

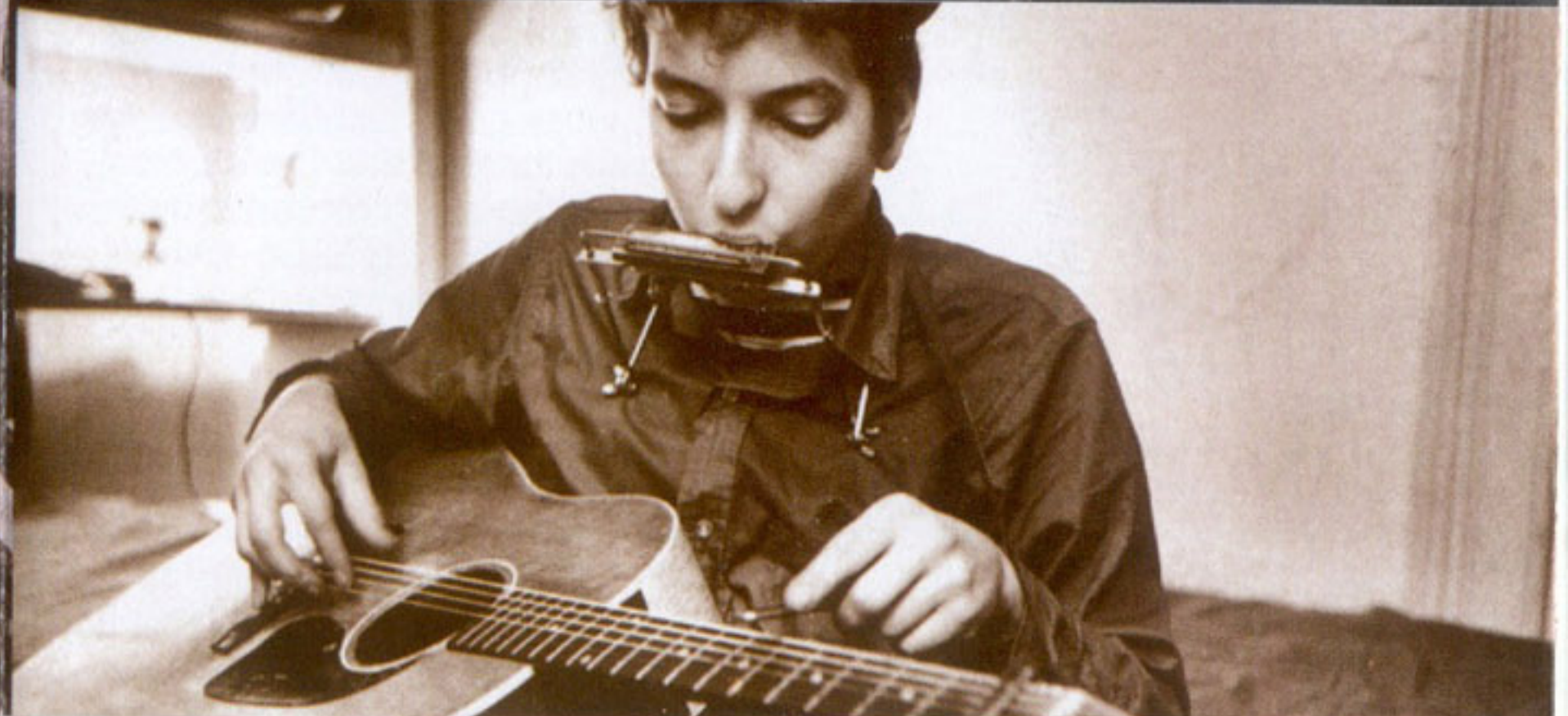
