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'Bob Dylan and The Band: Down in the Flood': Oh, What a Time We All Had

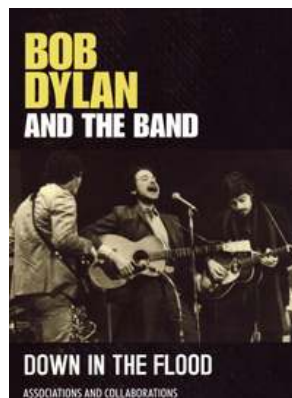
By [Jon Langmead](#) 4 October 2012

Early on in *Down in the Flood*, Anthony DeCurtis says, "It's really hard to convey to people who weren't around at the time the kind of significance that Dylan held." And in reference to the release of "Like a Rolling Stone", he says, "Suddenly it seemed like there were no more folk musicians." DeCurtis makes the event sound like a musical holocaust and in its way, this whole documentary is about paying tribute to a time when popular music and a handful of artists mattered to a lot of people like crazy. "There is no way to overstate its significance," he adds. "Whatever superlative you want to throw in there you're perfectly entitled to do that. It couldn't have been bigger or more important."

On Dylan going electric, Robert Christgau says, "Dylan was God. Jim McGuinn was not. Phil Ochs was not. Pete Seeger was not. Only Dylan; he was God. So God changed his mind. Yes, that made a big difference to all those who worshipped his divine presence." And even though you had to be there (I wasn't), the filmmakers do a perfectly admirable job of putting across, if not exactly what it was like, at least a solid approximation of what all the fuss was about.

They deal with a period of massive transformation for Bob Dylan, from roughly 1965 – 1968 when, as the story goes, Dylan went from radical folk god to amplified speedhead messiah to rustic troubadour. And it follows his intersection with The Band, beginning when they were still a bar band in Canada called The Hawks (it features some fabulous footage of a young Levon Helm playing drums) playing hopped-up R&B behind Ronnie "The Hawk" Hawkins and into their own re-invention as the eventual template for almost every bearded, would-be, Americana act who knowingly or unknowingly follow in their mudprints. The advertised focus is Dylan and The Band's 1967 collaboration that resulted in *The Basement Tapes*, the essential set of songs recorded in The Band's garage in Woodstock, but that's really only a small part of the film.

It was a period that *Isis* magazine editor Derek Barker calls "the most productive period of Dylan's career," and it returns to a time when new Dylan records arrived like meteors. It's hard to watch



Bob Dylan

Bob Dylan and The Band: Down in the Flood

(US DVD: 25 Sep 2012)

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this movie and wonder (with the exception of Jay-Z, maybe?) if an artists fifth (*Bringing It All Back Home*), sixth (*Highway 61 Revisited*), seventh (*Blonde on Blonde*) and eighth (*John Wesley Harding*) albums could ever matter that much to a good percentage of the record buying public again. Are artists with that kind of durability not being produced or do we just not care anymore? Could a musician ever be seriously thought of as some kind of a god again?

Ample time is also spent tracing The Band's formative years in the Toronto bar scene as well as Dylan's work leading up to his re-location to upstate New York and the post-*Basement Tapes* output of both. It touches on the tension over songwriting credit that arose within The Band between Levon Helm and Robbie Robertson with Band producer John Simon weighing in on the side of Robinson.

It also features some great interview footage with Nashville session musician Charlie McCoy, who recorded on *Blonde on Blonde*, *John Wesley Harding*, and *Nashville Skyline*, Dylan drummer Mickey Jones, who took Levon Helm's place on the first electric tour, and Band keyboardist Garth Hudson. *Down in the Flood* is a focused and surprisingly even-handed, almost fun, capsule of a fairly recent time that feels long gone all the same.

Rating: 

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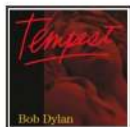
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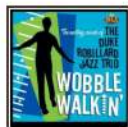
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