



Saturday, 15 September 2012

BOB DYLAN: Down in the Flood

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comments

Although, as anyone who is a regular reader of this online magaziney thingy will know, most of what I present here for your delectation has some direct connection to artists who appear (at least partly) on the Gonzo Multimedia group of labels. But other things are here only because they interest me (and because I hope they will interest you)...

Gonzo

Curated by Jon Downes

Music Review Beach Boys enjoy another moment in the sun - Boston Globe

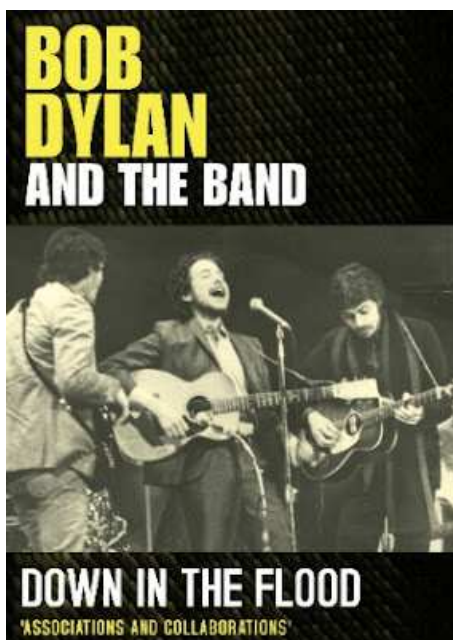
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I am unashamedly a Bob Dylan fan, and I was therefore very pleased when those jolly nice people at Chrome Dreams sent me another of their excellent documentary DVDs about the relationship between Dylan and his most famous backing group.

Now, if this is supposed to be a review, let's get the reviewey bits out of the way. Yes the documentary is excellent, yes the production values are great, and yes, once again I am amazed how the Chrome Dreams gang can get such an excellent result with scant access to any of the originals. It would be impossible anyway as

many of *The Band* are dead, and The Big Zim is notoriously unhelpful in such matters. There are appearances by an elderly and very bearded Garth Hudson (who looks like my old friend Doc Shiels) and the bloke who replaced Levon Helm on drums for the notorious 1969 world tour.

But the fact that I want to gloss over the reviewey bits in order to get to the meat and potatoes of what the video is about is because there is no need whatsoever to review it in a conventional sense; The Chrome Dreams documentary series is uniformly excellent, and I would have not expected any the less from this new dvd. Well done guys...

There are so many gems of information here, that it is difficult to know where to start. Probably the most important thing is regarding the revelations (to me at least) about the early days of *The Hawks*. I had an internet friend once (she is dead, sadly) who was one of **Ronnie Hawkins'** nieces, who once

company bringing you a wide variety of products from a number of renowned artists and record labels, largely spanning rock and pop music from the '60s to today, and the Gonzo catalogue includes 100% exclusive products that are unavailable elsewhere.



WE, THE BLOGGERS are a bunch of disaffected music journalists from beyond the lost horizon. And, like it says at the top of the page, we are still crazy enough to think that music is more than a disposable commodity useful to marketing departments across the world.

Do we think that if we chant loud enough we can stop it raining? Quite possibly.



THE BLOG? Well you are just going to have to wait and see, but I think that I can promise that it will be unlike anything else that you can currently read...

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▼ 2012 (1228)

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enigmatically told me that everything I had heard about Ronnie Hawkins was "probably true".

Well the sad truth is that, although I knew who he was, I didn't know much about him, and certainly didn't realise how influential he was amongst Canada's nascent rock and roll community; probably as important as Alexis Korner was to Britain's nascent R&B community at about the same time.

Yes, I knew that Levon Helm was the only American in *The Band*, but hadn't realised how he had originally been part of an Arkansas combo who went to Canada because gigs were plentiful (unless you were Canadian) who ended up backing Ronnie Hawkins (also an ex-pat Arkansasian) who replaced them one by one with native Canadians (who were presumably cheaper to hire).

I also didn't know about the pedigree of the Canadian members of *The Band*; Garth Hudson, for example, was already a well-known multi-instrumentalist with an impressive reputation who was originally brought in to tutor pianist Richard Manuel. This made what happened to Manuel in the end doubly poignant. According to *Wikipedia*:

"On March 4, 1986, after a gig at the Cheek to Cheek Lounge outside Orlando, in Winter Park, Florida, Manuel committed suicide. He had appeared to be in relatively good spirits but ominously thanked Hudson for "twenty-five years of incredible music". The Band returned to the Quality Inn, down the block from the Cheek to Cheek Lounge, and Manuel talked with Levon Helm about music, film, etc., in Helm's room. According to Helm, at around 2:30 Manuel said he needed to get something from his room. Upon returning to his motel room, it is believed that he finished one last bottle of Grand Marnier before hanging himself. Manuel's wife Arlie—also intoxicated at the time—discovered his body along with the depleted bottle and a small amount of cocaine the following morning. He was buried a week later in his hometown of Stratford, Ontario."

But the most important thing, to me at least, is the discovery that the accepted slice of rock and roll mythology surrounding *The Basement Tapes*; that Dylan and *The Band* hung out together, getting stoned and writing songs, while Dylan recovered from his motorcycle accident, just isn't true. Well not quite.

It turns out that Dylan/*The Band's* manager Albert Grossman bankrolled the whole thing. He put the band on a stipend, hired the eponymous 'Big Pink', and waited to see what would emerge. As no new album was forthcoming, and Dylan headed down to Nashville to record my favourite of his albums *John Wesley Harding*, Grossman got *The Band* a record deal in their own right, and did his best to recoup his losses by selling Dylan's new songs to the highest bidder. Which is why *The Mighty Quinn* and *This Wheel's on Fire* (amongst others) became massive hit singles for other artists, and a stolen copy of the acetate became 'The Great White Wonder' and kickstarted the whole bootleg industry.

Apart from this there is footage I have never seen before of Dylan/*The Band* doing a lacklustre version of 'The Mighty Quinn' at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1969, lotsa interesting stuff from the 1966 World Tour (including the infamous 'Judas!' incident), and footage I have never seen before of Dylan, and Johnny Cash.

Go and buy the bloody thing. You know it makes sense...

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