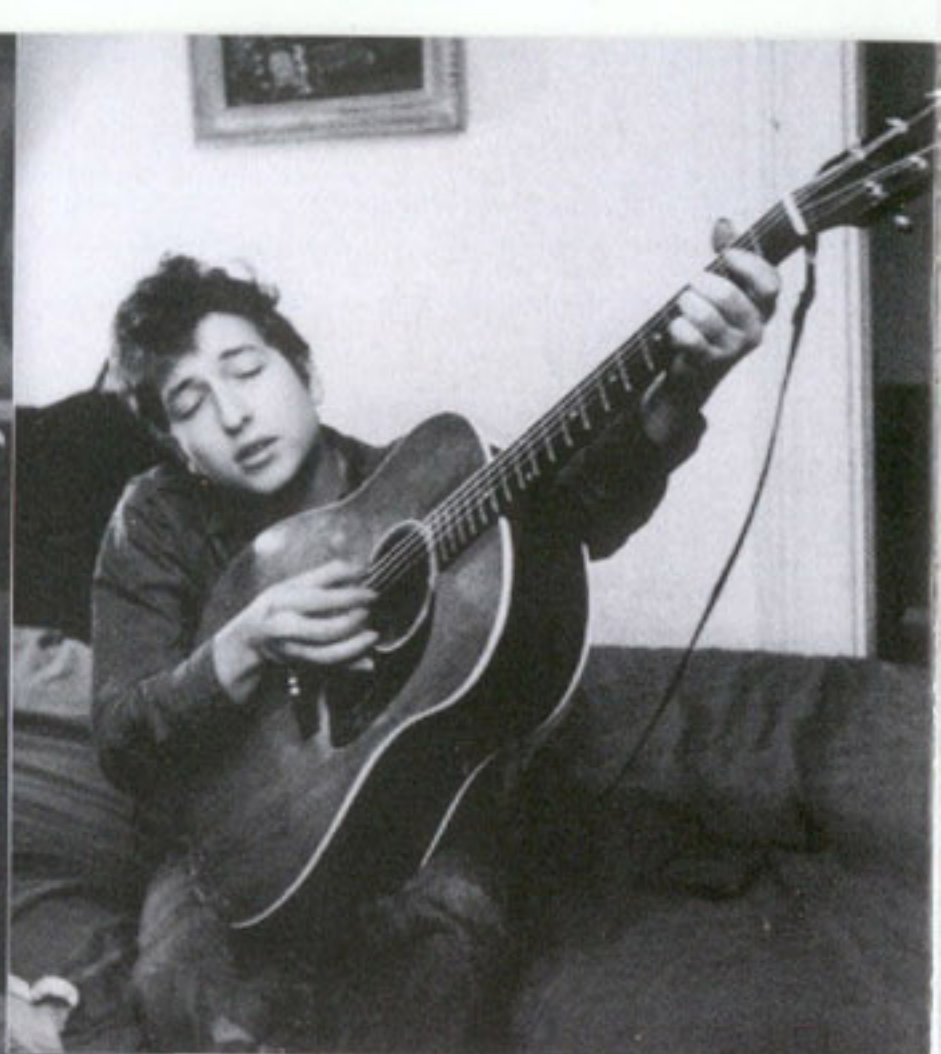


