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- [Theatrical](#)
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- [Easter Egg Database](#)
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- [Feature Articles](#)

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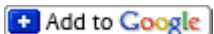
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Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries: Drummer Winston Watson's Incredible Journey

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List Price: \$14.95 [Buy now and save at [Amazon](#)]

Review by [Jeremy Mathews](#) | posted March 25, 2009 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

The Movie:

Imagine a movie about the Renaissance masters without a single shot of their artwork. Or one of Martin Scorsese's journeys through cinema that included no clips from the discussed films. That's essentially what you get with *Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries: Drummer Winston Watson's Incredible Journey*.

In the documentary, the very likable Watson recollects his at times very compelling story of an unexpected four-year stint drumming with the legendary Dylan in the 1990s. Listening to Watson talk about those performances, surprise songs and new sounds, it's hard not to want to, oh I don't know, *hear* them. Instead, *Tour Diaries* taunts us with clips of concert footage (much of which is fan-recorded) limited to Dylan stepping to or from the mic, while non-source music plays faintly in the background. The message from the filmmakers is this: We could let you hear what we're talking about, but we didn't want to shell out cash for the licensing rights.

I understand that the costs of the music must be restrictive, and some of it might not be available at all, but it is constantly distracting to leave it out. Another recent unauthorized documentary DVD,



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Composing The Beatles Songbook managed to include music from another legendary act to illustrate its points. Compounding matters, the sound mix buries some vaguely Dylanesque instrumentals by Highway 61, a Dylan tribute band fronted by the documentary's director, Joel Gilbert, and featuring Watson on drums.

Surely there are some of Dylan fans who have already heard all the bootleg Dylan concert recordings ever and don't need to hear the music, and those people will likely be able to look past its absence, along with Gilbert's awkwardly cheesy visual effects and sporadic shoe-horning of himself into interviews, to enjoy what is at times a quite entertaining piece, thanks mostly to the film's subject.

With a less likable storyteller, *Tour Diaries* might have proved completely excruciating. Fortunately, Watson is funny, charming and unavoidably relatable. He comes across not as an elitist rock star, but as an ordinary guy who wound up on tour with a musical legend.

While the film starts a bit slow with a rundown of Watson's background, the yarn about his unexpected first performance with Dylan is riveting. He essentially shows up at the hotel with no knowledge of where to go or what to do, and winds up onstage with Dylan with a setlist of songs whose live arrangements he doesn't know. While Gilbert fails to create much of an arc between Watson's arrival and departure, there are some good stories in there, about personal time with Dylan, the other legends with whom he shared the stage, and what life on the road is like. Anyone interested in this subject could do a lot worse than listening to Watson talk.

The DVD

Video:

The video quality on Highway 61 Entertainment's DVD varies greatly. The 16x9 video features Watson's fuzzy, noise-heavy home video footage, some artifact-heavy fan footage and other low-quality material. Some video is framed in a smaller, decorative frame within the screen, presumably to mask its lower resolution. Bad combing and other problems are still apparent in some footage. The video's appeal is definitely its insider feel, not its quality.

The interview with Watson is all done against designed, post-generated backgrounds, and the quality of the chroma-key isn't always up to the light that filters through Watson's curly hair. Distracting bright white outlines are quite common. Also, some of the background images are lower-than-screen resolution and appear blocky. Watson himself looks good, however.

The compression on the single-layer disc is generally acceptable, but some artifacts appear during lower light scenes and fade-outs.

Sound:

The disc features one competently mixed English stereo track. However, some of the editing is off. For example, after the

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opening music ends, the next song just kind of cuts in midway through. Watson is easy to understand, although there are a few slightly audible edit points in the interview. There disc has no subtitles.

Extras:

For its lackluster Special Features, the disc presents **two galleries**, one a collection of laminates (backstage passes) from Dylan's various tours, the other a photo album. The music abruptly cuts off without so much as is a fade at the end, but these will likely interest anyone intrigued enough to pick up the disc.

Oh paper, the highlight of the supplements appears to be the **soundtrack on mp3**, but as you may suspect, the generic Dylan-sounding filler music isn't worth owning. Making matters worse, the DVD producers didn't even bother to meta-tag the files, so anyone who wants to listen is suck with a series of files named "WW_NET_DIARIES_01," with no artist, album or track tags.

Final Thoughts:

While Watson's charming personality keeps the documentary consistently watchable, *Tour Diaries* doesn't dig beyond its collection of anecdotes to find a truly compelling character study. The lame effects give the filmmaking a decidedly amateurish feel, especially when Gilbert dissolves himself into the scene to ask a question. Watson shares some amusing Dylan tales, but there are better places to start if you aren't a die-hard. Basically, if you had to read this review to decide whether you wanted to check this disc out, it's probably safe to skip it.

Jeremy Mathews has been subjecting films to his criticism since 2000. He has contributed to several publications, including Film Threat, Salt Lake City Weekly, the Salt Lake Tribune, In Utah This Week and The Wasatch Journal. He also runs the blog [The Same Dame](#) and fronts the band [NSPS](#).

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