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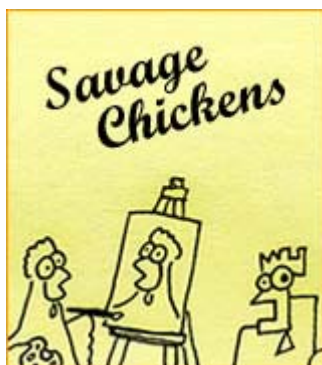
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Bob Dylan

World Tour 1966: The Home Movies [DVD]

(Highway 61 Entertainment)
 US release date: 1 September 2006

by Leigh H. Edwards

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Along for the Ride

Even though these home movies are of Bob Dylan, they're still home movies. And they're not even his. They were made on 8mm by his drummer (Mickey Jones) on the ground-breaking 1966 Dylan world tour.

Therein lies the blessing and the curse. We get to see a little of what it was like to be behind the scenes on that tour, from the vantage of another professional musician. But because Jones was also a fan, the strapping young Texan mostly just gives us tourist-style images of Dylan.

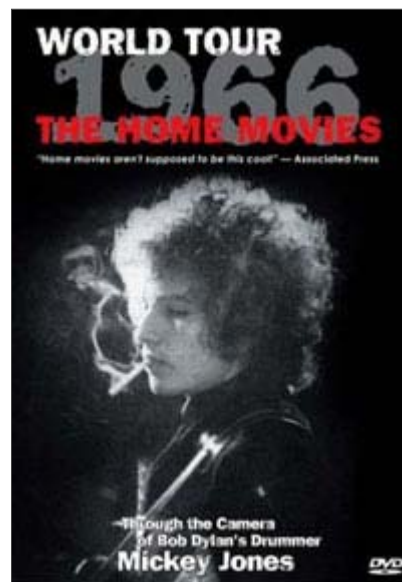
If any tour deserves some potentially extraneous footage, this one does. This global hop was, of course, the one where Dylan went electric. Though it was at the Newport Folk Festival on 25 July 1965 where Dylan first shocked audiences by adding an electric rock set to his folk music performances, this is the tour where he tried to take that innovation around the world. The one where he outraged his folk fans who insisted he was "the voice of their generation" and that he had betrayed them with the boom of the guitars and drums.

Jones, as many others have before him, notes that Dylan was "evolving" as a musician and serving up some of the best, most influential rock ever delivered, but his audience just wasn't ready for that. They wanted the troubadour who had headlined the folk revival and given them protest songs they believed in. What they got instead was a sphinx who wanted to go his own way; a man who was feeling more at home with blues-based electric rock. Dylan was booed around the world, and subsequently, changed the face of rock.

This important intervention in popular music has been documented before. Dylan cut his film version of the 1966 world tour, using D.A. Pennebaker's footage, as *Eat the Document* (a bootleg version of which has circulated widely enough for people to know that Dylan is as iconoclastic, cantankerous, smart, and snarky a filmmaker as he is a singer and songwriter). It's an anti-film; shaky, free-flowing, incoherent, stream of consciousness with less pay-off than one would hope. As Jones says here of that film, "no one knows what's happening half the time." Of course, Dylan likes it that way. And then there's Martin Scorsese's recent recut of that plus some other interview footage, *No Direction Home*. There, we get more recent Dylan actually trying to be...coherent.

So what does this new DVD release bring to the party? Well, tourist reels. Silent ones at that. Dylan tribute band Highway 61 Revisited provides covers of songs the band would have been playing had you been able to hear them in the footage. There's Bob on stage doing his acoustic set to the rapturous delight of audiences, and of Jones.

There's a stage hand holding Jones's shaky camera for the second, electric set, where Dylan is



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joined by Robbie Robertson and the group that started off as “the Hawks,” but as Jones explains in talking head interviews and voice-overs, came to be known as “the Band” because so many newspaper articles slammed the sacrilegious set for being loud, electric, and somehow a betrayal to Dylan’s fans. It was all great, reporters wrote, until “the Band” came out.

