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Music DVD Review: Winston Watson - *Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries*

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Bob Dylan is many things to many people. What he is to most, undoubtedly, is a living legend. Despite being in his late sixties his *Never Ending Tour*, which commenced in 1992, thankfully continues to wind its way around the globe.

His last few studio albums such as *Time Out Of Mind*, *Love & Theft*, *Modern Times*, and this year's excellent *Together Through Life* have arguably included some of his finest work.

There has been a huge revolving cast of musicians who have experienced being on the road with the genius that is Dylan. Tales of sudden unexpected changes in, not only set lists, but keys, and timing abound. Working with Bob must be anything but dull or predictable.

Drummer Winston Watson was one of the fortunate who have been challenged by Bob Dylan to keep the ever changing time behind the music of the *Never Ending Tour*. The insight that such an experience can bring has resulted in the release of a DVD cataloguing this incredible journey. It was a trip that took in over 400 shows, from the tour's first gig in 1992, throughout the following five years.

It was a time that saw Dylan and his band of musicians circumnavigate the globe ten times. The DVD, *Bob Dylan, Never Ending Tour Diaries* opens the door on the world of Dylan on the road in the '90's, whilst revealing tantalising glimpses of the man behind the shades.

Firstly, it has to be said that Winston Watson comes across as a hugely likeable, amiable, amusing, modest, and entertaining man and it is his own character as much as anything that keeps this particular DVD very much on the tracks.

He tells of how he was suddenly catapulted into huge arenas occupying the 'best seat in the house' behind none other than Bob Dylan. It was a surprising choice as his self confessed 'busy and heavy' rock style was largely inspired by the likes of Keith Moon, and John Bonham.

When he received the call to join Dylan's band he assumed it was a joke but found himself flying through a terrifying storm in the hope that it wasn't. When he arrived he

found that there was no-one to meet him, no hotel had been booked, he had no stage clothes, and there was no set list to hand.

He was due on stage to play in front of the biggest audience of his life, with one of the biggest names that music has ever produced, in a matter of hours. He was merely advised to mimic the previous occupant and nervously took his place in front of 80,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial Park.

During the show Dylan kept looking at him and not surprisingly he began to feel rather uncomfortable. Just as Winston was wondering 'what have I gotten into here', Dylan approached him saying, 'you played great, see you tomorrow night'. It was the start of a five year trip through the working world of Bob Dylan.

Suddenly Winston was meeting and playing with the likes of George Harrison, Eric Clapton, Tom Petty, Jeff Lynne, Carlos Santana, Jerry Garcia, The Rolling Stones, Neil Young, and rather significantly for the latter part of the story Van Morrison.

After this sudden elevation Winston was back at home when the phone rang. On the other end was someone who he was convinced was pretending to be Bob asking him to join him the following January. Instead it turned out to be the genuine article and Winston was soon packing his bags and setting out once again.

As Bob hardly ever told him how he wanted him to play, Winston survived largely on his instincts. He grew to recognize the signs of sudden 'in song' key and timing changes and began to enjoy being literally on the edge of the hottest seat in town.

Some of the stories give a colourful insight into the complex character and world of Bob Dylan. He reveals how Bob had no problems with ego when having to go through customs in Israel in 1993 unlike another 'big name' star. He adds during the interview that assuming anything with Bob Dylan was always 'a big mistake'.

He tells of how Bob picked up on Winston's slight dip in form after a show in San Diego. Also of how he was stung and hurt by a misquote in a newspaper that had Winston saying "Dylan doesn't talk to me", when that was, in fact, far from the truth. Clearly they communicated well and Winston touchingly adds that when Bob smiles, "it is like a small hole in the clouds has opened up and the sun comes down".

Despite his obvious respect for Dylan as man and musician, he still talks candidly and openly about the times he spent with him. He describes the experience as being in the 'presence of greatness' and for us mere fans his diaries reveal many sides and signs of that very genius. This helps to make this DVD one of the better tour diary releases of its kind.

His stories are well told, amusingly and modestly recounted leaving you wishing you could spend time with him listening to more of these memories. One of the highlights for him was playing the totally unrehearsed "Leopard-Skin-Pill-Box Hat" with Bob and

guest Neil Young. Another has Dylan telling Winston "you make me feel confident out there".

There are many more engaging stories included. Watch out for a problem of identification when playing with Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and Neil Young which left Winston literally out in the street. Also there are behind the scene memories of the *MTV Unplugged* recordings and how the songs were chosen.

He tells us of how Dylan constantly rewrites lyrics and never used a teleprompter instead preferring to carry three huge volumes of his own work around with him. Also of how his set lists are often left blowing in the winds of constant change.

Unfortunately, like all things it was destined to come to an end. It all began to fall apart following a fateful meeting with Van Morrison. It's a story that understandably angers the amiable drummer even to this day. Sadly, Winston's marriage also buckled under the pressure of the constant touring.

When his time with Dylan ended Winston wrote a letter of thanks to the man himself whose observations on receiving the note are more than enlightening. Winston has subsequently played with Alice Cooper on his 1998 tour and also appeared behind the late Warren Zevon.

The interview is conducted by Joel Gilbert, of the Highway 61 Revisited cover band, who clearly has a million questions to ask on our behalf. Winston provides some excellent answers making the DVD a worthwhile addition to people wishing to gain a further insight into the mind of arguably the most important musician of a generation.

This 100 minute film tells the story of an unknown drummer who was plucked from obscurity to become part of the extraordinary travelling world of Bob Dylan. It is a story very well told indeed.