



Yap, yap, yap. **Bob Dylan And The Band: Down In The Flood**, the latest of seven umpteenth million analyses of pop culture's greatest wordsmith, drowns in a soupy deluge of verbiage. More to the point, it's a series of seemingly unprepared statements by self-appointed historians, all punctuated with "uh" and assorted stammering variations thereof.

(Ellipses inserted to indicate pauses)

Exhibit A: "There is no way to overstate its significance...I mean (laughs) just whatever superlative you want to throw in there, you...you're perfectly, uh...entitled to do that. It couldn't have been bigger or more important.—*Anthony De Curtis*, Rolling Stone writer and editor for over thirty years; Grammy Award winner for "Best Album Notes," (Eric Clapton, "Crossroads," 1988).

Exhibit B: "The Basement Tapes began life...really, as a simple case of, you know...let's get together this afternoon, and maybe tomorrow afternoon, and the afternoon after that, and just play, and have some fun, you know...and drink a bit, and smoke a little reefer, and just see whether we can find some new...musical...language, or form to...to work in, I think."—*Barney Hoskyns*, British music journalist; author of "Across the Great Divide: The Band and America".

Exhibit C: "It was a complete mind-blower (laughs) at a time of this incredible ornate-ness, and this belief that...that...um, that the aesthetic value of rock and roll has to do with making it more complicated and-and, uh...and-and adding a bunch of instruments and-and uh...and hiring arrangers, and...and everyone expected him to do...well, what? We didn't know! What would it be? And instead, he says "go fuck yourself!" (wheezy laughter)"—*Robert Christgau*, Village Voice music writer for nearly forty years; self-proclaimed "Dean of American Rock Critics."

These are esteemed contributors, to be sure, and their authority on the subject matter is unquestionable. That said, these men seem exhausted by the strain of trying to come up with something fresh and original to say about a topic they've already devoted countless hours to examining and discussing (over a period of decades), both in print and on tape.

What's more, the interviewees appear too casually dressed, recorded in extremely makeshift settings; hardly the stuff of visual inspiration. Seriously, how can it be anything but self-

defeating when a documentary, purporting to illustrate the young revolutionary days of rock and roll, is narrated by a group of slovenly looking old men?!

Most disappointing of all is new interview footage of Garth Hudson, a founding member and easily the most musically accomplished member of The Band. As one of only two surviving Band-mates (the other being guitarist/songwriter Robbie Robertson; who, like Dylan, declined to participate), you'd expect him to be this project's ace in the hole, right? Unfortunately, between his black leather jacket, long gray beard, and the shadow from his baseball cap (which all but obscures his face), one gets a sense of watching bleak darkness! Hudson speaks cryptically in a (nearly inaudible) mumbling drawl, providing little in the way of revelatory information. I did several rewinds, in an attempt to catch what Hudson was saying, but the best way was to simply close my eyes and listen.

There are more satisfying interviews here: John Simon (who produced all The Band's studio albums), Ronnie Hawkins (the American rockabilly singer, whose Canadian backing group The Hawks eventually became Dylan's backing group, The Band), Sid Griffin (founder of seminal '80s roots revival band, The Long Ryders), and most importantly Mickey Jones.

What, you don't know Mickey Jones? You may not think so, but if you bought any popular '60s records, you've heard his drumming and singing, behind Trini Lopez, Johnny Rivers, and then as a founding member of Kenny Rogers and the First Edition. After the Edition broke up in 1976, Jones turned his attention to acting, and soon found his burly, red-headed "red-neck" look was just what Hollywood wanted, in spades. Perhaps his best-known performance was a 1996 Breath Mints commercial, where Jones played a Biker on a commuter train, whose breath is commented upon by a sweet little old lady. If you've never seen it, it's now available on YouTube; a rare thoroughly entertaining advertisement!

Jones is every bit as engaging here, relating how he came to be Dylan's hand-picked choice for the drum chair on that fateful 1966 Dylan/Hawks "electric" tour, which culminated in the now infamous Manchester Free Trade Hall show, where the non-acoustic folk singer-songwriter was heckled with the ultimate in-concert insult: "Judas!" There's more on this particular incident in a dandy featurette called "Driving The Band: Mickey Jones & Tour '66."

Presented in standard definition 1.33:1 full frame, **Bob Dylan And The Band: Down In The Flood** looks fine, though some of the clips betray their over-use (in countless other bios covering this territory) with varying degrees of dirt, scratches, pops and clicks. The 2.0 stereo sound mix is remarkably unremarkable, not doing especially much for the (truncated) song and concert clips featured, though (Hudson aside) the interviews and narration come through clearly enough. Unfortunately, no subtitles have been provided. The set's one other bonus

feature is quite a bit less exciting: a page-by-page bio, highlighting the credentials for each of the aforementioned contributors.

Sadly, I can only recommend this one for Dylan/Band completists. Perhaps someday, a long-forgotten, unmarked container in a dusty old attic will reveal an amazing cache of heretofore undiscovered concert footage or an uncharacteristically candid interview with Mr. Tambourine man himself. Short of that, I can only surmise this story of one man and his temporary backing band (two tours, two albums, and change) has pretty much been milked to death, as this well-intentioned but unimaginative documentary clearly demonstrates.

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