







**A**t the beginning of the sessions for "Nashville Skyline", Bob Dylan had no more than four original songs on hand. His near retirement these past few years had obviously given him space to think, to relax and jam with the friends who had dropped in on him at Woodstock but, as contented as he might have been, he still had that itch to scratch, the want for something to do. He had a writer's mind and was sure that he could still spring something if coerced in to doing so. By this time he had also taken the bull by the horns and thrown himself in to the new decade's style of country music as attested to by the "John Wesley Harding" album and also with a nod to the music that his former backing group, The Band, had spearheaded and who's streamlined style the rest of rock was waking up to. A turning reaction to the madness outside his doors as the 60's turned a corner and the darker side of the decade reared its ugly face. The rich, thick, syrupy croon was the latest twist in the measure that Dylan was implementing. This was apparently down to his stopping cigarettes but several witnesses will attest to him singing in the same style back in his small club dates of the very early 60's before he decided to amend his style and ape the direct style of his hero Woody Guthrie.



"Nashville Skyline" was the least bitter album Dylan had recorded to date. There were no covered codes, there were no bitter twists, no pointed jousts. Just Dylan and his band of Nashville session men playing his new jams and the sound was of a man contented. Romance bubbled over alongside the jaunty, earnest twang of country. Sorrow wasn't far behind but none of this was really attributable to Dylan. No thing that you could read that much in to, nothing that you could find yourself rallying against, just good solid song writing.

Sessions at that time were as easy going as the music itself. Dylan himself was quoted as saying "We just take a song, I play it and everyone else just sort of fills in behind it... at the same time you're doing that, there's someone in the control booth who's turning all those dials to where the proper sound is coming in."

The first night of recordings apparently yielded nothing. This may just have been the night that saw Dylan bed himself in and try to capture the feel of the sessions between him and his men. The following night was the beginning of the base of the work. Several tracks were performed including "To Be Alone With You", "I Threw It All Away", "One More Night" and "Lay Lady Lay" - the song that he had written for the soundtrack of "Midnight Cowboy", losing out to John Barry when he didn't hand it in on time.

All in all the album took a mere nine days to record and when it was released featured only 27 minutes of music. One track in particular had Dylan and Johnny Cash duetting together on a song that Bob had







originally written for either Echo Helstrom, Bonnie Beecher or, Bob's serious girlfriend at the time, Suze Rotolo back in 1963, which he recorded for his album "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan". The Cash duet came about when Johnny dropped in on Dylan's recording at Columbia's Studio A on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 1969 (Cash had been working on his own songs next door). The get together after the main session was completed and featured a number of duets between the pair including "One Too Many Mornings" and "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright" as well as Cash's own "I Still Miss Someone".

None of the renditions were deemed successful enough to make the cut but Johnny would return the following evening to record more duets. The following evening was much more productive with at least 18 different songs being tackled. Two of them were the Dylan tracks that were tried out the previous day but once again failed to make the cut. Various other oldies were also performed including a whole glut of Sun Studios era recordings including "I Walk The Line", "Big River", "Matchbox" and "Ring Of Fire", most of these made famous by Cash himself. Only one of the tracks made it officially and this is how "Girl From The North Country" was to become the leader song for "Nashville Skyline".

The reason these tapes have only appeared now stands as testament to tardiness - reportedly producer Bob Johnston left the studio tapes behind at a Nashville storage facility for a number of years. Once the storage time had elapsed the company contacted Columbia to enquire as to whether they wished to extend the lease on their stay. Apparently uninterested in putting up the cash towards keeping these tapes in storage or, indeed, even buying them back, Columbia/Sony waived their rights to owning the tapes. The company, realising just what they had in their hands, put the tapes up for auction. The tape, with a 27:05 minute recording time featured several takes of "Lay Lady Lay" and also a hitherto unreleased track "Going To Chicago".

