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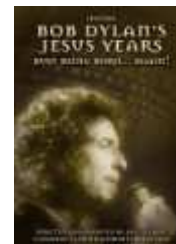
Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)

REVIEW

DVD Review: *Inside Bob Dylan's Jesus Years - Busy Being Born...Again!*

Written by [The Other Chad](#)

Published October 28, 2008



Inside Bob Dylan's Jesus Years: Busy Being Born...Again!, now available on DVD from MVD Visual, is a documentary produced and directed by Joel Gilbert. It focuses on the brief period (late '70s to early '80s) when Bob Dylan embraced Christianity and released a trio of Christian-themed albums. Fertile ground for a documentary, to be sure, but this film can't deliver the goods. Joel Gilbert botches the execution so thoroughly, I can't imagine even the most die-hard Dylan fans finding much reason to invest time in this.

"Contains no Bob Dylan songs, not affiliated with Bob Dylan," states the back DVD cover. At least they're up front about it. This is an unauthorized documentary, not necessarily a bad thing. But the completely objective perspective taken by Gilbert renders the whole project superficial at best. The film contains no overall thesis. Gilbert isn't making a case for or against the work produced by Dylan during this much maligned period of his career. He opts for a mostly informative approach, gathering a bunch of interviewees (some of far more interest than others) for two hours of talking head shots. An informative documentary, when done well, can be enlightening. But without access to the primary subject (Dylan himself), nor enough people with truly close ties to him, considerable gaps are left in the story.

Making matters worse, Joel Gilbert indulges in some very intrusive camera-hogging. It's quite unbecoming of a documentarian. This isn't a document of Gilbert's personal journey, though that might have improved his film. Through reading a his bio, I found that Gilbert "plays" Bob Dylan in a tribute band called Highway 61 Revisited. That isn't really talked about in the documentary, but it explains his Dylanesque appearance. He features himself prominently throughout the film, both on the soundtrack as well as on camera. Most of the songs are Gilbert originals, written and performed in a way that suggests Dylan on a very bad day. I doubt many viewers really want to hear a Dylan-wannabe while watching a film about the real guy.

While conducting his interviews, he cuts to frequent reaction shots of himself (mostly horribly lighted and with the camera and other gear in the shot) for no good reason. Worse still, there are shots of him walking around to various filming locations. Why? Because he apparently wants to be the star. The most jaw-dropping indulgence occurs with a sequence showing Gilbert driving to Muscle Shoals, Alabama. With his own music blaring away on the soundtrack we see dull footage of him behind the wheel, driving along southern highways. Perhaps he would've been better off making the film about himself and his own experiences portraying Dylan on stage.

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Comments

#1 – October 29, 2008 @ 11:34AM – Bryan

Hey man. I believe documentaries are supposed to document, not try to sway you from one side to the other. If what you say is true, then Gilbert "documented" the period. They are not supposed to be unobjective. Just because Michael Moore doesn't produced "documentaries" objectively doesn't mean everyone else has to.

#2 – October 29, 2008 @ 20:15PM – [The Other Chad](#) [[URL](#)]

Hey Bryan - that's a pretty narrow perspective. There are different types of documentaries and some of those are very much subjective. And not just Michael Moore.

What I say in the review is true - he poorly covered the subject matter, even from an objective, information-based approach. "Saved" and "Shot of Love", for example, are barely mentioned.

Thanks for the comment.

#3 - November 10, 2008 @ 14:21PM - A. Critic

To make matters worse, Gilbert actually released this exact same film, under a different title several years ago. "Bob Dylan: Rolling Thunder and the Gospel Years." It originally ran 4 hours long, so he chopped off the "Rolling Thunder" years and is looking to make some easy money, and hasn't improved upon the original release.

#4 - November 11, 2008 @ 08:31AM - Steads [[URL](#)]

[GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY:THE GOSPEL SONGS OF BOB DYLAN.](#)

[Gold Medal for Excellence Audience Choice for Best Music Documentary 2006 PARK CITY FILM MUSIC FESTIVAL.](#)

The best African-American covers of Dylan songs since Jimi Hendrix. --International Herald Tribune

"This DVD overflows with interest, and, more importantly, with music." -Michael Gray, author of The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia and Song & Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan.

Interviews with Dylan musicians: Jim Keltner, Spooner Oldham, Regina McCrary, Fred Tackett, Terry Young, Mona Lisa Young, and producer Jerry Wexler

Participating artists: Bob Dylan, Shirley Caesar, Chicago Mass Choir, Dottie Peoples, Aaron Neville, Sounds of Blackness, Helen Baylor, The Fairfield Four, Great Day Chorale, Arlethia Lindsey, Mighty Clouds of Joy, and Rance Allen.

Commentary by: Paul Williams and Alan Light

This musical documentary premieres 1980 footage of Bob Dylan performing "When He Returns," the first archival performance released from this important era.

Amazon.com Editorial Review

Gotta Serve Somebody - The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan is all about redemption. That's apparent enough in the music, where the struggle between sin and salvation is inherent in the tunes that are interpreted here by a host of superb gospel artists. But in a larger sense, the very existence of this DVD (and the Grammy-nominated CD that preceded it in 2003) can be viewed as redemption for Dylan himself, who weathered another controversy and emerged, if not triumphant, then certainly vindicated. When he plugged in an electric guitar in 1965, he was labeled "Judas" by the folkie faithful; ironically, when he turned to Jesus some 15 years later, proclaiming himself born again and releasing *Slow Train Coming* and *Saved*, the outcry was even louder. But once again Dylan has the last laugh, as now, a quarter of a century after the fact, it's clear that the material on those recordings was his strongest not only since 1975's *Blood on the Tracks* but perhaps since his '60s heyday. The quality of the songs lies in what Jerry Wexler, co-producer of the two Dylan albums, describes as the "immaculate funk" of the music, and especially in the heartfelt simplicity (especially by Dylan standards) and emotional directness of the lyrics; clearly, that's what attracted great gospel singers like Shirley Caesar (singing "Gotta Serve Somebody," the most recognized song on the two Dylan albums), Dottie Peoples (a powerful version of the beautiful "I Believe in You"), the Mighty Clouds of Joy (a rockin', sanctified "Saved"), the Fairfield Four (the stirring, a cappella "Are You

Ready"), and the angel-voiced Aaron Neville ("Saving Grace") to this project. We also get Dylan himself, performing "When He Returns" at a 1980 concert, along with an animated rendering of his original "Gotta Serve Somebody." Hallelujah, y'all. --Sam Graham

Bob Dylan's Gospel songs, widely reviled when new, have steadily grown in stature and acceptance over the years. Here in the hands of Gospel greats, likely the folks best suited to do them, they come up stronger than ever. Strong recommendation. Much better and more gripping than I expected. -Sing Out!

Directed by Michael B Borofsky
Edited by Christine Mitsogiorgakis
Jeffrey Gaskill Executive Producer

Featured Performances:

Every Grain of Sand (Arlethia Lindsey)
When He Returns (Bob Dylan)
Solid Rock (Sounds of Blackness)
Gotta Serve Somebody (Shirley Caesar)
I Believe In You (Dottie Peoples)
Saving Grace (Aaron Neville)
What Can I Do For You? (Helen Baylor)
Are You Ready (The Fairfield Four)
In the Garden (Great Day Chorale)
Saved (Mighty Clouds of Joy)
Pressing On (Chicago Mass Choir)
When He Returns (Rance Allen)

Bonus Features include: Animated video to -Bob Dylan's original GRAMMY® -winning, "Gotta Serve Somebody."