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TELL TALE SIGNS

& THE RIDE OF A ROCK-AND-ROLL FATHER

Dylan's "Bootleg Series" #8

◆ **TELL TALE SIGNS. INSTALLMENT 8 OF THE BOOTLEG SERIES.
Bob Dylan. Produced by Jeff Rosen. Columbia Records.**

By John Aiello

Even though a smattering of the selections contained in this three-disc set have already made the rounds between bootleggers at the four corners of the globe, none of those homemade copies could hope to come close to the stunning production work of **Tell Tale Signs**, the 8th installment in Dylan's famed "Bootleg Series."

When fans think of Bob Dylan's music, they most often think of the amazing body of songs the man has produced and the amount of time he has spent on the road: Except for an 8 year hiatus between the 1966 motorcycle accident and the 1974 world tour, Dylan has pretty much been performing live for nearly 35 years straight.

However, the tentacles of Dylan's art extend so much further than that. In addition to altering the way songs were written and the way that radio was formatted, he also gave birth to the phenomenon of the *bootlegger* (people who circulate pirated recordings in plain wrappers through the underground networks of the world).

Basically, there was such an insatiable appetite for Dylan's work fans could not wait for the next official release. Instead, they had to hear it *now* – even if the quality was pale and the practice illicit. For them, it was all about the music and the holy energy of the poetry; for them, it was only about the secret realms of emotion that Dylan's voice somehow carried them to.

And thus the "Bootleg Series" was born. In 1991, Columbia decided to finally give the fans what they wanted and they packaged a handsome set of unreleased and live takes that filled in the blank spaces between Dylan's official life on record and his life on the public stage.

The experience of that first "Bootleg" release was indeed riveting, as we collectively came to be immersed in the creative genius that is Bob Dylan – alternate song takes showing how the impulse of the creative self is formed and honed, how it's plied and molded, until the flower of *poem* grows from the

mere shape of *idea*.

Staying true to this tradition, **Tell Tale Signs** presents a magnificent collection of rare and unreleased recordings spanning the years 1989-2006. The pieces contained herein are the gems that Dylan didn't feel quite right about, the pieces that somehow didn't fit into the schematic of an official record.

Still, the circumstances that tell us why these songs were held off official Columbia releases are hardly important. Instead, it's the music that matters, and hearing this record is like venturing into some great archive of untouched memories, the same as being granted permission to rifle through some drawer full of Blake's unread rhymes.

If experienced at just the right moment, a song can actually transcend the human world and elevate you to a plane that parallels heaven. And that is just how much of this record plays – on a plane with an invisible as yet unnamed world riding the wings of angels through the misty rain at dawn.

Compiled by Jeff Rosen (one of Dylan's managers and the driving force behind the "No Direction Home" PBS documentary that outlined Dylan's early years), the songs on **Tell Tale Signs** capture pieces of Dylan at his most intimate and stark and searching – the perfect compilation of 'greatest hits' that aren't known to the mass audience.

At the centerpiece of the record is "Series of Dreams" (unreleased from the *Oh Mercy* sessions). This song, driven by pounding horse-hoof drums, is a clear and crystalline picture of Dylan's consciousness: Surreal now ice-deep, connected to this hidden murky undefined world of ultimate truths that only reveals itself when we sleep.

In addition, the three versions of "Mississippi" (from the *Time Out of Mind* sessions) are particularly compelling, for they offer us the rare chance to peer into the mind of a songwriter as he grapples and fine-tunes, editing and refining, twisting the lips of syllables here and back to there, plying the melody line to build just the right bridge of rhythm to carry the boots of the words forward.

Also notable is the live version of "Ring Them Bells" (*Supper Club, 1993*). This is one of Dylan's great latter-day songs, and the piece benefits from the intimate venue, Dylan's voice soaring and straining and inspired, waltzing through the cradle of its own spectacular vision.

Going still further, "Mary and The Soldier" (unreleased, from the *World Gone Wrong* sessions) tastes poignant and reflective, a song for times of war and moments of penance, this hymn calling all the living and all the dead to genuflect in a collective gesture of love.

And finally, the live version of "High Water" from 2003 is vintage Dylan – the long-bruised venom wail now has receded to an introspective growl as the aging poet goes searching for the souls that influenced his path across these

distant stages of the past.

Obviously, there is quite a lot of music on these three discs, and it has the power to keep you occupied for hours. In simple sum, this record is an absolute treasure – a tour de force of lyricism and endless dimension taking us to secret places beyond words, taking us deep into webs of echo and sound now leaping beyond frozen skeletons of human time into mazes of breath and song.

And these, then, are the places where the angels play and the dead men reign. And these, then, are the places where storms blow in fever-stained circles as old Rock-and-Roll fathers sing the faint whispers of the dawn back to sleep.

Order at BobDylan.com



GRAMMY NEWS

JOHN PHILLIP SANTOS' LINER NOTES UNDER GRAMMY CONSIDERATION

By **John Aiello**

In my mind's eye, Bob Dylan's early 1960's records made album liner notes an art form. Starting back in 1964, Dylan penned the notes to 5 of his 60's classics, culminating with the magnificent allegory about man's futile search for an earthly paradise that graced the "John Wesley Harding" collection (1967).

However, as time passed, CDS replaced vinyl and record jackets fell by the wayside. And while these changes made records sound better, they also served to homogenize their personality, stirring so many individual voices into a 'one-size-fits-all' package.

Looking back, what made Dylan's liner notes so great was that they bloomed as poems spontaneously written in the moment and extending the vision of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg (and the other seminal Beat writers). In sum, these pieces speak from the core of the self – passionate statements about the steps men take in these lonely cold solitary hours that rise just before dawn.

And now, in year 2008, music fans have a second chance to venture back into the sweet infancy of rock-and roll. As collective music historians, we are able to take this ride only because of the brilliant imagination of John Philip Santos.

Santos wrote the liner notes to The Krayolas' "La Conquistadora" album