

# Leap In The Dark

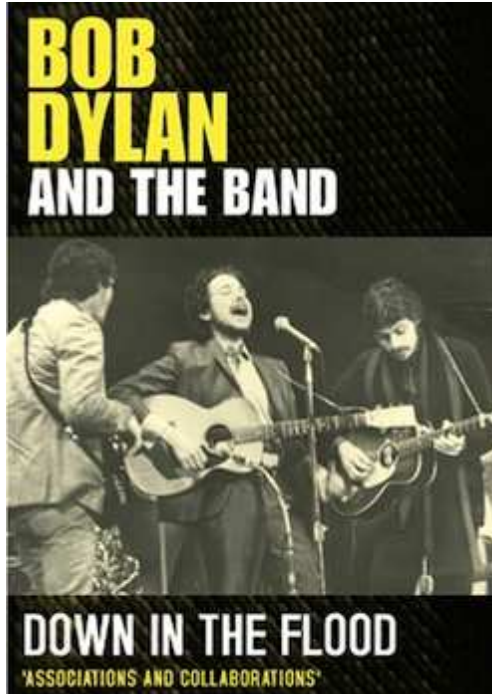
News, views and reviews from an iconoclastic Canadian writer.

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## DVD Review: *Bob Dylan And The Band: Down In The Flood*

There are some things we just naturally associate with each other in life and pop culture. Just as you can't think of ham without cheese it's almost impossible to think of Lennon without McCartney or Jagger without Richards. The latter being two of the most famous song writing teams in the history of contemporary pop music and the nucleus of their respective bands. While there is precedent for the association of two individuals either as a songwriting team or as a performance group in pop culture the marriage of [Bob Dylan](#) and [The Band](#) was something unique in the history of popular music.

Since the release of his first record in 1962 Dylan was a highly successful solo act claimed by the folk music community as not only the inheritor of Woody Guthrie's role as voice of the people, but seen by his audience as the guiding light leading the way to a better future. On the other hand, The Band, (Rick Danko, Robbie Robertson, Richard Manuel, Garth Hudson and Levon Helm) were the creation of rockabilly singer [Ronnie Hawkins](#). Although Hawkins was originally from Arkansas he carved out a career for himself in Canada and put together a band made up of four young Canadian musicians and a drummer (Helm) from his home state. Under his tutelage The Hawks, the name Hawkins gave to all his bands, learned how survive in bars and play a mixture of rock and roll, blues, rockabilly and R&B.



A new DVD, *Bob Dylan And The Band Down In The Flood*, from the [Chrome Dreams](#) label of Britain, being released in North America by the [MVD Entertainment Group](#) on September 25 2012, purports to take an in depth look at this unlikely marriage of folk and rock and roll. From their infamous tour of 1966, their hibernation in Woodstock, the triumphant tour in 1974 to their final act during *The Last Waltz*, this documentary picks over the roughly eight years Bob Dylan and The Band were associated with each other in painstaking detail.

Now, don't watch this movie expecting to see tons of footage of Dylan and The Band in performance as it was not authorized by either of

them. The movie is primarily made up of interviews with those who either had some sort of association with them or had written about them for the music press. There's Romping Ronnie (Hawkins) himself, [John Simon](#), the producer of their first two albums, 1966 tour drummer Micky Jones, and supposed authorities like Barney Hoskins (The Band's biographer), Sid Griffin (referred to as the archivist of *The Basement Tapes*) and journalists Derek Barker from *Isis* and Anthony De Curtis from *Rolling Stone*

The early part of the film splits between telling us about The Hawks and what Dylan was up to from 1964 until 1966 when he hooked up with the boys. It does a credible

job of recapping the basic facts of both their careers but stumbles for the first time when explaining how they found each other. The best they can come up with is that once the Hawks had split from Hawkins and began performing as Levon & The Hawks and that Dylan must have got wind of them somehow.

It goes from there to telling how Robertson and Helm came up to New York City to meet with Dylan and were basically hired on the spot.

