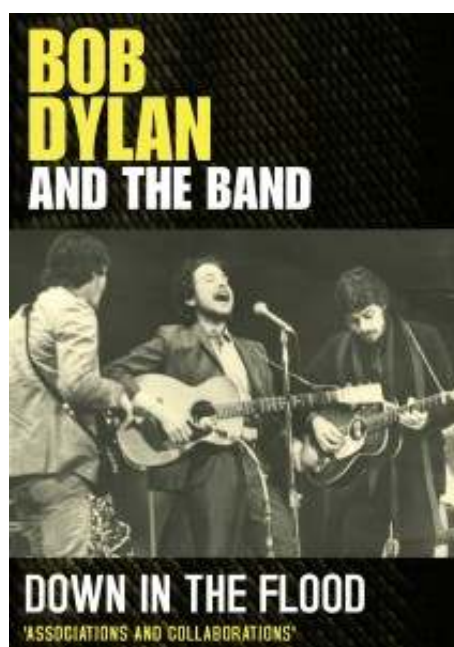


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Author: **larryjaffee**

(<http://www.rocksbackpagesblogs.com/author/larryjaffee/>)
27 Sep 2012



(<http://www.rocksbackpagesblogs.com/2012/09/just-call-me-judas/flood/>)

By Larry Jaffee

Okay, here's the blasphemy. Despite its nearly universal rave reviews, I must say that *Tempest* is a very overrated Dylan album, marred by his harsh-sounding voice that just ruins the overall experience for me.

I've always made excuses to non-believers for his voice, praising his phrasing, intonation, attitude, etc. Just can't do it this time. I've given it a chance with repeated listens (at least a dozen already), hoping that the supposed brilliance would finally kick in. I don't hear it. Sure the lyrics sound interesting (such as the murder ballad "Pay in Blood"), and there are infinite one-liners to keep the Dylanologists buzzing. But based on the foghorn that comes out of his mouth found throughout *Tempest*, maybe the never-ending tour has finally taken its toll, and it's filtered into the studio.

I eagerly anticipated *Tempest's* release, as I've done with every album since his 1997 indispensable return-to-form with *Time Out of Mind* when Dylan left his cryptic pen behind and allowed the listener to easily follow his ruminations over mortality, love and disappointment, backed

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by a crack band that knew how to play the blues.

Just when you thought it was impossible, the follow-up, *Love & Theft* (2001), topped it. *Modern Times* (2006), although thoroughly listenable (four stars), was a step backwards, as was *Together Through Life* (2009) (three stars), which was redeemed by a few tracks, making it ultimately a keeper, albeit one that I rarely have a hankering for return listens.

It's doubtful I will also come back to *Tempest*, which I heard a few times in its entirety on the free stream courtesy of iTunes (maybe a Steve Jobs last request) the week before its official release. I then found a retailer who jumped the release date, selling the standard and deluxe CD (no lyrics in a skimpy booklet; thanks Sony), as well as vinyl edition, a few days before it was supposed to be out. Here is a link for the album's **full lyrics** (<http://www.metrolyrics.com/tempest-album-bob-dylan.html>).

Tempest starts off promisingly enough with "Duquesne Whistle," which harks back to the type of vintage music Dylan plays on his "Theme-Time Radio Hour" satellite program. (Public service announcement: An hour-long segment of the always-entertaining program streams for free every day at 11 a.m.-noon EST on [Dylanradio.com](http://dylanradio.com), also found on iTunes radio under classic rock.) And it's also great to have readily available most of the Dylan catalog, including *Tempest*, on Spotify when I'm at work.

But his honk of a voice deteriorates on *Tempest* song after song, whose subject matters surely deserve further scrutiny. My favorite is probably "Narrow Way": "You got too many lovers, wailing at the wall/If I had a thousand tongues, I couldn't count them all..."

The roadhouse band is tight throughout the album, although Dylan's voice dominates the mix, and of course, that's the problem. My criticism is purely about his singing.

I remember seeing Merle Haggard opening for Dylan about seven years ago at the Beacon Theater, and thinking that even though the country legend was four years older than the headliner, his voice would do a better job on the entire set list.

Sorry but I rank *Tempest* just slightly ahead of the Christmas album, and this is coming from someone who actually likes the weirdness of *Self Portrait* and the strange covers on the 1973 *Dylan* album. I wonder why he didn't tackle any Beatles back then.

I much rather watch his London **limo ride** (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMdNlZRK59s>) with John Lennon, captured on the rarely seen *Eat The Document* than listen to "Roll On John."

Which opus would you rather hear: *Time Out of Mind*'s humor-filled, 16-minute "Highlands," a story about a diner encounter with a hip waitress, or *Tempest*'s 14-minute, 75-verse nearly unbearable title track about the sinking of the Titanic? I don't mean to sound heartless, but after suffering through the first few minutes, I couldn't help thinking "Drown already!"

Speaking of nautical matters, here's new Dylan product I highly recommend: a **new DVD** (<http://mvdb2b.com/s/BobDylanDownInTheFlood/SIDVD571>)

blackout-335/) by **Jeffrey Morgan**

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called *Bob Dylan & The Band: Down In The Flood*, piggybacking on all the hoopla associated with *Tempest*.

The documentary features new interviews with Rock's Backpages grand poobah Barney Hoskyns, organist Garth Hudson; Band producer John Simon; The Hawks' 1966 tour drummer, Mickey Jones, who insists that Dylan did not say to the band "Playing Fucking Loud!" after the balcony cry of "Judas" (as a reaction to Dylan going electric); Ronnie Hawkins, who assembled and tutored the Hawks and from whom they took their name; Dylan guitarist/Nashville session player Charlie McCoy; 'Basement Tapes' archivist Sid Griffin; *Isis* magazine's Derek Barker; and *Rolling Stone*'s Anthony DeCurtis.

Through rare tour footage, archive interviews and seldom-seen photographs, the DVD chronicles Dylan from *Bringing It All Back Home* in 1965 to the Dylan/Band reunion tour of 1974. What a rich period of material! The motorcycle accident, the Big Pink/Woodstock, NY basement recording sessions, the stripped-down feel of *John Wesley Harding*, the countrified *Nashville Skyline*, and the Dylan/Band record *Planet Waves*.

To recap, I don't mean to sound ungrateful about *Tempest*. I never thought we'd still get new music from him at 71. Dylan remains a fascinating artist who can't sit still. To wit, his latest trippy *Rolling Stone* **interview** (<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/bob-dylan-strikes-back-at-critics-20120912>). Roll On, Bob.

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One Response to Just Call Me Judas

September 27, 2012 at 9:46 am

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Noe Gold (<http://doctornoemedia.blogspot.com/>) says:

"You're a liar." That was Dylan's response to the "Judas" exhortation. Here's the thing: Dylan's voice has always been raspy, with the exception of the "Lay Lady Lay" days.

So I am not hearing the sub-par vocals that you are. I am hearing echt-Bob.

I'm lovin' it.

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