

Bob Dylan Press Conference
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I'd like to know the meaning of the cover photo on your album, 'Highway 61 Revisited'?

What would you like to know about it?

It seems to have some philosophy in it. I'd like to know what it represents to you—you're a part of it . . .

I haven't really looked at it that much.

I've thought about it a great deal.

It was just taken one day when I was sittin' on the steps y'know—I don't really remember too much about it.

I thought the motorcycle was an image in your song-writing. You seem to like that.

Oh, we all like motorcycles to some degree.

Do you think of yourself primarily as a singer or a poet?

Oh, I think of myself more as a song and dance man, y'know.

Why?

Oh, I don't think we have enough time to really go into that.

You were quoted as saying when you're really wasted you may enter into another field. How "wasted" is really wasted and do you foresee it?

No, I don't foresee it, but it's more or less like a ruthless type of feeling. Very ruthless and intoxicated to some degree.

The criticism that you have received for leaving the folk field and switching to folk-rock hasn't seemed to bother you a great deal. Do you think you'll stick to folk-rock or go into more writing?

I don't play folk-rock.

What would you call your music?

I like to think of it more in terms of vision music—it's mathematical music.

Would you say that the words are more important than the music?

The words are just as important as the music. There would be no music without the words.

Which do you do first, ordinarily?

The words.

Do you think there ever will be a time when you will paint or sculpt?

Oh, yes.

Do you think there will ever be a time when you'll be hung as a thief?

You weren't supposed to say that.

Bob, you said you always do your words first and think of it as music. When you do the words can you hear it?

Yes.

The music you want when you do your words?

Yes, oh yes.

Do you hear any music before you have words—do you have any songs that you don't have words to yet?

Ummm, sometimes, on very general instruments, not on the guitar though—maybe something like the harpsichord or the harmonica or autoharp. I might hear some kind of melody or tune which I would know the words to put to. Not with the guitar though. The guitar is too hard an instrument. I don't really hear many melodies based on the guitar.

What poets do you dig?

Rimbaud, I guess; W.C. Fields; the family, you know, the trapeze family in the circus; Smokey Robinson; Allen Ginsberg; Charlie Rich—he's a good poet.

In a lot of your songs you are hard on people—in "Like a Rolling Stone" you're hard on the girl and in "Positively 4th Street" you're hard on a friend. Do you do this because you want to change their lives, or do you want to point out to them the error of their ways?

I want to needle them.

Do you still sing your older songs?

No. No. I just saw a songbook last night, I don't really see too many of those things, but there's a lotta songs in those books I haven't even recorded, y'know. I've just written down, and y'know and put little tunes to and they published them. I haven't sung them, though. A lotta the songs I just don't even know anymore, even the ones I did sing. There doesn't seem to be enough time, y'know.

Did you change your program when you went to England?

No, no, I finished it there. That was the end of my older program. I didn't change it, it was developed and by the time we got there it was all, it was more or less, I knew what was going to happen all the time, y'know. I knew how many encores there was, y'know, which songs they were going to clap loudest and all this kind of things.

In a concert tour like this do you do the same program night after night?

Oh, sometimes it's different. I think we'll do the same one here in this area, though.

In a recent 'Broadside' interview, Phil Ochs said you should do films. Do you have any plans to do this?

I do have plans to make a film but not because anybody said I should do it.

How soon will this be?

Next year probably.

Can you tell us what it will be about?

It'll be just another song.

Who are the people making films that you dig, particularly?

Truffaut. I really can't think of any more people. Italian movie directors, y'know, but not too many people in England and the United States which I really think that I would dig.

You did a Chaplin bit as an exit in a concert once.

I did! That musta been an accident. Have to stay away from that kind of thing.

What do you think of people who analyze your songs?

I welcome them—with open arms.

The University of California mimeographed all the lyrics from the last album and had a symposium discussing them. Do you welcome that?

Oh, sure. I'm just kinda sad I'm not around to be a part of it.

Josh Dunson in his new book implies that you have sold out to commercial interests and the topical song movement. Do you have any comment, sir?

Well, no comments, no arguments. No, I sincerely don't feel guilty.

Of all the people who record your compositions, who do you feel does the most justice to what you're trying to say?

I think Manfred Mann. They've done the songs—they've done about three or four. Each one of them has been right in context with what the song was all about.

What's your new album about?

Oh, it's about, uh—just about all kinds of different things—rats, balloons. They're about the only thing that comes to my mind right now.

Mr. Dylan, how would you define folk music?

As a constitutional re-play of mass production.

Would you call your songs "folk songs"?

No.

Are protest songs "folk songs"?

I guess, if they're a constitutional re-play of mass production.

Do you prefer songs with a subtle or obvious message?

With a what???

A subtle or obvious message?

Uh—I don't really prefer those kinds of songs at all—"message" you mean like—what songs with a message?

Well, like "Eve of Destruction" and things like that.

Do I prefer that to what?

I don't know, but your songs are supposed to have a subtle message.

Subtle message???

Well, they're supposed to.

Where'd you hear that?

In a movie magazine?

Oh—Oh God! Well, we won't—we don't discuss those things here.

