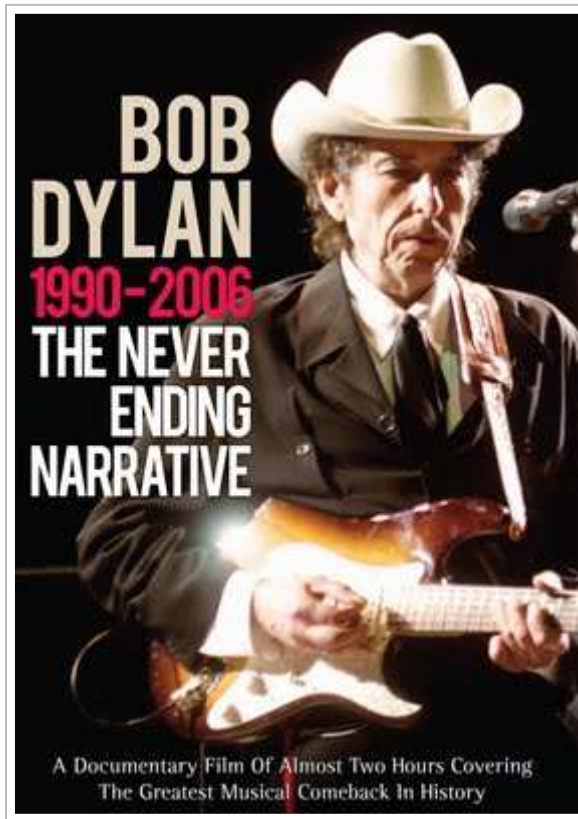
FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

TUESDAY, JULY 12, 2011

DVD Review: Bob Dylan 1990-2006: The Never Ending Narrative

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Images from the Internet*



Bob Dylan 1990-2006: The Never Ending Narrative
Executive Producer: Rob Johnstone
Narration by Thomas Arnold
Music by T-Bomb; Dylanesque
Chrome Dreams
105 minutes, USD \$19.95

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Chromedream.co.uk
MVDvisual.com

When I think back looking at Dylan's career, it seems kind of seamless. He's just always been there my whole sentient musical life. And yet, he's had his trials and tribulations on and off over the past few years, and that's exactly what this CD covers.

We start off on this DVD in 1990 with Dylan entering his 50s, and putting out the *Under the Red Sky* LP, with its sing-song, almost child-like rhythms, which essentially tanked. Despite it having such guest musicians as Elton John, George Harrison, Slash, and David Crosby, it was not well received by the critics or his audience alike. This leads to possibly the lowest point in his career.

The tour that follows is also called "lackluster" here, and guitarist and band leader, G.E. Smith (ex-*Saturday Night Live* musical director and Gilda Radner's ex-husband) left the tour early. Dylan auditioned guitarist on stage during performances. That must have contributed to an inconsistent level of professionalism that people had to pay to hear.

This was, of course, followed by Dylan's appearance at the Grammys in February of 1991, when he sang a stupefying version of (supposedly) "Dogs of War" (a wonderful clip of the performance is shown here). This is described by one author here as his "nadir." I remember during a *Saturday Night Live* "newscast" they had Adam Sandler (in one of his few funny bits) as Dylan, and David Spade as an equally mumbling Tom Petty translating (this clip is *not* included here, but should have been). Back to the Grammys' song, Anthony Curtis of *Rolling Stone* (who is in a *lot* of these British music icon documentaries) stands up for Dylan, positing that it was cool that Dylan played atonal at a corporate function.

Speaking of music experts, let me discuss some of the people who appear on this documentary to explain what you are seeing. With the exception of a couple of the engineers on his *Oh Mercy* release, all the people discussing Dylan and his career are writers and journalists, most of them British (this is a UK-based production). While this is all well and good, nearly all of what is presented are opinions, conjecture and impressions. I would have liked to have seen more people who were actually *there* discussing what they were seeing, rather than what they were hearing (about). This is second or third hand. Yes, it is good to hear from people (all men; these British docs need more women) who know enough of Dylan's catalog to give a cohesive overall picture, but rather than hearing about Dylan being depressed, I would like to hear from someone like G.E. Smith who can testify, and while

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About Me

[Robert Barry Francos](#)

Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com | address). From 1977-88, I u publish a print version of a magazine in New York calle FFanzeen, which dealt with wide-ranging independent r scene. I also photographed bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog have a column at jerseybea com (slash) quietcorner (do html. And the beat goes on

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it's an interesting concept to say that during his low point, Dylan was possibly jealous of and competitive about his son Jakob's success with the Wallflowers during the '90s, how about an opinion from Jakob? I have many friends who are intimate with the Dylan cannon, such as Bernie Kugel or Nancy Neon, and I respect their opinions as much as whoever is on this DVD.

Some who appear here are Nigel Williamson (British author of *The Rough Guide to Bob Dylan* who also is in a lot of these), Patrick Humphries (British author of *The Complete Guide to Bob Dylan*), Clinton Heylin (British author of *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades*), Derek Barker (British editor of *Isis* magazine), and Robert "D-" Christgau (ex-*Village Voice* music editor; currently with *Rolling Stone*).

But getting back to the narration... Dylan was in a funk and stopped writing songs because, as he is heard to question here in an audio clip, why bother writing songs anymore because the world already has enough of them. In fact, after a break, his next two albums, *Good As I Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong* were both acoustic and full of covers of blues and folk traditional pieces. By digging up the (his?) past, he laid the groundwork for his future.

And almost in a reflection of 1965, after the two acoustic releases, he goes full electric with band at Woodstock II (I was just across the Hudson River interviewing singer-songwriter Margo Hennebach), and his star was on the rise again with a whole new and younger audience enthralled by him. The DVD theorizes that he is finally appreciative of his listeners, and it shows. The performance is followed by the obligatory *MTV Unplugged* (clips of both are shown here). Finally, the following year with new songs in tow, he released *Time Out of Mind*. This is a return to critical success, especially after a heart infection puts his life in danger (raising the rhetorical question, is a life-endangering disease worth it if it gets you enough publicity?).

By his next release, *Love and Theft*, produced by himself and using his touring band (something he rarely did), he was "on top of his game" as one of the authors professes. Well, he does win a Grammy for it. This follows by a couple of film appearances (one he writes and directs) and soundtracks, another album (*Modern Times*), a Victoria Secret ad, and his autobiography, *Chronicles Vol. 1* (which Christgau describes as, "It's just one more mirror in the hall of mirrors that has been his continued public life"). By the end of the DVD, we are hearing Dylan as a disc jockey on his *Theme Time Radio Hour*, a long way from his incomprehensible Grammys "Dogs of War" performance.

With the release of Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home* Dylan has become "The Elder Statesman of Rock," even though the film is about

his career up until 1966. And as he approaches his '60s, and he is dressing like a swarthy cowboy with a pencil thin moustache, he is starting to facially resemble Leonard Nemo.

Throughout the DVD there are numerous clips, photos, and performances by Dylan, alone making this worth seeking out. The research done by Angela Turner is spectacular, and even the *opinonators* (authors, et. al) get some good comments in along with the conjecture.

Marshall McLuhan once said that old technologies get replaced, and then come back as "art." This DVD shows that this can be true of people, as well.

Extra video

(from *Modern Times*):



Posted by Robert Barry Francos at [4:31 PM](#)

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