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THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH

Your Gateway to Music and More from a Christian Perspective
Slow down as you approach the gate, and have your change ready...

Bob Dylan 1975-1981 - Rolling Thunder and The Gospel Years
Directed by Joel Gilbert
Label: Highway 61 Entertainment
240 minutes

The "Contains no Bob Dylan songs" disclaimer on the front of the case rings out like pistol shots in a barroom night. Four hours about Bob Dylan with NO Dylan songs? In the wake of Martin Scorsese's fine *No Direction Home*, which had access to both the music and the man himself, it's not difficult to be disappointed by this "totally unauthorized documentary."

Leader of "the world's only Dylan tribute band," producer/director Joel Gilbert has assembled a cast of interviewees that peak with Jerry Wexler, the legendary producer behind Dylan's first explicitly Christian album *Slow Train Coming* and Greenwich Village folkie Ramblin' Jack Elliott and plummet with A.J. Weberman, best known for rummaging through Dylan's garbage.

Like the many shots of Gilbert bemusedly wandering around studios and city streets, the film ambles its way through these two underreported segments of Dylan's career. Rob Stoner and Scarlet Rivera offer some not unexpected looks into Dylan's working habits and Elliott joins in to describe the circus atmosphere of the initial Rolling Thunder dates. The second half of the film picks up slightly as it digs into Dylan's immersion in the Vineyard Christian Fellowship Church, Wexler's tales of the Muscle Shoals sessions, and the controversial series of gospel-only shows at the Warfield in San Francisco.

While most of the interview subjects are reasonably interesting (unlike many of Gilbert's questions), prudent editing could have trimmed the film by nearly an hour. The endless cuts to amateurish artwork and Gilbert's inability to stay with a camera angle for more than five seconds also distract from the story he's trying to tell.

Special features include Gilbert's guided tour of Dylan's hometown of Hibbing, Minnesota and an entertaining interview with Ramblin' Jack Elliott.

For hard-core Dylan completists only.

Dave Draeger



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