

Bob Dylan Revealed DVD Review

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"Aren't you the new me?" Bob Dylan questions Patti Smith, quick-witted as ever, in Bob Dylan Revealed, a DVD released on May 1, 2011, by Highway 61 Entertainment/MVD Visual. Put forth into the world in conjunction with Dylan's 70th birthday this May, the DVD informs us that his career has now spanned five decades. But who was Bob Dylan in the 60s and who is he today? Not many can claim to have been called "the voice of a generation."

Bob Dylan never used conventional methods to do anything. Scarlet Rivera was stopped in the middle of a street in New York City when Dylan shouted to her from a car window, asking if she could play that instrument she was carrying, the violin, and so she became a main member of his band for the album Desire and its subsequent tour on a bus as The Travelling Circus That Time Forgot. A wealthy Japanese patron wanted Dylan to revive his older songs, so Dylan put bassist Rob Stoner in charge of a group of musicians that practiced in an old gun factory, thinking up new arrangements so that they could then perform Live At Budokan to an appreciative Japanese audience. When making the film Renaldo and Clara Dylan wouldn't tell his cast members who they were or what the plot was (resulting in a five-hour film). Drummer Winslow Watson recalls that Dylan never told his band members how he wanted anything played, just let them be spontaneous and then gave nods of approval or disapproval. Singer-songwriter Kris Kristofferson says Dylan "has so many sides he's round."

Drummer Mickey Jones, also one of Dylan's greatest fans, tells us about Dylan's first world tour with stops in London, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Sydney with Pennebaker filming each step of the way. In Denmark The Band visited Hamlet's castle, with its members intrigued as any group of typical tourists. Kids all over Europe (who'd studied English in school) knew every lyric of every one of his acoustic songs and sang along with Dylan at concerts. But at the Manchester Free Trade Hall in England on May 17, 1968 (nicknamed The Judas Show) acoustic aficionados disdained Dylan's new use of electric guitar. In Paris Dylan put up a huge American flag behind his band because so many French people disliked Americans.

After a motorcycle accident (which many feel was a cover-up for a stint in a drug rehabilitation center), Dylan made his 1974 comeback. Photographer Barry Feinstein accompanied The Band as they opened in Chicago and flew everywhere in their own private jet, and each band member had a fictitious name used when booking hotel rooms. Jimmy Carter, then governor of Georgia, invited Dylan to breakfast at his mansion and got along famously with him, and in Washington, D.C. Dylan visited a number of art museums, art being one of his passions.

The Rolling Thunder Tour of 1975 included Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Rob Stoner, Scarlet Rivera, Howie Wyeth and guest stars like Joan Baez. Dylan visited boxer Rubin Hurricane Carter (accused of, along with John Artis, killing four people in a bar and sentenced to 30 years for murder) in prison and afterwards wrote his famous song The Hurricane about him. The Rolling Thunder Tour travelled on a bus named Phyllis loaned to them by Frank Zappa, and its members wore white-face onstage "because I want you to hear my words, not look at my face." Joan Baez and Bob Dylan showed a genuine affection for each other and appeared dressed in identical mime outfits. Joni Mitchell was booed at a prison performance for Rubin Carter and accused Carter of not controlling his audience, but he told her he couldn't control them, they just didn't like her music and couldn't relate to it.

In 1975 Dylan became Born Again and later produced Slow Train Coming, which caused fans (ex-hippies on drugs) to turn away from him, although the famous song You Gotta Serve Somebody came out of that effort. Dylan was said to be fiery onstage but in

Untitled

his next album, Infidels, feeling used by the Christians, he reverted to his native Judaism. In 1992 he began his Never-Ending Tour, playing with greats like Neil Young, Eddie Vetter, Billy Idol and George Harrison along the way, and that tour continues to this day.

So who is, and was, Bob Dylan? The very man who did all of the aforementioned remarkable things. Winslow Watson says Dylan was almost like a religious figure to many, and that when he was in a room everyone waited to pick up what he was saying, even if it was under his breath. Dylan never sold as many albums as Led Zeppelin, retaining a cultish aspect to his works, but if you mention his name everyone knows who he is. Bob Dylan Revealed is certainly worth the viewing, and you'll probably replay this DVD many times again in the future!

Total Running Time: 110 minutes

Directed and produced by Joel Gilbert

With Bob Dylan, Mickey Jones, Rob Stoner, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Barry Feinstein, Winston Watson, Scarlet Rivera, Jerry Wexler, Rubin Carter, Joel Selvin, A.J. Weberman, Bill Dwyer and Al Kasha