



Down in the Flood

[Bob Dylan & The Band](#)

Sexy Intellectual - SIDVD571 (DVD)

Available from [MVD Entertainment Group](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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A word or two about the task of the critic if I may (or even if I mayn't; I'm arrogant). Though many of us writers are full of ourselves without warrant, the critic's only job, when all is shorn of errant nonsense, is that of 'consumer advocate', no matter what any may claim to the contrary. That's all we are. No, really. The film oeuvre may have its poets, but the music world does not, not that I've read, and so our function is to inform readers that their hard-earned and limited shekels are better spent on **this** rather than **that**. When we exceed that very simple monomania, we fuck up. Regardless, I received a few snarky comments on my recent critique of Les Krantz's *The Beatles—Their Golden Age* ([here](#)), darts and arrows which I deigned to ignore because answering would've been fruitless and I suspect the complainants haven't even seen the disc, but I hope those readers are perusing this, my reply herein contained.

When you enter any fray as an artist, you're doomed to ceaseless comparatives. Everyone whines about it—artist, agent, label, etc.—but catch 'em out of the public eye, over a beer or two, and that's all they do too, size up the competition, so screw 'em. But alongside the Krantz problem, a few fellow crits have lately hocked me thusly: "Hey, Tucker, what the hell's with this new worship of labels? Other than with ECM, you never used to do that!" Okay, that tends to be a correct rebuke per se but not well founded in view of modern complications: the entire music environment has shifted seismically since the old days, and it's hell on Earth to get a leg up in the market. Thus, when you run across a brand issuing exemplary product, that company needs to be lauded by name. Decades ago, this would've been crass; now it's entirely proper. And if the issuing agency continues to excel, then commemoration of the fact continues. Why? Well, for the same reason as lauding an individual musician or group: you want to see and hear more, doncha? Okay then, sing praises! Encourage 'em. C'mon, this kinda logic ain't rocket science, knowhudamean?

Thus, when you wish to see the ne plus ultra in music journalism on film, when you want to know where others are lacking, you need to go to Eagle and then to Eagle's successor: *Sexy Intellectual*. Only then will you be able to form a worthy opinion about the efforts of such as Krantz and ilk. After that, go ahead and write me; at that point, your analysis will be coherent.

This new SI release about Bob Dylan and The Band is the latest proof. It views the same way a good book reads, and the chronography of detail is a matter of tension and resolve, flowlines of data, side pools of anecdotalism, and all the needed literary devices—of course surfeited with images, music, etc. *Down in the Flood* takes Dylan forward from the decision to go electric into the formation of The Band and thenceforward. Not a minute's wasted, there are no idling peripherals, everything fits. You're being educated while entertained, and you're digging it immensely.

Robert Christgau, a *Sexy Intellectual* perennial, is a good deal less loony here than in other discs, while still mirror gazing and preening (ironically, his name doesn't appear on the liner credits), and then we first hear from the plethora of those who were there (Ronnie Hawkins, Mickey Jones, Garth Hudson, etc.) and then those who have scribed the times (Barney Hoskins, Sid Griffin, Tony DeCurtis, and so on), all the while treated to snippets from concerts and other era fumetti. In that fashion, one feels properly academically removed while intimate with the vibe and feel of the times. The insights from the musicians and from the writers gather the audience into the mind and craft of those who have provided so much pleasurable art, deepening an appreciation of matters that would never make themselves known via just the LPs and live gigs. There are a million and one such details in *Down in the Flood*, and the sum total has the effect of renewing or magnifying the enamorment you've long held for the work.

It's taken forever for rock and roll to take its place as a completely legitimate art form, a process that's not completed and probably won't be until long after the progenitors are dead, that inevitable cycle now getting all too near to closure, but the further we get from the origin points, the more incisive the analyses become. In *Flood* and all such SI product, gone are the fannish excesses, the lightweight superficialities, and the hideous business diversions, replaced by an oral scholarliness that reifies what was truly beneath the blazoned billboards, the radio blare, the teen-beat mags, and the social fritterings. In many ways, what *Sexy Intellectual* is doing, even more so than the hallowed Eagle forays of yore, is acting as a historiographer finally disciplining the old waves of revisionism and nostalgia into a body of knowledge that will ensure the formerly missing dimensions of baseline aesthetics necessary to a full appreciation of even such gigantic figures as Dylan.

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