BOB DYLAN



SONGS FOR BONNIE

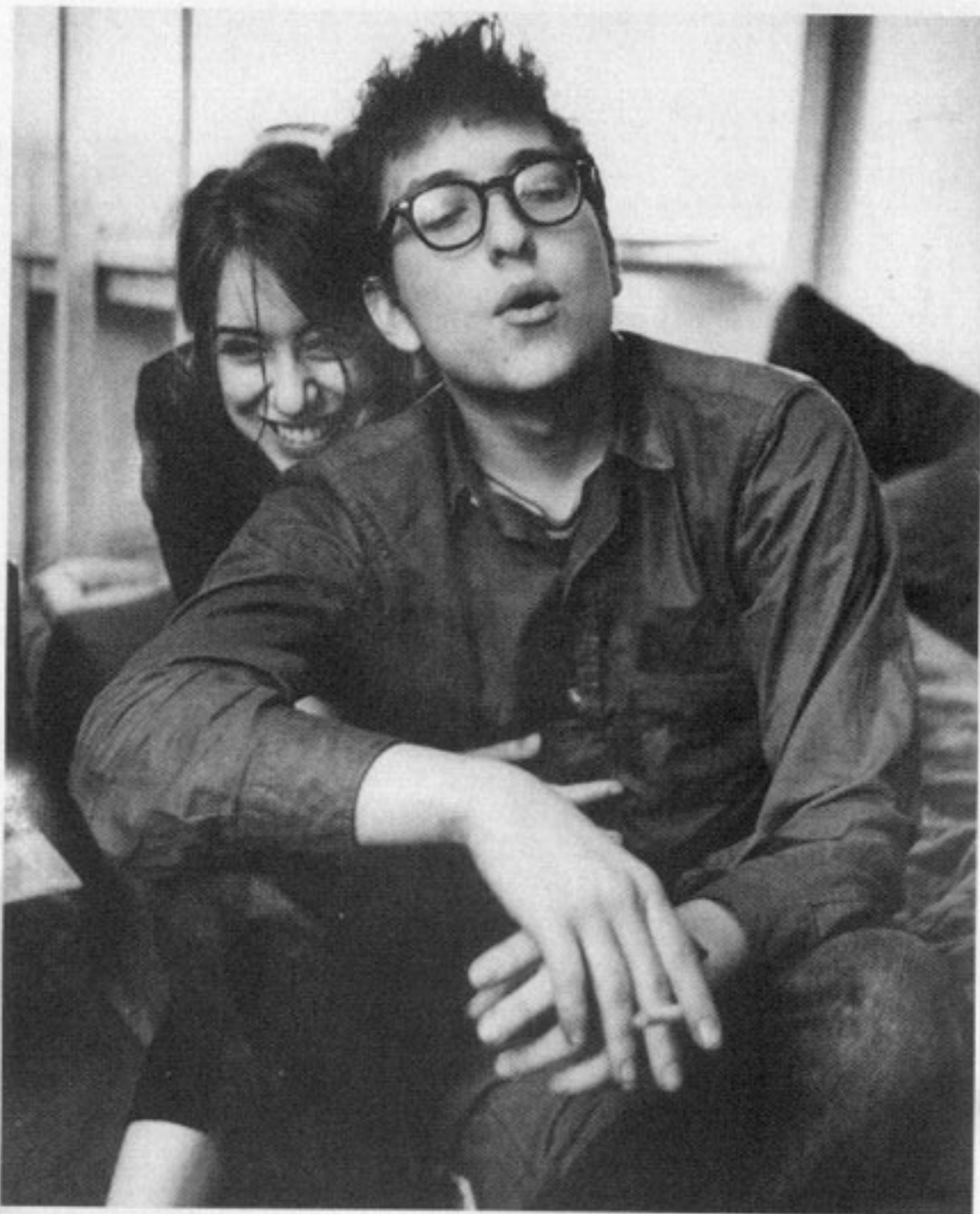
THE MINNESOTA HOTEL TAPE - DECEMBER 1961



BOB DYLAN

"SONGS FOR BONNIE"

THE MINNESOTA "HOTEL" TAPE DECEMBER 1961



Love And Theft's bonus disc featured "I Was Young When I Left Home" from December 1961. 1961! Just think how long ago that was, how much has changed. That track was plucked from a tape well known to collectors of early Dylan, and here it is for you on this new CD, released in 2002.

2002. How time flies. Think back Eighty-two years to 1920 for a minute - go on, indulge me. 1920 found the world recovering from the Great War. "The war to end all War is" as they said then, in sadly misguided optimism. The communist state in Russia was in its infancy it was before the Roaring Twenties, way before the depression, before the rise of Hitler and Stalin A very long time ago, 21 years before the birth of Bob Dylan. Robert Johnson was (probably) impatiently waiting puberty, Charley Patton had an impressive repertoire and a sizeable local follow but it'd be nine years before he made a recording. Hell, this was before the 'Roaring Twenties' and the Jazz age.