Back to our story; the album was then considered finished but Dylan still had the 'need-to-get-back-to-the-studio-blues' and in a continuation of the country standards that he had been performing towards the end of the sessions returned with the idea of recording an album full of the best of

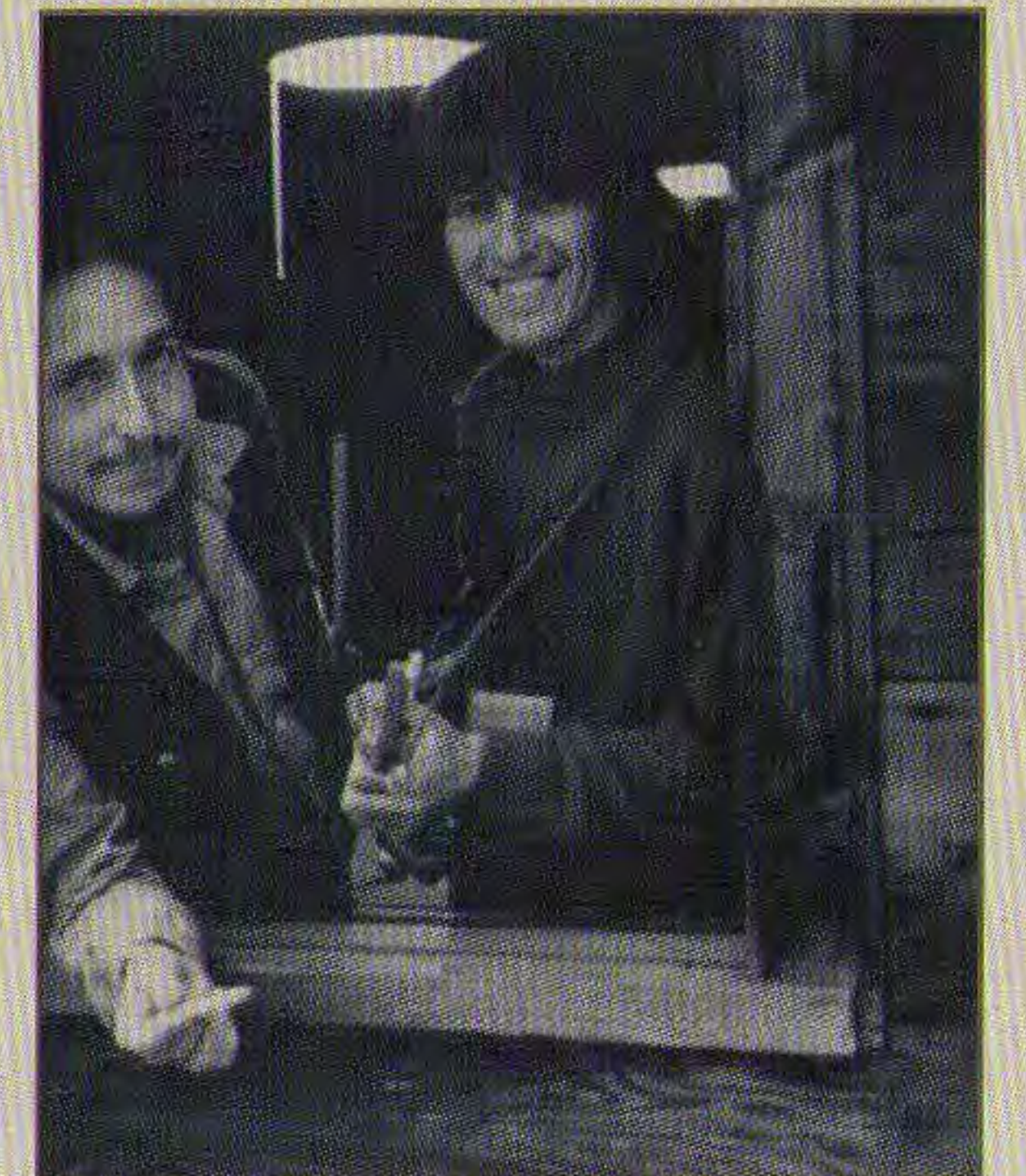




old Americana. He was encouraged by Columbia Records president Clive Davis who, while holding reservations about the amount of original material for the album, knew he could do nothing to stop Dylan and told Bob that he should go for it.

April 24<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and May 3<sup>rd</sup> saw Dylan once again winging his way through a tremendous amount of material. Eleven tracks in all were compiled, ranging between "Living The Blues", "Let It Be Me", "Ring Of Fire" and "Blue Moon", the Rogers/Hart ballad. The latter confusing author Robert Shelton upon its release. He couldn't understand why Dylan had ventured so far from his regular path but Bob was unrepentant. He insisted he knew what he wanted and had to do to keep people from bothering him but this story, in Dylan's hands, would tend to change nearly every time he told it. The drubbing that Dylan took for "Self Portrait" was almost unanimous. Nearly everyone hated it but of course nowadays, it is received as a buried treasure in the canon of Bob's back pages.

