

## Images and Assorted Facts

By Terry Kelly

Rock music DVDs can often represent an extremely mixed bag. The official stuff – with such notable exceptions as *No Direction Home* – can seem geared towards the casual customer, with few rare elements to keep hard core fans satisfied. And while the phrase “totally unauthorised” has a certain attractive frisson, it’s often simply rock biz shorthand for cheaply made documentaries containing dozens of static, talking heads and no original music or footage. But while Joel Gilbert’s latest DVD, the rather awkwardly titled *Bob Dylan 1975-1981 - Rolling Thunder and The Gospel Years* (Highway 61 Entertainment) is indeed touted as “a totally unauthorised documentary,” contains no Bob Dylan songs and is packed with talking heads, it’s far superior to the majority of the genre. In fact, it’s quite the strongest DVD production yet from the man who also leads American Dylan tribute band, Highway 61 Revisited. Running for a generous 240 minutes, the DVD contains such “scoops” as an extended interview with Rubin “Hurricane” Carter and clips of a previously unseen Dylan TV interview from 1980, plus added commentary from such heavyweight players as Ramblin’ Jack Elliott, Scarlet Rivera, Rob Stoner, Jerry Wexler, Bruce Langhorne and Regina McCrary. Covering the aforementioned Rolling Thunder and gospel periods, the DVD also features director and producer Joel Gilbert visiting such iconic Dylan locations as Muscle Shoals Studios and the rather bizarre Rundown Studios (the latter seemingly possessing the audio qualities of a bus shelter). The interviewees, particularly Scarlet Rivera and Jerry Wexler, are a joy, the latter revealing how he supplied the (uncredited) line “you can call me Zimmy” to Dylan during the *Slow Train Coming* sessions, which he produced. There are also chats with the churchmen who helped bring Dylan to Jesus and TV clips of angry fans outside the first gospel concerts in San Francisco (evoking shades of 1966). The fascinating but brief KDKA TV interview with Dylan from 1980 shows a rather concerned artist trying to absorb his fans’ displeasure at his Born Again transformation. Revealing how he tracked down the interview, Joel Gilbert told *The Bridge*:

*“This is quite a long story. This footage was a news story that ran after Dylan’s show in Pittsburgh in 1980. I phoned KDKA News department in Pittsburgh and was told very forcefully that the footage was destroyed in a flood in the news storage basement some years ago, and that any remaining*

*footage was removed to a warehouse that was also flooded by the Allegany River, and thus was unobtainable. She was so forceful that I couldn't help myself but answer back, 'well, that being the case, let's go find it anyway.' She was so taken aback that she referred me to their archivist, who found the catalogue number for it and began a search. This resulted in a call three weeks later from the archivist, telling me the footage was isolated in a warehouse by the river, but there were '200 boxes of tapes and thus would be too much trouble to try and find the tape.' Of course, my answer was 'let's find it anyway.' Three weeks later, the archivist called me and said 'I've got it!'"*

Gilbert also revealed that it took “several months and a lot of communication” before Rubin Carter finally agreed to talk about his Dylan connections in front of a camera. All of the interviewees add fresh colour and detail to the Rolling Thunder and gospel years, Gilbert explaining: “Everyone showed a lot of happiness, passion and emotion for their experience with Dylan, and most of them seemed to have some pain associated with it as well.” The DVD project took a total of eight months to complete, including pre-production, filming and post-production. Joel Gilbert is currently planning a future Dylan documentary, but is keeping the project under wraps.