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Bob Dylan

1975-1981: Rolling Thunder & The Gospel Years
CD&DVD

Highway 61 Entertainment

Scary superfan turns a biopic into a labour of love

At what point does a fan become a stalker? This is the question Rolling Thunder And The Gospel Years unavoidably arouses. Director / producer Joel Gilbert dresses like Bob Dylan, wears his hair like Dylan, fronts a Bob Dylan tribute band and his filmography consists of two films on the subject of none other than Bob Dylan. It's no wonder it's unauthorized and that it contains neither Dylan's music, nor an interview with the man himself; if I was him I'd be trying to distance myself from the freak too. Surprisingly, despite this obvious handicap, it proves a detailed and sometimes even enjoyable film which will doubtless be of considerable interest to Dylan fans even if it does come across as a declaration of love.

It covers a specific period of Bob Dylan's history, during which time he released the classic Desire album, toured with his Rolling Thunder Review (a kind of 70's folk Lollapalooza also featuring Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell and Ramblin' Jack Elliott) which culminated in "The Night Of The Hurricane", a benefit for Rubin "Hurricane" Carter. Carter was a professional boxer who had been wrongly convicted of murder, whose cause was strongly supported by Muhammed Ali as well as Dylan, who wrote his song "Hurricane" about Carter's case. The second part of the film concentrates on Dylan's

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reinvention as The Entertainer, the story of the three Gospel albums he made as a born again Christian, and the story of the flop tour film “Renaldo and Clara”.

As well as Ruben Carter’s first interview for 30 years (apparently!), Gilbert has secured interviews with Jack Elliott, Dylan’s backing musicians Scarlet Rivera, Rob Stoner, Spooner Oldham and Regina McCrary, his pastor and bible tutor Bill Dwyer and a host of others. His obvious enthusiasm for his subject infuses his quest to extract new nuggets of information from the surrounding cast, and he proves a capable and intelligent interviewer.

Sadly, that same enthusiasm prompted him to believe that anyone who does not share it can cope with a frankly sadistic running time of four hours. Yes, we learn the minutiae of Dylan’s schedule over that period, but mostly we learn that Joel Gilbert Loves Bob Dylan 4 Eva With Sugar On and feels his fanaticism for Bob Dylan is intrinsically linked to the size of his penis.

If you’re truly Dylan mental, the CD soundtrack is available, featuring Gilbert and most of the (musical) cast performing a few Dylan-esque numbers (none of which the man himself composed, natch). Whether or not you are likely to purchase this as well as the DVD probably depends on whether you are Joel Gilbert or, at a pinch, his friend. Overall, while Dylan fanatics will glean much from Rolling Thunder And The Gospel Years, for the rest of us it’s a document of one man’s all-consuming obsession with another. We can only hope Michael Jackson doesn’t have fans like him...

<http://www.highway61ent.com/>

By Eddie Thomas

This release was published on 05 Mar 2006.

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