Less interestingly, we see footage of arrivals and departures from airports, and visits to tourist destinations in Hawaii, Australia, and Europe. While it can be amusing to catch glimpses of Dylan banging around old castles and generally being cool and ironic, while he’s the anti-tourist, Jones is not. And Jones is the one controlling our view. We never get close enough to Dylan to learn anything new about him. Instead, we get a lot of Jones, an affable presence, no doubt, but he doesn’t offer any insights.

Jones, who later gained fame as an actor on shows like *Home Improvement* looking like a biker version of Grizzly Adams, pounded his bass drum into history that year. A Texan making a living in LA drumming for acts like Trini Lopez, Johnny Rivers, and, after Dylan, Kenny Rogers, Jones was a fan of Dylan’s before the bard asked him to join his tour, saying: “You’re my favorite rock ‘n’ roll drummer in the world.”

Even today, Jones still seems shocked by that statement. It seems probable that Dylan liked Jones’s aggressive rock with its country influences. So his use of Jones on this tour is interesting historically as yet another example of how Dylan helped spark interest in country rock. It would have been compelling to hear more about those connections. In one DVD extra, Jones interviews friend Charlie Daniels, who played on some Dylan recordings because of Columbia producer Bob Johnston, and Daniels talks knowledgeably about Dylan’s interest in country music on the *Nashville Skyline* album, which is helpful.

Another DVD extra, an interview with sound man Richard Alderson, is also more illuminating than the documentary itself because Alderson talks about the logistical difficulties he encountered when making a new sound system for the electric set. He also ruminates on how Dylan was so much a product of his Greenwich Village scene.

In the documentary itself, we learn perhaps too much about Jones’s background, musical influences, and career. Obviously, we want more Dylan. Most of the over hour-and-a-half documentary is dominated by Jones being interviewed, in talking-head style, about his experiences of the tour and of Dylan, and at times one would also have wished for more of the tour footage. Some of this devolves into rather generic accounts of tourist destinations.

Also troubling is how the fandom tone seems to win out when we see, from time to time, the man interviewing Jones, Joel Gilbert, the documentary’s director. He, too, has a very affable presence, he’s clearly dedicated to Dylan’s music and career. But the fact that he’s the lead singer of the Dylan tribute band providing the music for this venture, the fact that he’s clearly trying to look like Dylan, and that fact that the DVD clearly states it is not in any way associated with Dylan itself, provides some cause for worry.

Fandom is not to be dismissed, because the cultural work fans do is illuminating and community-building. So I would not want to criticize these men too harshly. But the documentary is not what you would hope for, i.e., illuminating socio-historical commentary of an important moment in popular music. Instead it is, for the most part, a slight bit of behind the scenes footage parlayed into a very beefed up version of fans or journeymen musicians talking Dylan. You hear what it was like for a musician on his tour, but you don’t hear enough broader cultural context or enough Dylan specifics.

To be fair, the one place where Jones does try to make an intervention is in reference to a much-debated bit of Bob lore. At the Manchester Free Trade Hall concert in England on 17 May 1966, what Jones described as “the day Dylan changed rock,” as the crowd booed the electric set, a fan yelled out “Judas”, the audience applauded, and someone said “Play F-ing Loud.” Scorsese and others have insisted that that someone was Dylan. In *No Direction Home*, Scorsese tries to edit the sound and image to make it seem that way. Jones points out that Scorsese’s footage is out of sync, and he insists that Dylan didn’t say that, and, as he argues, he would know, because he was there and Scorsese wasn’t.

Jones doesn’t know who said it, but he theorizes that it must have been a British roadie, judging from the accent. He insists that cursing wasn’t Dylan’s style, and while he would joke at the crowd in response to catcalls, he wouldn’t say that. Alderson concurs that Dylan didn’t say it, and he’s the most believable witness. Having debunked the popular history, however, Jones doesn’t have much else to say about it and none of the other talking head musicians do, either. The bottom line is that if Dylan didn’t say that, one would have to look elsewhere for a trailblazing, anthemic moment of punk attitude.

If you’re obsessed with Dylan, you might glean some tidbits of the quotidian kind here. If you’re interested in more substantial footage of Dylan and more substantive discussions of

how he fits into the welter of '60s music, you would do better to turn to Scorsese.



Bob Dylan 1966 Tour, The Home Movies -- trailer

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