Are your songs ever about real people?

Sure they are, they're all about real people.

Particular ones?

Particular people? Sure, I'm sure you've seen all the people in my songs—at one time or another.

Who is Mr. Jones?

Mr. Jones, I'm not going to tell you his first name. I'd get sued.

What does he do for a living?

He's a pinboy. He also wears suspenders.

How do you explain your attraction?

Attraction to what?

Your attraction—your popularity—your mass popularity.

No, no. I really have no idea. That's the truth. I always tell the truth. That is the truth.

What are your own personal hopes for the future and what do you hope to change in the world?

Oh, my hopes for the future: to be honest, you know, I don't have any hopes for the future and I just hope to have enough boots to be able to change them. That's all really, it doesn't boil down to anything more than that. If it did, I would certainly tell you.

What do you think of a question and answer session of this type (with you as the principal subject)?

Well, I think we all have different—uh—(I may have dropped an ash on myself somewhere—you'll see in a minute here)—I'm not going to say anything about it though—uh—what was the question?

What are you thinking about right now?

I'm thinking about this ash.

Right before that.

Uh—the ash is creeping up on me somewhere—I've lost—lost touch with myself so I can't tell where exactly it is.

Was that an inadvertent evading of the question?

No, no—

What do you feel about the meaning of this kind of question and answer session?

I just know in my own mind that we all have a different idea of all the words we're using—uh—y'know so I don't really have too much—I really can't take it too seriously because everything—like if I say the word "house"—like we're both going to see a different house. If I just say the word—right? So we're using all these other words like "mass production" and "movie magazine" and we all have a different idea of these words too, so I don't even know what we're saying.

Is it pointless?

No, it's not pointless. It's—it's—you know, if you want to do it, you're there—then that's not pointless. You know, it doesn't hurt me any.

Is there anything in addition to your songs that you want to say to people?

Good luck.

You don't say that in your songs.

Oh, yes I do, every song tails off with "Good luck—I hope you make it."

Why couldn't you—uh—

Who are you? [Laughter] Get the camera on this person here.

What do you bother to write the poetry for if we all get different images? If we don't know what you're talking about.

Because I got nothing else to do, man.

Do you have a rhyme for "orange"?

What, I didn't hear that.

A rhyme for "orange."

A-ha . . . just a rhyme for "orange"?

Is it true that you were censored for singing on the Ed Sullivan show, etc. , etc.

I'll tell you the rhyme in a minute.

Did they censor you from singing what you wanted on the Ed Sullivan show?

Yes. It was a long time ago.

What did you want to sing?

I don't know. It was some song which I wanted to sing and they said I could sing. There's more to it than just censorship there. They actually said I could sing the song, but when we went through the rehearsal of it, the guy came back afterwards and said that I'd have to change it and he said, "Can't you sing some folk song like the Clancy Brothers do?" And I didn't know any of their songs and so I couldn't get on the program. That's the way it came down.

Have you found that the text of the interviews with you are accurate to the original conversations?

No. That's another reason I don't really give press interviews or anything, because you know, I mean, even if you do something—there are a lot of people here, so they know what's going on—but like if you just do it with one guy or two guys, they just take it all out of context, you know, they just take it, split it up in the middle or

just take what they want to use and they even ask you a question and you answer it and then it comes out in print that they just substitute another question for your answer. It's not really truthful, you know, to do that kind of thing, so I just don't do it. That's just a press problem there.

Do you think the entire text of your news conference today should be printed in the newspaper?

Oh no, nothing like that, nothing like that. But this is just for the interview, you know, when they want to do interviews in places like Omaha, or in Cincinnati, man, you know. I don't do it and then they write bad things.

Well, isn't this partly because you are often inaudible? Like, for most of this dialogue you have been inaudible, and now when you are touched personally by the misquotation, your voice rises and we can hear you.

Yeah, well, I just realized that maybe the people in the back there can't hear me, that's all.

I was just going to ask you—in your songs you sing out—

Yes I do.

And whether . . .

You see the songs are what I do—write the songs and sing them and perform them. That's what I do. The performing part of it could end, but like I'm going to be writing these songs and singing them and recording them and I see no end, right now. That's what I do—uh—anything else interferes with it. I mean anything else trying to get on top of it making something out of it which it isn't, it just brings me down, and it's not, uh—it just makes it seem all very cheap.

Well, it made me feel like you were almost kind of doing a penance of silence here . . .

No, no.

The first half.

I'm not one of those kind of people at all.

You don't need silence?

No, no silence. It's always silent where I am.

Mr. Dylan, when you're on a concert tour how many people travel in your party?

We travel with about 12 people now.

Do the number of people seem to go with the amount of money you're making?

Oh, yes, of course.

Is that known as Dylan's law?

We have the band, we have five in the group. And we need other things; we have to—it's a lot of electronic equipment now, a lot of different things which have to be taken care of so we need a lot of people. We have three Road Managers and things like that. We don't make any big public presentations though, like we never come into town in limousines or anything like that. We just—uh—go from place to place, you know, and do the shows. That's all.

You fly in your own plane?

Yes, yes.

