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Bob's rock 'n' roll riot

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By 1964, Bob Dylan was so revered at the Newport Folk Festival that he freely walked the festival grounds with his girlfriend, Joan Baez, while randomly cracking a bullwhip. One year later, the festival whipped him back.

"The Other Side of the Mirror: Bob Dylan Live at the Newport Folk Festival, 1963-1965," just out on Blu-ray, shows both the rapid evolution of Dylan's swagger and style, and how the festival's acoustic-loving folk audience found its temper in 1965, when he dared to play with a full electric band.

As we see in the Blu-ray — one of several releases timed to honor Dylan who turns 70 this month, including a documentary called "Bob Dylan: Revealed" and the Blu-ray version of "Don't Look Back" — Dylan was still an optimist in 1963, but by the following year he was considerably more cynical and self-assured.

The folk contingent's growing dissatisfaction with Dylan is revealed in an interview with a teenage fan who, hours before Dylan's surprise electric performance in 1965, tells an interviewer, "He's part of your establishment now, so who needs him?"

So when Dylan shocked the crowd by coming out for his set not with a simple acoustic guitar and harmonica, but backed by musicians from the Paul Butterfield Blues Band for a rousing electric rendition of "Maggie's Farm," the set came to be seen as a betrayal, and was later regarded as a death knell for folk music.

Some have wondered over the years, though, how much booing really occurred, and if Dylan's new direction was really what inspired it. Al Kooper, Dylan's keyboardist for the set, has argued that the audience was booing the bad sound system and Dylan's shortened set. Director Murray Lerner believes that the crowd was showing its displeasure with Dylan's embrace of electric rock.

But Dylan's success ultimately quieted the naysayers. To Lerner, Dylan at Newport was nothing less than a seismic shift in the music of the time. "He deserves a lot of credit for branching out into new ways of using music to express yourself," says Lerner. "He was able to feel what the next step should be."

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