

Classic Rock Bob

Musings about music

On Stage and in the Basement with Dylan and The Band

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One of the advantages of being a **Bob Dylan** fan is that you have your pick of Bobs to like over the course of his career. Do you prefer Folkie Bob to “Wild, Mercury-sounding” Bob? How about Country Bob and Saved Bob? Or Bitter Divorcee’ Bob, Grizzled Bob, and Riverboat Gambler Bob? Hell, you can even like [Christmas Bob](#). Not an easy trick to pull off if you’re a Jew!



Rick Danko, Dylan, Robbie Robertson, and Levon Helm on the 1974 tour.

My favorite Dylan period is '74-'76, which covers the “reunion” tour with **The Band**/*Blood on the Tracks*, The Rolling Thunder Revue, and *Desire*. That’s right before he decided to Serve Somebody, and concerts became hit-free hectoring sermons to the confused masses. I’m paraphrasing here, but during one show when an audience member shouted “Let’s boogie!” an unamused Dylan told the audience they could boogie on down to the pits of hell – because Jesus was coming back.

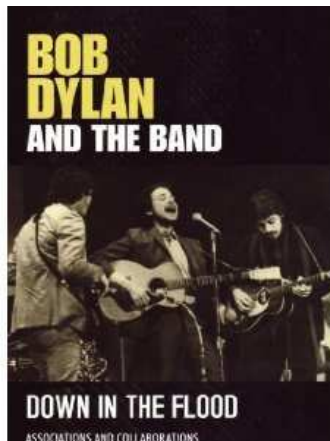
That 1974 reunion tour effectively capped off the working relationship between Dylan and The Band, save a brief collaboration at *The Last Waltz*. But there was never a better synergy both in studio and onstage between a solo artist and a “backing” group (and I use that term loosely – The Band certainly more than proved they could stand on their own).



Mickey Jones, Dylan, and Robertson on the 1966 tour.

When Dylan “went electric” on his 1966 tour, it was The Band (then called the Hawks) taking the catcalls from folkie purists behind the Bard of Hibbing. It so unnerved drummer **Levon Helm** that he soon opted out of live playing.

Yet, they would continue to collaborate occasionally, and most famously on the originally done-for-a-lark “Basement Tapes” of tunes which were either old or sounded old. They became the source of what is considered rock’s first “bootleg” recording (*The Great White Wonder*). And even the doctored “official” release of 1975’s *The Basement Tapes* is considered to be inferior to the actual raw recordings from Big Pink.



The recent documentary DVD *Bob Dylan and the Band: Down in the Flood* (Sexy Intellectual Productions, 114 mins., \$19.95) is a great exploration of this partnership – as well as each act’s own careers around those years.

Yes, it’s one of those “unauthorized documentaries” done strictly for DVD release. And yes, many of them over the years have suffered from crap writing, amateurish video production, and an overreliance on repeated, static visuals and an absence of actual songs or concert footage (usually due to prohibitive or costly licensing issues).

But *Down in the Flood* is a pretty impressive effort on all of those fronts, and includes not only music and footage, but contemporary interviews with your go-to Lion-in-Winter rock scribes and Dylanologists (**Robert Christgau**, **Anthony DeCurtis**, **Barney Hoskyns**), Hawks-shaper and early employer **Ronnie Hawkins**, ’66 tour drummer **Mickey Jones**, and even an actual, real live Band member – keyboardist **Garth Hudson** - who looks alternatively like a rock and roll Gandalf or Dr. Andrew Weil, most of his face completely shaded by a ball cap.

Rock Doc DVDs like this one and an increasingly large number of others are, of course, aimed squarely at the hardcore fans of these acts. The quality does vary wildly, but they are a sometimes overlooked addendum to the books, magazines, and articles on classic rock acts.



Dylan and Robertson at *The Last Waltz*.

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