

## Winston Watson

### ***Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries: Drummer Winston Watson's Incredible Journey [DVD]***

(Highway 61 Entertainment) Rated: N/A

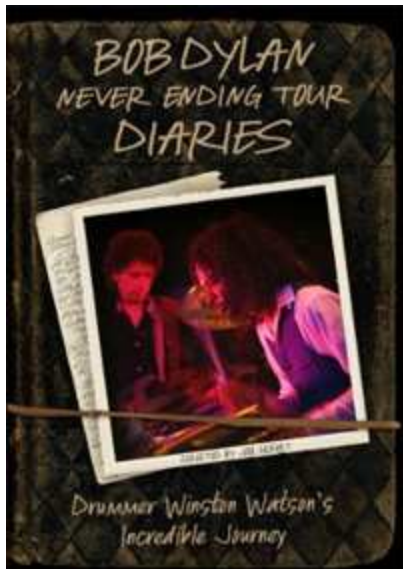
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by **Guy Crucianelli**

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If, as Kris Kristofferson said of Bob Dylan, “The guy’s got so many sides he’s round”, this new DVD release shows what it’s like to be in Dylan’s orbit. Essentially an extended interview with drummer Winston Watson, who played with arguably the world’s greatest songwriter and his Never Ending Tour from 1992 to 1996, this project might have been annoyingly pointless and self-serving if Watson himself lacked charisma. But the drummer has such natural eloquence and personality that his story comes across as a compelling musical experience.

Despite his tenure with Dylan, Watson remains an enthusiastic fan, yet his enthusiasm is tempered by hard-won experience. In his straightforward way, the drummer offers profound, practical lessons about what it means to be a professional musician, especially a young unknown backing a legend. As one might expect, playing with Dylan is like going to war: terrifying, exhilarating and nerve-racking beyond belief. As Watson was thrust into his new position almost by accident, when Charlie Quintana bowed out and suggested him as replacement, the drummer was forced to go in cold and so had his first Dylan lesson: You better be able to wing it.



[Amazon](#)

Physically and stylistically, Watson would seem an odd choice for Dylan, a fact the drummer himself acknowledges. Though extremely versatile, he was primarily a hard rocker for whom the shuffle, one of Dylan's favorite beats, was anathema. Of African-Indonesian-Scottish descent, Watson has a mass of curly hair and a style that is part Tommy Lee, part John Bonham and, as he says, part *Hee-Haw* drummer Kenny Buttrey.

It's not surprising to find out that at one point during the Dylan tour, Lenny Kravitz tried to steal Watson away. With his flashy look and attack, the drummer must've seemed a perfect fit for the more flamboyant artist and his band who, had Watson joined them, would have truly looked like a pack of Noel Reddings. Wisely, the drummer stuck with Dylan.

It seems that everyone who plays with Dylan does an impersonation of him, and Watson does a pretty good one. He relates how Dylan commented, "Hey, uh, I like how you play," after that first anxious gig, and went on basically to build his band's sound around Watson's style. It is clear from the live clips strung throughout the film that Dylan really did enjoy playing with the dynamic young drummer, as he often swings around and smiles, happy, no doubt, to be rocking so hard.

Watson played gigs from massive 80,000 seat arenas to a "draconian" corporate party of 250 people. Along the way he met various superstars—George Harrison, Tom Petty, Carole King—all of whom, it seems, deferred to Dylan.

All told, Watson played literally hundreds of shows with the band before, as he puts it, "we just weren't playing together anymore." At one point, Van Morrison, that old Irish lout, trash-talked the drummer to Dylan within earshot of Watson. This, it turns out, was just one harbinger of the end, and not the most important one, as Watson's troubled marriage fell apart soon after he left Dylan's band. The drummer then went on to play with such disparate figures as Alice Cooper and Warren Zevon.

Along with video and still images from throughout Dylan’s career, both backstage and front, are clips from Watson’s own Video 8 camera. Fortunately we are spared endless footage of bleary-eyed musicians yawning on buses, and instead get a swift visual blend that matches or underscores Watson’s stories, including those of his own family. There are some pretty goofy green-screen wipes and transitions, as well as some low-tech optical tricks and visual punchlines. The film’s interest lies primarily in its subjects.

Director and interviewer Joel Gilbert plays “Bob Dylan” in the tribute band Highway 61 Revisited of which Watson is now a part, along with other Dylan ex-band members Scarlet Rivera and Rob Stoner. It may seem odd, after the real thing, for these musicians to play in a tribute band but as Watson explains, it’s a way to get the kind of Dylan fix that Dylan himself never really gave him—that is, a chance to play all his favorite songs as he and the fans remember them. Watson likens the gig to a turkey dinner in which the side dishes are real but the turkey itself is tofu, a great backhanded compliment that director Gilbert is big enough to end the film with, considering he’s essentially the tofu.

The DVD extras are pedestrian: still photographs and tour laminates we’ve already seen in the film, and some MP3s from the soundtrack by Highway 61 Revisited.

RATING: 

EXTRAS: 

— *7 April 2009*