

DVD Review: Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries

BY IAN STURGESS ON APR 24, 09 12:00 AM IN DVDS

Not the work of the Zim, but a fascinating portrait of what it's like to spend the best part of five years in the inscrutable bard's company.

Winston Watson went from nowhere to become Dylan's drummer in the early 90s, playing more than 400 shows all over the world including Woodstock '94 and MTV Unplugged.

With insight and humour, Watson presents the life of the working musician with all its highs and lows - on the one hand getting to play with a legend every night, travelling the world in comfort and raising his personal profile; on the other, suffering the heartbreak of being away from his wife and kids for months at a time as his marriage suffers, and the insecurity of never knowing whether he'll get the phone call inviting him on the next set of dates.

Watson's tenure in the band starts in a bizarre fashion with a pal of his vacating the drum stool and persuading Dylan to give Winston a try. So, while doing his day job as an electrician, he gets a call from his buddy telling him to get on a plane as he's playing with Bob Dylan the next night.

He arrives, struggles to find the venue and hook up with the rest of the band, and eventually finds himself thrust onstage playing along with Dylan's other drummer, ex King Crimson veteran Ian Wallace, from whom he has to take all the cues not knowing the set. This suitably vague beginning (he's never officially told he's now in the band) sets the tone for Winston's time in the group. Dylan is typically enigmatic with mindreading seemingly high on the list of attributes his sidemen need to possess.

Communication with the boss is fairly minimal - the odd chat in a coffee shop, a few cryptic words in rehearsal - but Dylan isn't slow to admonish Watson for overplaying at one show, calling him in the next day and asking, "Winston, where were you last night?"

Clearly valued by Bob, although rarely complimented, Watson enjoys the ride until Van Morrison makes some snide post-gig remarks to Dylan about his drummer within Winston's earshot.

Then the next phone call never comes and Watson philosophically goes back to being an Arizona sparky after rubbing shoulders in dressing rooms with rock royalty such as George Harrison, Neil Young and the Stones. With lots of tour and stage footage, this is an insider's view of both Dylan and life on the road, with a poignant rags-to-riches-to-rags subplot.