

Busy being born again

The production quality is Christian cable TV, but *Inside Bob Dylan's Jesus Years* has revelations about the born-again Bob. By Mick Farren.

Bob Dylan

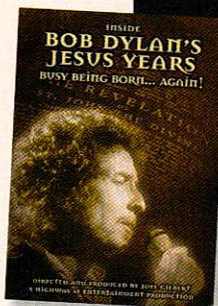
★★★

Inside Bob Dylan's Jesus Years

WERNERWORD

NO ROCK star ever took greater delight in blindsiding his audience than Bob Dylan. Some of his legendary turnabouts – his 1966 Stratocaster romance, or his embrace of country music – had a perceivable logic, but others appeared unheralded from left-field, not least his late 1970s conversion to fundamentalist Christianity and the albums *Slow Train Coming* and *Saved*. Dylan's own oblique statements were hardly enlightening. "They used to convince me I was a prophet. Now I come out and say Jesus Christ is the answer. They say, 'Bob Dylan's no prophet.' They just can't handle it."

Thus the DVD documentary *Inside Bob Dylan's Jesus Years* spawns a natural curiosity and, in all fairness, it throws light on the mystery, although mainly from reading between the lines. It is low budget, 40 minutes too long, and loaded with crudely banal religious imagery. Its director/



producer, Joel Gilbert, thrusts himself into every scene and, since he also fronts a Dylan tribute band,

he even provides the music. Interviews with bassist Rob Stoner and violinist Scarlet Rivera last bare minutes, but backup singer Regina McCrary talks at length and says nothing, as does Mitch Glaser from the bizarre Jews For Jesus organisation, while Dylanologist and garbage sifter AJ Weberman is elevated to expert. Pastor Bill Dwyer, Dylan's Bible teacher at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship Church in Los Angeles, recounts how Bob, still in need of an audience, read biblical passages from the pulpit – especially the violent sci-fi of Revelation. The only voice of reason is San Francisco Chronicle rock critic Joel Selvin, who gives crucial cultural context.

The documentary finally comes alive when the late Jerry Wexler describes his production of *Slow*

Train Coming and recalls his wry rebuff of Bob's attempted evangelism. "Bob, you're dealing with a 62-year-old Jewish atheist. Let's just make an album." Equally unresponsive are the angry fans emerging from a series of 1979 shows at Bill Graham's Warfield Theatre in San Francisco after Dylan had subjected them to an entire show of hell-fire gospel. At the same show Graham took Glaser out to his Rolls-Royce, and demanded to know what had made Dylan the way he was, but Glaser had no coherent answer.

The accidental strength of *Inside Bob Dylan's Jesus Years* is that the tedious testifying of Glaser, Weberman, Dwyer, and McCrary creates a fascinating picture of the unquestioning, seemingly irrational certainty of the born-again. Joel Gilbert is too much of a fan-boy to suggest Dylan was either stone crazy or emotionally exhausted from the strain of being Dylan when he surrendered to the cocoon of Jesus, but mercifully for the rest of us, Bob decided his salvation lay in music.



Arctic Monkeys

★★★★★

At The Apollo

DOMINO

Not a bog-standard 'Live in Manchester' fandango.



"This is our last gig," teases Alex Turner from the stage in Manchester last Christmas, full in the knowledge,

surely, that this package would follow his Last Shadow Puppets side project and ensuing speculation about the Monkeys' future. The DVD itself segues with the LSP's cinematic '60s vibe. Shot on Super 16mm film, it is a homage to the Nouvelle Vague and Italian neorealism. Glacial panning shots across the stage present a sumptuous tableau of shadow and static detail – total Visconti – while Godardesque split screens turn between-song banality into intrigue. The Monkeys are, helpfully, ice-cool-looking, but sonically on fire. Turner, even in a V-necked jumper and thrashing furiously, never breaks sweat. The fans, whose unsightly ravings so often hog the limelight, are glimpsed

rarely, as a distant ripple of light. Supremely directed by Warp's Richard Ayoade, the film is forward-looking – the set's new tunes are presumably among those being recorded with Josh Homme in California.

Andrew Perry

The Police

★★★★

Certifiable

CHERRYTREE/A&M

Reunion tour souvenir CD/DVD. Also available – why? – on futuristic Blu-ray.

Recorded at River Plate Stadium well into their 2007 reunion tour, *Certifiable* is technically faultless, the track-listing nearly impeccable (the DVD version throws up the question of why a tender *Wrapped Around Your Finger* was omitted from the CD in favour of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*), and the legendarily rancorous band members even share the occasional smile. The decision to strip everything back rather than indulge in fripperies such as backing singers (as on their final pre-split tour in 1983)

was the correct one, too, but a feud-less Police is a slightly dulled Police, summed up by the wholly inappropriate chirpiness afforded *Don't Stand So Close To Me*. You may wish to remember why you were there, but few will be annoyed that they missed out.

Andy Fyfe

Elton John

★★★★

The Red Piano

UNIVERSAL

His Vegas spectacular, plus a behind-the-scenes and tantrum-free documentary.

"They say Las Vegas is where musicians go to die," Elton smirks during an off-stage interview. "There had never been a real rock'n'roll show in Vegas since Elvis Presley. But I like a challenge." In February 2004, *The Red Piano*, Elton's glittering greatest hits show, began a 200-night residency at Caesars Palace, "The ex-home of Celine Dion," as Elton informs his audience before mischievously referring to the Canadian diva as "that skinny bitch!" Directed by

photographer David LaChapelle, it's a show that delivers the razzle-dazzle Vegas audiences expect, albeit with tongue in cheek. There's a giant phallic inflatable banana with two cherries for balls, and a 120ft by 40ft video screen playing footage of a near-naked Pamela Anderson pole-dancing to *The Bitch Is Back*. But amid all this frivolity, Elton is quite serious when singing his deepest songs: *Rocket Man*, *Tiny Dancer* and the finale, *Your Song*. If the challenge of *The Red Piano* was to 'do' Vegas without succumbing to it, he succeeded.

Paul Elliott

The Flaming Lips

★★★★★

Christmas On Mars

WARNER BROTHERS

Wayne Coyne's skewed, Red Planet-set sci-fi.

One always felt the Lips had a feature film in them, and now here's an 86-minute, mostly black-and-white fantasy starring band and various pals. A claustrophobic, at times

trippy conceit, broadly redolent of various '50s B-movies and Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, it took Coyne and co seven years to make, not least because most of the sets were hand-built in the singer's backyard. Lips multi-instrumentalist Steven Drozd is Major Syrtis, a man out to celebrate the December 25 birth of the first child on a newly colonised Mars. He has to contend with his nominated Santa's suicide and visions brought about by a broken oxygen generator. Can the benevolent alien (Coyne) save the day? Funny, sexy and gory, COM cements the Lips' place as purveyors of compelling weirdness. A Delia Derbyshire-like soundtrack adds to a winning package.

James McNair

