

Bob Dylan Reviews

The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia

by Michael Gray
Continuum Books (hardcover, 784 pages, \$40)
Grade: A-

Bob Dylan Live In Canada: A Concert History, 1962-2005

by Brady J. Leyser and Olof Björner
Trafford Publishing (paperback, 366 pages, \$60.83)
Grade: A-

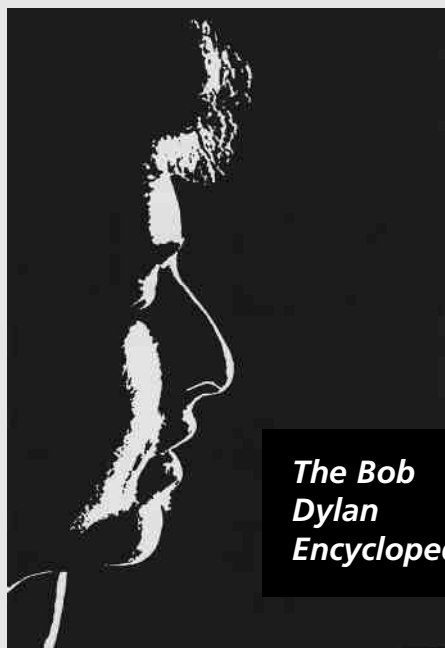
Erudite, idiosyncratic, witty and caustic — like its subject — Michael Gray's *The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* provides more than 850 entries on sidemen, songs, friends, family and more, reaching from "Aaronson, Kenny" (Dylan's 1988-89 bassist) to "Zimmerman Family, the." We find strong writeups on influences such as Blind Willie and Lonnie and Robert Johnson. A column on Sun Records' Billy Lee Riley tells us how often Dylan has performed Riley's compositions. A page on David Whitaker — who introduced him to Woody Guthrie's *Bound For Glory* back in Minnesota — has six paragraphs on Whitaker's subsequent life. Four well-researched pages on the traditional "Love Henry" (sung on *World Gone Wrong*) should delight ballad scholars. Nearly two pages contrast "Spanish Harlem Incident" with "Emotionally Yours."

"On The Street Where You Live" from *My Fair Lady* gets an entry since Gray (who previously brought us *Song & Dance Man III: The Art Of Bob Dylan*) feels three Dylan songs borrow from it. Paul McCartney's entry includes an unfinished lyric he, Dylan, and John Lennon penned in 1966. Gray's treatment of Joan Baez ("a slattern for punishment") parallels Dylan's in kindness. Regardless of whether you agree, his opinions make the reading all the more lively.

Among the entries, we find, for example, "Alvin, Dave," "Carroll, Lewis, echoes of," "Coopers & Lybrand," "co-option of real music by advertising," "guitars, Bob Dylan's, electric," "kelp" and "pseudonyms used by Dylan." *The Times They Are A-Changin'* receives a paragraph; its title track has seven. Musicians get partial discographies. As for an accuracy spot-check, Ian & Sylvia's eight-paragraph entry flubs one LP's title and another's date.

Thirty-two pages of black-and-white photos range from a 1965 publicity shot of Dylan with The Byrds to (on the same page) Hoagy Carmichael. The first edition of the tome includes a searchable CD-ROM of the encyclopedia.

Meanwhile, *Bob Dylan Live In Canada: A Concert History, 1962-2005* offers details of 119 Canadian concerts including setlists for all his 1974-June 2005 gigs. It also identifies, for example, 77 songs he has played only once in Canada, 11 he has introduced there and eight unreleased songs he has played a total of 25 times there. From the book's 18 indexes, we learn that "All Along The Watchtower" leads in number of Canadian performances



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(78) and times closing a show (27) — certainly a worthy choice, to my mind.

The 229 well-chosen reprinted articles (like Gray's *Encyclopedia*) don't whitewash "His Bobness." A 2005 piece opines, "It was as though he was unearthing ancient relics and bemusedly poking at them with a stick." In a 1964 interview, he remarks, "My singing style is a conglomeration of contradictions." There's even an account of his first mutually skeptical meeting with Levon (Helm) And The Hawks set up by Canada-born Mary Martin of his manager Albert Grossman's office. Ten pages of ticket-stub photos close the book.

