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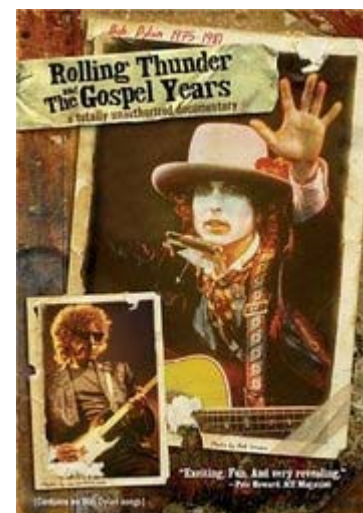
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Bob Dylan 1975 – 1981: Rolling Thunder And The Gospel Years

Picture: C Sound: C Extras: C
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It was probably April of my junior year in high school during a free period in which I probably should have been in the library poring over my physics notes, a class that I was precariously close to failing, that I first cracked open Jack Kerouac's "**On The Road**" while lolling on the hard, sweating steps outside the principal's office. Suffice it to say that I had to make up my physics class over the summer, but the Kerouac, well, that went straight in my eyes, rollercoasted through my veins, and embedded itself in my marrow.

I had already been making my way through Brautigan and Whitman. Bob Dylan was taking up more and more of my time and attention. Stacks of his old vinyl records borrowed from the public library had been sitting next to my stereo for so long that a film of dust, artfully broken and smeared by my fingerprints, covered the jackets like powdered sugar. But Kerouac, man, he just blew the roof off my head and irrevocably altered the way I understood art.

I now saw art as vocation, meaning the full on religious definition of the

IN STORES NOW

- > Bob Dylan 1975 – 1981: Rolling Thunder And The Gospel Years
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- > The Candy Snatchers
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- > Planet Of The Apes – The Legacy Collection

word. Art was a personal search for the source of creation. You can put that in whatever context you choose to, secular or otherwise. Not to get all-mystical or anything but when an artist is creating he/she is dipping into, brushing against, that great swirling source at the center of all things. Kerouac opened my eyes to that. And I found that the musicians I most respected exemplified this paradigm; namely Bob Dylan and John Coltrane.

Dylan once described the idealized sound of his music as being "thin, wild mercury music" which is an apt metaphor for Dylan the artist as well. Ever searching, always changing. Never look back. From high school rock'n'roll hellion, to Greenwich Village folkie, to surrealist garage rocker, to singer-songwriter stateliness, to ghostface carnival barker, to born again preacher, and everywhere in between Dylan has traveled an endless road of self-invention and self-examination.

Director Joel Gilbert highlights the oft-overlooked period of 1975 – 1981 in **Bob Dylan: Rolling Thunder And The Gospel Years**. Gilbert ambles leisurely, this documentary runs over four hours so why hurry, from the jailing of boxer Hurricane Ruben Carter and the two Rolling Thunder tours to the controversial denouement of Dylan's born again phase when Bob spent most of his concerts preaching to the audience like Billy Sunday.

This doc is clearly a labor of love. The interviews with Spooner Oldham, Rob Stoner, and Ramblin' Jack Elliot in particular make watching this a necessity to any serious Dylan fan as these folks don't often get this much camera time to recollect and discuss their time spent working with Dylan. Unfortunately, Gilbert has chosen to liven up the proceedings with awful clip art and goofy sound effects. This gives the film an embarrassingly adolescent quality, as though Gilbert's twelve-year-old nephew got a hold of the film and then proceeded to insert a bunch of stupid junk that tickled his funny bone.

It is a huge misstep on Gilbert's part, almost unforgivable because it belittles the whole project. If you can manage to ignore this glaring feature of the film then you'll find much of interest.

- Kristofer Collins

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Kristofer Collins is an editor at The New Yorker and the owner of Desolation Row CDs in Pittsburgh, PA. Visit Desolation Row at www.myspace.com/desolationrowcds for more.



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