



## Rolling Thunder and the Gospel Years:

### Bob Dylan 1975-1981 DVD Review

by Jordan Rodgers

There's an interesting caveat printed on the cover of this DVD, which goes a long way in telling you what sort of viewing experience you're in for. It warns that the DVD "contains no Bob Dylan songs." Let me repeat that: THIS DVD CONTAINS NO BOB DYLAN SONGS. You are watching a DVD documentary about one of the greatest musicians of the 20th century, but the good folks from Highway 61 Entertainment have decided that none of Dylan's *actual music* need be included. On the contrary, what the fans of Bob Dylan *really* want (obviously) is 4 hours of interviews with such exciting people as Dylan's backup singers and Bible school teachers from the 70's, talking about their experiences with the legendary folk troubadour.

Now, to be fair with the creators of this DVD, it is advertised as a "totally unauthorized" documentary, and I suppose they did the best they could without rights to Dylan's music, but it boggles the mind that they actually thought anyone would be interested in this. A great deal of the documentary is not even related to Dylan's music: the DVD begins with an extensive interview with Rubin "Hurricane" Carter and his story of woe that Bob Dylan documented on his song in tribute of the boxer, and then the bulk of the DVD is devoted to discussion of Dylan's conversion to Christianity in the late 70's, and its affect on his critical and popular reception.

While these are somewhat interesting aspects of Dylan's life and career, you'd never know it from the way it is presented here. Interviews are a good component of any good documentary, but they can't carry a whole film, much less a *four hour* film. And, they need to be interviews with people that the audience might be interested in... Carter is most likely the only person interviewed on this disc that you might possibly have heard of before, and the rest are a group consisting mostly of people that vaguely knew Dylan for a small time in his career. The interviews are mostly boring, and they go on forever.

It's not just boring though. The whole film is completely amateurish; so much so, in fact, that it borders on comic. For one, the film has no consistent order other than chronological: the topics discussed from one section to the next often are not connected at all. Also, the whole documentary is run by a man (Joel Gilbert) who's claim to fame, other than doing other Bob Dylan documentaries (presumably of similar quality), is being the leader of a Dylan cover band. The unfortunate thing is that Gilbert felt that trying to actually *look like Dylan* was required to give his band an extra kick, so all the interviews are done by a guy trying to look like Bob Dylan circa 1979, which was not exactly Dylan's best look. But the most embarrassing bit of this film is the images spliced into the film while we listen to the interviews. For some unknown reason, the creators of the film decided that cartoon images trying to narrate what the interviewees are talking about would add to the presentation. It really just makes the whole thing look like a big joke; the fact that the creators are actually serious just makes the joke that much funnier.

If you have any interest in Bob Dylan's music, you will be bored to tears by this thing. And if you don't have any interest, why would you even look at it in the first place?

<http://www.rocknworld.com/features/06/BobDylanDVD.shtml>