I found it hard to believe Dylan would have hired a band sight unseen - or at least without checking them out somehow. Anyway, one thing that we do know for sure is that Levon wasn't thrilled with giving up being band leader and becoming somebody's backing band again and quit. Which is how it came about that Jones was hired as drummer. His main contribution to the film and the history is to confirm that during the 1966 tour they would play louder and louder as the booing became louder. He also recounts what he knows about Dylan's famous motorcycle accident as it affected him directly. After he and the Hawks had returned to the States from England he was still under contract to Dylan and was supposed to be going on tour with them again. However Dylan called him just after the accident to let him know his services were no longer required. According to Jones Dylan had told him he was in traction and all future touring plans were on hold indefinitely.

If you've seen any of the movies made about the 1966 tour, including the superlative *I'm Not There*, you're not going to learn anything you didn't know already. There's the usual speculations about drugs and Dylan burning out in answer to why the tour was cut short, but the movie doesn't really have anything new to add about what happened. They do show some footage from that time, but again its stuff that has appeared elsewhere first as it all looks and sounds very familiar.

When the scene shifts to upstate New York and The Band and Dylan settling into Woodstock the movie again stumbles out of the blocks in telling the story. Instead of anybody offering up any sort of explanation of what really happened to Dylan in his motorcycle accident we go



from Jones telling us Dylan phoned him to Dylan inviting The Band to hang out in Woodstock to jam and record. For a guy who was supposedly in traction the photos we're shown of Dylan at this time show him looking surprisingly spry. Just the fact he was able to play and record enough music for what turned out to be the double album of *The Basement Tapes* make you wonder how hurt he really was. However they just skirt over reality to get on with the myth making. It may seem trivial to you, but this sort of stuff drives me crazy and it makes me question people's credibility as "authorities" if they've never bothered chasing down the facts of the matter.

Ironically the one guy interviewed who comes across the best is not mentioned in the liner notes, Robert Christgau. Critic for almost every major publication in the US, including *The Village Voice* and *Playboy* he comes the closest to putting the relationship between The Band and Dylan in perspective. For after that period when they hung out together in 1966 they pretty much went their separate ways until 1974. However, that time was instrumental in changing the paths of both their

careers.

The final bit of the movie deals with the reuniting of Dylan and The Band. They talk a little about the one studio album they made together, *Planet Waves*, the tour of 1974 and then finish off with the *Last Waltz*. They don't really offer any special insights, or any new footage, about any of these events. In fact that's pretty much the case with the DVD all the way through. For those not familiar with the story of Bob Dylan and The Band it does a competent job of telling the history of their association and placing it in its appropriate historical context. While everything the film has to say about the subject has been covered before, this is probably the first time it all has been put together in one movie.

As far as Bonus features go the DVD includes biographies of the various people interviewed for the documentary and the entire interview with Micky Jones from which were drawn his contributions to the movie. It's been over 40 years since The Band broke up yet they still remain linked in the minds of many with Bob Dylan. *Bob Dylan and The Band: Down In The Flood* might have most of the facts about their on again off again nearly decade long association, but at the end you're still left wondering why it is we continue to make this association.

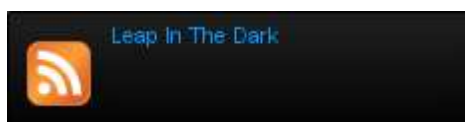
Is it merely the power of Dylan's name and his personal mythology that elevates anybody associated with him to the same near mythical status? Or were The Band that influential a group in their own right? While I have my own opinions on that matter, this movie didn't offer any compelling reasons for either argument. Somehow though, Dylan and The Band, who only released three albums together and really only toured together once, remain as iconic in pop music as others who have contributed far more. Don't get me wrong, I liked The Band, but rather than providing reasons for cementing their place in musical history, this movie left me questioning their significance.

(Article first published as [DVD Review: Bob Dylan and The Band: Down In The Flood](#) on *Blogcritics*.)

Photo Credit: Photo of Bob Dylan & The Band by Bob Gruen

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