



Bob Dylan

*Politics*

*Of*

*Sin*



Band Members:

Bob Dylan: Vocal & Guitar

Fred Tackett: Guitar

Steve Ripley: Guitar

Willie Smith: Keyboards

Tim Drummond: Bass

Jim Keltner: Drums

Clydie King, Carolyn Dennis, Regina Havis, Madelyn Quebec (Background Vocals)

\* (Lead Vocals)

*"The Diamond Voice Within," By Neil Spencer.*

This was Dylan's sixth or seventh visit to Europe in his 20-year career, and this time round it was different.

The expected media fanfare came, but it was muted in comparison to that afforded the '78 trip, when Dylan was seen as the concensus of the ongoing 'rock' tradition handed down from the 60s; still the enigmatic and unrepentant rebel carrying the standards of alienation, protest and emotional and spiritual exploration forward into the future.

The national press, radio and tv didn't seem to know quite how to respond to the new, Christian Bob Dylan; and for them it was a case of better the cosy fantasy scenarios of last-chance power drives down endless american highways than the uncomfortable moral imperatives of Dylan's new kingdom.

Dylan's refusal to bow to the myths of rock -- he'd always kept an ambiguous, open relation with 'rock' anyway, what with his folk roots, the frequent diversions into country, blues and anything else that took his fancy -- and his insistence on his personal salvation had cost him heavy with critics and fans.

To some of them, any type of born-again Christianity smacked of U.S. president Ronald Reagan's 'moral majority', even though Dylan's new songs have consistently spelt out an anti-establishment stance, the protest era rekindled if anything. There again, any spiritual values smack of humbug to a sometimes insensitised youth culture, more caught up with the materialist and consumer values it professes to despise than perhaps it realises or cares to admit.

Source Notes:

\*Leading Dylan authorities do not agree on the order in which Lenny Bruce and All Along the Watchtower were played at this show. We've followed the order indicated by most of the master tapes, set-lists, and expert opinions we were able to compare, with LB coming before AATW.

\*Drop-out on D-1 around the 2:12 mark.

**POSITIVELY  
BOB DYLAN.**

Nobody's ever been able to figure out whether Bob Dylan anticipates trends... or creates them. But nobody doubts that Bob Dylan is always there first.



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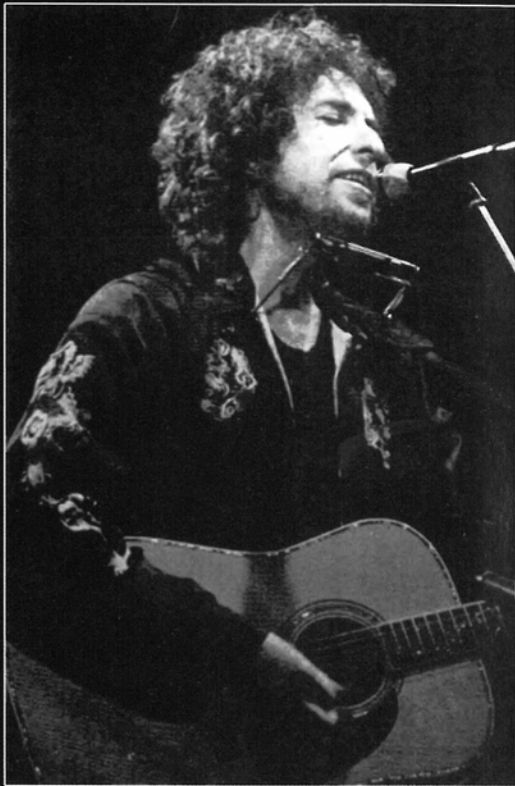
Produced by Chuck Plotkin and Bob Dylan except "Shot of Love" produced by George Steinbush. Chuck Plotkin & Bob Dylan. Columbia Entertainment Properties, © 1984 CBS.



Christian or not, in the gritty business of attracting paying customers, there are few artists able to command the allegiance that Dylan still does, and ugly rumours of unsold tickets finally gave way to near-capacity audiences. Around 120,000 saw the British shows.

... The younger fans that Dylan has always attracted seem more prominent at the Continental shows, where rock tradition and contemporary protest -- the German peace and eco movements and their equivalents in France, Benelux and Scandinavia -- have not diverged the way they have in little of post-industrial UK.

... Dylan's European jaunt can be safely judged a success. ... [His] strategy on this tour has been to present a set that straddles almost his entire career, harking back to his coffee-house days on numbers like 'Barbara Allen', 'Girl from the North Country', featuring a healthy slug of 60s hits - 'Like a Rolling Stone', 'Tambourine Man', 'It's all over now Baby Blue' -- and reserving pride of place for his post-conversion songs, to which he seems to bring an extra vocal commitment. His singing this time round was quite astonishing, clearly superior to all his many past styles, from all of which he borrows for the present. With the horn section of '78 now thankfully nudged out -- the present group is more supple and understated -- the harmonica has found new favour. Indeed, the acoustic and harp spots [are] among the most affecting of the show[s]. You could almost hear the audience gasp unbelieving joy every time he picked up his acoustic guitar, feel them tingle whenever Bob whipped a mouth-harp from a pocket and piped that crazy, angular, plaintive harmonica music of his round the hall.



At a time when conventional rock performance is increasingly derided by many musicians and fans, to Dylan it seems that the performance is the crucible of his art, an all-important testing point.

"It's so immediate it changes the whole concept of art to me," he tells me later.

"... what I do is more of an immediate thing; to stand up on stage and sing -- you get it back immediately. It's not like writing a book or even making a record. And with a movie -- it's so difficult to get anything back working on a movie, you never know what you're doing and the results never come in until usually years afterwards. What I do is so immediate it changes the nature, the concept, of art to me. I don't know what it is. It's too immediate. It's like the man who made that painting there (points to painting on wall of hotel room) has no idea we're sitting here now looking at it or not looking at it or anything... performing is more like a stage play."

Hearing him draw from that awesome vault of material he's stockpiled over the last twoscore years, it was impossible not to marvel at the sheer volume and quality of his writing. Never did 'Masters of War' sound more apt than in the precipitous war-mongering climate of the present. Other songs -- 'Like a Rolling Stone' being the obvious one -- seemed likewise to acquire a new resonance in the light of Dylan's Christian beliefs.

Dylan's new material continues to reflect his Christianity, though the songs of the new lp, 'Shot of Love' are less directly devotional in their approach, taking the Christian code as the bedrock of his observations rather than merely preaching, as 'Saved' too often did. Dylan's enthusiasm for his new record is only intermittently contagious, but certainly the album boasts some of his finest work in years, particularly the touching melancholic 'Grain of Sand' where Dylan's retrospection over his life leads him to state "no inclination to look back on any mistake/ as I hold this chain of events that I must break".

Whatever one may feel about Dylan's conversion -- and the ridicule and depth of scorn to which he has been subjected for his beliefs is unfair -- it's obvious that we will need some kind of spiritual dimension to our credo if we really are to build the New Jerusalem among the dark, satanic mills.

-- Neil Spencer, "The Diamond Voice Within," *New Musical Express*, 15 August 1981