Its follow up was released only four months later, but that was only because "Self Portrait" had been in gestation for around a year before its eventual outing. Dylan hadn't been lazy in the interim though and had been working with another musical partner - soon to be ex-Beatle George Harrison, who had dropped in to see Bob at the Columbia Studios a couple of years earlier for a vacation with Bob and his family in Woodstock and who can also be heard







playing a few Dylan songs during the ill-fated "Let It Be/Get Back" sessions. During Thanksgiving 1968 the pair had composed "I'd Have You Anytime", but George had now returned, his band had ceased to be and he was looking for solace. Where better than joining his friend who was also trying to seek anonymity. None of Harrison's songs that he had written for his solo album were

put to tape at this time but, with George's passiveness in mind, Dylan's tracks took precedent - the most famous of which was the Dylan penned "If Not For You" that would appear on "New Morning". Harrison would eventually cover this for his own "All Things Must Pass" album. Further recordings included Dylan's own "Sign On The Window", "I Threw It All Away", a cover of Henry Thomas' "Honey, Just Allow Me One More Chance" and another Dylan original "Working On A Guru" (notated on the tape box as "Working On The Ghury"). Our set closes with the infamous studio take of Dylan's "Tomorrow Is A Long Time", a track that Dylan first sang at his session for the Witmark publishing demos and one that he would try out again at the "New Morning" sessions. For whatever reason, it was never released. Needless to say, this 1970 studio take has never seen an official release.

Stacy Shelton

1. Lay Lady Lay	(NCO98925)	3.26
2. One More Night	(NCO98924)	2.47
3. Blue Moon I	(NCO99084)	2.56
4. Blue Moon II	(NCO99084)	2.35
5. Ring Of Fire	(NCO99085)	2.35
6. Take A Message To Mary	(NCO99083)	2.32
7. Living The Blues	(NCO99064)	2.34
8. Take Me As I Am	(NCO99066)	2.54
9. Let It Be Me	(NCO99069)	2.54
10. I Forgot More Than You'll Ever Know	(NCO99068)	2.17
11. Take A Message To Mary	(NCO99083)	2.40
12. Blue Moon	(NCO99084)	2.23
13. Folsom Prison Blues	(NCO99086)	3.28
14. Ring Of Fire	(NCO99085)	2.20
15. eBay Sample		5.23
16. CNN News Report		2.29
17. Went To See The Gypsy		3.32
18. If Not For You	(CO104590)	2.26
19. Sign On The Window	(CO107277)	3.42
20. If Not For You	(CO107087)	4.17
21. I Threw It All Away		2.30
22. Honey, Just Allow Me One More Chance		2.01
23. Working On A Guru	(CO107089)	3.35
24. Tomorrow Is A Long Time	(CO107272)	3.52

Total Time: 73.01

**1-2** 2<sup>nd</sup> Nashville Skyline session, Columbia Studio A, Nashville, TN, February 13<sup>th</sup> 1969  
**3-6** 3<sup>rd</sup> Self Portrait session, Columbia Studio A, Nashville, TN, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1969 **7-14** Acetate source recorded at Columbia Studio A, Nashville, TN, during Self Portrait sessions between April 24<sup>th</sup> and May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1969 **17** 5<sup>th</sup> Self Portrait session, Studio B, Columbia Recording Studios, New York City, NY, March 4<sup>th</sup> 1970 **18** 3<sup>rd</sup> New Morning session, Studio E, Columbia Recording Studios, New York City, NY, June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1970, overdubs recorded July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1970 **19** 6<sup>th</sup> New Morning session, Studio E, Columbia Recording Studios, New York City, NY, June 5<sup>th</sup> 1970, overdubs recorded July 13<sup>th</sup> 1970 **20-23** Studio B, Columbia Recording Studios, New York City, NY, May 1<sup>st</sup> 1970. Studio session with George Harrison **24** Studio E, Columbia Recording Studios, New York City, NY, June 4<sup>th</sup> 1970