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As a child of the '60s, Bob Dylan has been a huge part of my life.

My first 45 records were Dylan and Motown. I bought my first book about Dylan when I was in middle school. And my first Dylan concert was one of the biggest thrills of my life.

Over the years I've seen him perform six or seven times, and always was wowed by what an incredible band he put together. Even in his brief Christian phase, Dylan's bands were astonishing.

One of my keen regrets as we wind down the last days of this paper is that I never did a piece on Winston Watson, the Tucson-based drummer who played with Dylan for five years in the 1990s. I saw Watson play at Club Congress during one of the big anniversary celebrations, but I was shooting video and somehow never made contact with him.

So when I got home Monday night and discovered a copy of the DVD, "Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries: Drummer Winston Watson's Incredible Journey," sitting on my doorstep, I felt like I might finally get the chance to hear the stories of one who had been there with the road master.

Watson evidently kept a running diary of his road experiences as part of Dylan's band, from the time he got a call to fly to the Midwest to join the band the next day, with no one there to pick him up or tell him where to go, through the rather unceremonious split from the tour he feels was instigated by Van Morrison.

Watson also brought his consumer video camera on the road. His footage, historic video and stuff shot by fans comprises a lot of the visuals for the film.

Naturally it's a slightly drummer-centric view of Dylan's touring life. And if you're looking for an "I was Dylan's buddy" kind of tell-all thing, this ain't it. But it is a fascinating glimpse into

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the touring life of a mysterious American musical icon that shows both how revered Dylan is and how lonely his fame has made life. Not that the word "lonely" ever comes up, but when you see Dylan in the center of crowds of the likes of George Harrison, Neil Young, Tom Petty, Levon Helm and others, they all look to be having a great time while he just looks like he's been there, done that.

What we do learn about Dylan from this is what a consummate bandleader he is, how carefully he chooses his sidemen, and how while he may say little to them, in his economy of gesture and phrase he speaks volumes to those players. Basically the players are on one bus and Dylan on another. Not that there isn't some "hang time" with him along the way, but there's clearly a boss/worker vibe to it.

And it is work. Few performers have a songbook as thick as Dylan's, and fewer still juggle so vast a repertoire on a nightly basis. On top of that, as anyone who's seen Dylan over the years can attest, Dylan's road show arrangements almost always are a vast departure from their recorded counterparts.

One could whine about the production values of the film. It's not a high budget production. But the first 60 minutes of this 95-minute film are so packed with wonderful stories of the band, the road and Watson's life that you can easily forgive the hokey green screen transitions. Even so, it could still stand to shave of the bulk of the last 25 minutes of the film.

The stuff of Watson playing with Alice Cooper and Warren Zevon is great, but the hype of him now playing with the Dylan cover band Highway 61 just seems like a bad way to end the film. Even so, I'm grateful to Watson for giving an inside look at the music making of an American original, and even more so to the filmmakers who recognized the anecdotal gold mine that Watson's memories represent.

Grade: B-

1 TOTAL COMMENT

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21 hours, 34 minutes ago



I saw two shows from the Slow Train Coming tour and the band