

Bob Dylan – 1975-1981: Rolling Thunder & The Gospel Years / 2006 Music Video Distributors
241 Minutes / <http://www.highway61ent.com> / <http://www.mvdb2b.com> /
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To properly capture the entire history of a musician or any other public figure over forty years is great for individuals that might not have been alive for part or nearly all of the period covered to get a sense of what exactly happened in this period. Coming from a perspective in which I have no major love for the person as anything beside a writer (think about it, the best Dylan songs were covered better by other acts; 'All Along The Watchtower' by Jimi Hendrix and 'Knockin' On Heaven's Door' by Guns 'N' Roses), this documentary gets me to contextualize Dylan's music as necessarily coming from a specific period of time.

Coming as an uninitiated person in Dylan's music I only had the vaguest idea about the big stink caused by his decision to plug in, and to be honest I had no idea that Dylan found Jesus for a few years. However, the reason why I was not familiar with these circumstances in Dylan's life is because this seemed to be the least critically successful period of his life. Previously, I had just thought that the youth fan base of Dylan in the sixties had taken control of all forms of musical production by the nineties, and engineered a revival for him. This four-hour documentary dissects to an incredibly minute set of details the six years from 1975 to 1981. It is almost as if director Joel Gilbert is trying to do for Dylan what Ken Burns did for the Civil War; by the time Gilbert is done, there will honestly be about 20 hours of footage concerning all aspects of Dylan's life. While this is necessarily a good thing for all fans of Dylan, the average interested individual may be a little put off by the extreme length of the video and the level of detail that Gilbert elicits from each interview.

Also a note of contention is the use of computer-generated fades that seem to do nothing more than irritate instead of mark differing sections of the video. Another thing that is particularly irksome is that none of the Dylan recordings from this period were released for use on this documentary. As someone who is not a Dylan fan, I still would like to hear exactly what the whole hubbub was about. For the actual research done for this documentary, Gilbert cannot do much better. Essentially everyone who was present during this period of Dylan's life has been approached to give information; violinist Scarlet Rivera, bassist Rob Stoner, and even Dylan's teacher in the ways of Christianity give interesting commentary. There are a few extra features present on this DVD but what really should sell copies is the tremendous job done by Gilbert in trying to coordinate all these disparate interviews into something cohesive. This DVD should take a place alongside Gilbert's other movies (Bob Dylan 1966 World Tour – The Home Movies and Bob Dylan Work Tours 1966-1974) on the shelf of any collector of Bob Dylan ephemera.

Rating: 6.5/10

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