Midway in between that historical point and now, 20 year-old Bob Dylan was taped in Bonnie Beecher's apartment playing these songs. This was long before the Never Ending Tour, a generation before 'turning Christian' and then turning everyone off at Live Aid. Here we find him at the beginning of his career and of the decade, which was to bring assassinations and war and Beatles and Peace and Woodstock and a manned flight to the moon.

This was before Martin Luther King's "I have a dream speech" and years before he was slain. This was a time before Robert had been gunned down, it was even before his brother, John F Kennedy suffered the same fate. Hell, this was so long ago it was before "Blowing In The Wind" and "The Times They Are a changing", way before going electric and all that.



A recording from 1961 stands equidistant between today and 1920. 1920 seems ancient, and 1961 is coming to feel the same. Maybe not ancient yet but old; old and yet fresh as a daisy too in this re-packaged and re-released sparkling upgrade. A young man's recordings preserved before he and the world changed (with no little influence from recordings he was soon to make).



The tape this comes from was known as "the Hotel Tape", presumably in tribute to how many people in need of a bed stayed at this apartment. Those familiar with the tape from previous incarnations might wonder how the just over 81 minutes of it have been fitted on to one CD. Well, it is no new format CD here, no instead: Shock Horror! A track is missing. However, worry not, it's all for your own good really, it isn't a song. The one that took the chop was the joke "East Orange, New Jersey" track that shows Woody Allen had no fear of a rival stand-up comedian as Dylan told the old, desperately weak "chess-money" joke. (Though its interesting to note that he liked hoary jokes back then too, not just in 1999's live shows and on "Love And Theft".)

If you desperately need that joke, you will not find it here. If this worries you, my advice is to 'get a life'. No, that's too rude, what I meant to say was 'get a copy of it from an old tape, record or CD' and listen to it at the appropriate point if you really desperately need to hear Bob Dylan telling a bad joke. As for me, I am sticking with this space-saving, more convenient single CD in "superior sound quality" and musing

on time and music's journey from a far-away delta and a far-away era right up to now, as I take "Love And Theft" with High Water (for Charley Patton) on it from my CD player and pop in this, up a bus-stop from halfway through that journey. And what do I hear?

I hear young Bob Dylan trying to sound old. I hear a relaxed Dylan, it has been said that he consumed a bottle of Jim Beam's during the session, maybe that helped! Whatever, I prefer this sounding Bob Dylan to the one of his already recorded first album. I can hear some very confident vocals, and although the guitar playing is often rudimentary, there is a lot of confident and effective picking, allowing one to remember that Dylan grew from this to become a very effective acoustic guitar player. Perhaps it's something he should be reminded of himself some nights. I hear many influences, this is not as totally dominated by Woody Guthrie as some of the other early recordings can feel; I hear Cisco Houston and Dave Van Ronk too amongst others. I hear Dylan adapt sources and begin the first tentative steps to becoming the songwriter who would change not only be medium he worked in but the history of us all. I hear young man play for his friends, I laugh at the glimpse into the vanity of youth in the open delight of Dylan talking about photographs that had been taken off him when he says: "You oughtta see them pictures of me.. I look like Marlon Br.. James Dean."

We end here with a marvellous rendition of Lord Buckley's magnificent "Black Cross" - but not the best. Perhaps the Jim Beam's was beginning to have too much of an effect. (Though it is perhaps worth noting that if we did not have another version of Dylan singing it, we would rave about this one.) But Dylan is right, he has done it better yet it still is worthy of concluding a collection that showcases the confident young man displaying his ability to cover traditional tunes and to adapt some to create songs of his own. He also gives us another glimpse of the future, when he prefigures his role as a prophet by closing with: "you better stop making this pretty soo.." Click.

Enjoy.