



BOB DYLAN

BIRMINGHAM

NATIONAL EXHIBITION CENTRE ARENA

ITB Proudly present

BOB DYLAN

7.30PM WED 20 SEP 2000

DOORS OPEN 6.00PM

STANDING

£25.30
(inc. £2.30 booking fee)

VISA

3-AUG-00

NEC ARENA

Seats are purchased subject to the terms and conditions printed on the back of the ticket.

Disc 1 33.57

1. **Intro** 0.29
2. **I Am The Man, Thomas** 2.01
3. **The Times They Are A-Changin'** 5.34
4. **It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)** 7.08
5. **One Too Many Mornings** *w/ harmonica* 5.35
6. **Tangled Up In Blue** 7.39
7. **Searching For A Soldier's Grave** 2.58

Disc 2 77.60

1. **Country Pie** 2.37
2. **Ballad Of A Thin Man** 5.36
3. **Crash On The Levee (Down In The Flood)** 3.42
4. **Tryin' To Get To Heaven** 5.31
5. **Cold Irons Bound** 6.42
6. **Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat** 5.31
7. **Things Have Changed** 6.29
8. **Like A Rolling Stone** 6.51
9. **It Ain't Me, Babe** 6.25
10. **Highway 61 Revisited** 5.38
11. **Forever Young** 6.05
12. **Everything Is Broken** 5.18
13. **Blowin' In The Wind** 5.38





If ever a venue was designed to sap the spirits, the bleakly utilitarian Birmingham NEC has to be it. So, it's testament to Bob Dylan's mystique that the mere prospect of his presence transform this dour enormo-shed into a cosy 12,000-member clubhouse. The burbling excitement is heighted by appetite-whetting reports, filtering through from Glasgow and Newcastle, that Dylan is in rare form. He's reportedly singing with renewed fire: whatever the demons are that all too frequently disrupt his concentration, they've not made the trip this time. The opening moment of a Bob Dylan show - however wretched, wanton or dull it eventually turns out to be - is still a thing of spine-tingling, awe-inspiring electricity. It's as near as we'll now get to the feeling of being in the same room as Elvis, Sinatra or Guthrie. A tapped announcer booms the somewhat superfluous intro, "Ladies and Gentlemen, Columbia recording artist Bob Dylan", the stagelights flare and there he is - tight black suit, the halo of curls, myopic squint and iconic proboscis all present and correct. Needless to say, he commences with a cover of I Am The Man, Thomas, by bluegrass legends The Stanley Brothers. Strangely, it's a sterling opening. The band are clipped, sympathetic and on the money - guitarists Larry Campbell and Charlie Sexton adding keening, rural harmonies to Dylan's energised bark. Bassist Tony Garnier - a dead ringer for Walker off Dad's Army - and drummer David Kemper are similarly on-form and spirited. The all-but solo acoustic sections have these days been replaced by an opening sequence of semi-acoustic songs. Tonight, upright bass and mandolin lend a distinctly Appalachian tone to readings of The Times They Are A-Changin', the traditional Searching For A Soldier's Grave and the aforementioned It's Alright Ma, now a stately rockabilly shuffle. On One Too Many Mornings, Dylan - who seems unusually focused - delivers the sort of sinuous, elegiac vocal that hardcore fans dine out on, making a mockery of the sandpaper warble to which he too often resorts. The auditorium becomes folk-club intimate, and he milks the atmosphere by rounding off the song with a lovely, melodic harmonica solo. Nowadays, he plays the harp into it's

own microphone while tip-toeing daintily across the stage. It's terrific, and the seated part of the audience rise as one to applaud vigorously. After the litting opening, the electric guitars appear. This segment begins with Nashville Skyline throwaway Country Pie, which Dylan sings in full declamatory mode while wiggling his right leg, Elvis-style. He then re-visits The Basement Tapes for a jump-blues version of Crash On The Levee (Down In The Flood) - a song obscure enough for him to forget some of the words but fine nonetheless. 1965's Ballad Of A Thin Man sticks closer to the original, Dylan somehow investing the name Mr Jones with about 12 syllables. A brief detour through 1997's Time Out Of Mind follows with the jazzy, resigned, Tryin' To Get To Heaven and Cold Irons Bound. After a raunchsome Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat, Dylan and band stand motionless, absorbing the tumultuous applause. It's an odd, vaguely threatening gesture, but it all adds to the spectacle. The encores are many and various. Things Have Changed - Dylan's first new release of the 21st Century - is sad and sardonic, Like A Rolling Stone perfunctory, while a murmuring, semi-acoustic It Ain't Me, Babe and rollicking Highway 61 Revisited have the crowd stomping their feet in the bleachers. A misty-eyed Forever Young, twangy Everything Is Broken and - inevitably - Blowin' In The Wind complete the fantastic evening. Dylan emits one last "Thankyou", the band do their nice tuch statue act again, and the house lights go up. On this evidence, it's easy to understand Dylan's continuing allure. "I first saw him in the '70," says Stephen Bouille, 46, from Goole. "Dylan's just the best songwriter there is - there's no others to touch him." And he comes to the UK on a regular basis. Dylan's fans are not all of a certain age Rob Adams from Birmingham is 17 and it's his first ever Dylan gig. "He's a legend - it's my ultimate dream to see him." 16-year-old Michael Moore agrees: "Dylan is the greatest poet of the 20th Century. It's enough to be in the same room as God."

David Sheppard