— Bruce Sylvester

Modern Times

Columbia (82876-87686-2)
(CD+DVD)
Grade: B-

Enigmatically, Bob Dylan picks up where he left off with his last album (2001's *Love and Theft*) — this latest album being positioned as the third in a trilogy that started with 1997's *Time Out of Mind*.

Authentic Chuck Berry guitar leads chase cryptic lyrics through "Thunder On

The Mountain," the set's country-blues opener. Dylan's craggy but endearing voice pines spiritually for Jesus, lustfully for Alicia Keyes and apocalyptically for the world — and more — all in one song.

"Spirit On The Water" follows gently in a '40s swing mode. Dylan whispers these lovesick verses, hopelessly but realistically romantic.

Dylan borrows throughout from styles past and pinches familiar lyric passages, which are generously credited as his own; purists may be jarred to count the instances. Case in point is "Rollin' And Tumblin'," which is quite simply a lyrical rewrite; the music is the same as the well-covered blues standard.

At any rate things get back to greatness in a hurry, with "When The Deal Goes Down." Lyrically an ode to faithfulness itself, the first single release from *Modern Times* borrows from Civil War poet Henry Timrod.

Continuing the line of tales about relationships gone south, north, east and west, "Someday Baby" cribbs lyrics from Maceo Merriweather's "Worried Life Blues."

Modern Times grows stronger with its final cuts. "Workingman's Blues #2" harkens back to Jimmie Rodgers in title. "Workingman" is a beautifully delivered piano-based ballad. A timeless look at labor and economy, the song mirrors the ways of love, as Dylan ends up settling for less.

The crown jewel of *Modern Times* is the whimsical '40s jazz piece "Beyond The Horizon," an instant classic. Brilliantly kind and gentle, it sweeps over the listener like a late summer breeze at twilight.

A real stunner is the stark "Nettie Moore," a hymn about a lost maiden and a love measured by biblical proportions. "When The Levee Breaks" chugs along, possibly inspired by Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans.

The set closes with a striking coda that will keep Dylanologists picking out messages. "Ain't Talkin'" may be the statement at this point in time for the world's most famous Christian Jew. Just like life itself, Dylan's work here is defined by contradictions, musings and distractions along the way.

All borrowed bits aside, *Modern Times* is strong but does not stand in the top echelon of Dylan albums with *Oh Mercy*, *Blood On The Tracks*, *Time Out Of Mind*, or *Blonde On Blonde*. Still, it is well timed and comes on the heels of a ton of great Dylan issues and reissues. *Modern Times* has a momentum about it, and it capitalizes on it.

This deluxe issue comes with a four-track DVD that features videos to "Blood In My Eyes," "Lovesick," "Things Have Changed" and "Cold Irons Bound."

— C. Brian Jasper

1966-1978 After The Crash

Chrome Dreams (CVI5390) (DVD)
Grade: A-

Maintaining a music career that spans 45 years is a phenomenal accomplishment in and of itself. Maintaining a consistent high profile after all that time is even more remarkable. Yet, with an unceasing touring schedule, a new album and the recent documentary *No Direction Home* keeping him top of mind, it would be difficult to think of any artist, The Rolling Stones aside, who's as visible and vital as Bob Dylan continues to be.

Consequently, *1966-1978 After The Crash* makes for a timely addition to the volumes of Dylan-related offerings that already cram store shelves and Internet sites. The second in a series of critical commentaries analyzing various phases of his career, it is dominated mainly by talking heads and is noticeably short on actual footage and Dylan's music. Although there's enough archival material to appeal to Dylan devotees — video from his great comeback concert at the Isle of Wight Festival, as well as George Harrison's Concert for Bangla Desh, the Band's Last Waltz, the Woody Guthrie Memorial Concert and the Rolling Thunder Review — these snippets are of mostly questionable quality and fleeting at best.

Even so, there's good reason to recommend this effort. The experts — all U.K. journalists — are knowledgeable and insightful, allowing the video to sustain interest over the course of two hours. It cranks up the credibility by including exclusive interviews with several insiders — among them, musicians Rob Stoner, Bruce Langhorne, and Scarlet Rivera and close confidants and collaborators Jacques Levy and Al Aronowitz, both of whom have passed away since the making of this DVD. Still, the most intriguing — and amusing — insights come from snoop and self-proclaimed Dylanologist A.J. Weberman. Hearing the contentious exchange between him and Dylan is revelatory in itself, a rare opportunity to hear the bard as he actually bares his barbs.

— Lee Zimmerman