Do you have to get in a certain type of mood to write your music?

Yeah, I guess so. A certain type of mood, if you want to call it that.

Do you find that you are more creative at a certain time of the day?

Yes, yes, I feel that way.

Like a night writer?

I would say night has nothing to do with it.

Have you ever sung with the Beatles?

No. Well, I think we have messed around in London, but, no I don't think anything serious.

Have you ever played a dance?

No. It's not that kind of music.

It is.

Well, what can I say. You must know more about the music than I do. How long have you been playing it?

Do you find that when you're writing you free-associate often?

No, it's all very clear and simple to me. These songs aren't complicated to me at all. I know what they are all about! There's nothing hard to figure out for me. I wouldn't write anything I can't really see.

I don't mean it that way. I meant when you're creating a song are you doing it on a subliminal level?

No. That's the difference in the songs I write now. In the past year or so—in the last year and a half, maybe two, I don't know—the songs before, up till one of these records, I wrote the fourth record in Greece—there was a change there, but the records before that, I used to know what I wanted to say, before I used to write the song. All the stuff which I had written before which wasn't song, was just on a piece of toilet paper. When it comes out like that it's the kind of stuff I never would sing because people would just not be ready for it. But I just went through that other thing of writing songs and I couldn't write like it anymore. It was just too easy and it wasn't really "right." I would start out, I would know what I wanted to say before I wrote the song and I would say it, you know, and it would never come out exactly the way I thought it would, but it came out, you know, it touched it, but now, I just write a song, like I know that it's just going to be all right and I don't really know exactly what it's all about, but I do know the minutes and the layers of what it's all about.

What did you think about your song "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)"? It happens to be my favorite one.

God bless you, son. I haven't heard it for a long time. I couldn't even sing it for you probably.

How long does it take you to write a . . .

Usually not too long a time, really. I might write all night and get one song out of a lot of different things I write.

How many have you written?

Uh—I guess, well, there's one publisher that's got about a hundred. I've written about fifty others I guess. I got about 150 songs I've written.

Have they all been published?

No, some of the scraps haven't been published. But I find I can't really sing that anyway, because I forget it, so the songs I don't publish, I usually do forget.

Have you ever taken these scraps and made them into a song?

No, I've forgotten the scraps. I have to start over all the time. I can't really keep notes or anything like that.

You can't go back to one of your earlier things and use them in your . . .

No, no. That wouldn't be right either.

On your songs do you get any help from the rest of your entourage?

Robbie [Robertson], the lead guitar player, sometimes we play the guitars together—something might come up—but I know it's going to be right. I'll be just sitting around playing so I can write up some words. I don't get any ideas though of what I want to or what's really going to happen here.

Why do you think you're so popular?

I don't know. I'm not a reporter, I'm not a newsman or anything. I'm not even a philosopher, so I have no idea I would think other people would know, but I don't think I know. You know, when you get too many people talking about the same thing it tends to clutter up things. Everybody asks me that so I realize they must be talking about it, so I'd rather stay out of it and make it easier for them. Then, when they get the answer, I hope they tell me.

Has there been any more booing?

Oh, there's booing—you can't tell where the booing is going to come up. Can't tell at all. It comes up in the weirdest, strangest places and when it comes it's quite a thing in itself. I figure there's a little "boo" in all of us.

Bob, where is Desolation Row?

Where? Oh, that's someplace in Mexico. It's across the border. It's noted for its Coke factory. Coca-Cola machines are—sells—sell a lotta Coca-Cola down there.

Where is Highway 61 ?

Highway 61 exists—that's out in the middle of the country. It runs down to the south, goes up north.

Mr. Dylan, you seem very reluctant to talk about the fact that you're a popular entertainer—a most popular entertainer.

Well, what do you want me to say?

Well, I don't understand why you . .

Well, what do you want me to say? What do you want me to say, d'you want me to say—who—who—What do you want me to say about it?

You seem almost embarrassed to admit that you're popular.

Well, I'm not embarrassed, I mean, you know—Well, what do you want, exactly—for me to say. You want me to jump up and say "Hallelujah!"—and crash the cameras or do something weird? Tell me, tell me. I'll go along with you, if I can't go along with you, I'll find somebody to go along with you.

I find that you really have no idea as to why you are popular, no thoughts on why you are popular.

I just haven't really struggled for that. It happened, you know? It happened like anything else happens. Just a happening. You don't try to figure out happenings. You dig happenings. So I'm not going to even talk about it.

Do you feel that part of the popularity is because of a kind of identification?

I have no idea. I don't really come too much in contact.

Does it make life more difficult?

No, it certainly doesn't.

Were you surprised the first time the boos came?

Yeah, that was at Newport. Well, I did this very crazy thing. I didn't know what was going to happen, but they certainly booed, I'll tell you that. You could hear it all over the place. I don't know who they were though, and I'm certain whoever it was did it twice as loud as they normally would. They kind of quieted down some at Forest Hills although they did it there, too. They've done it just about all over except in Texas—they didn't boo us in Texas or in Atlanta or in Boston, or in Ohio. They've done it in just about—or in Minneapolis, they didn't do it there. They've done it a lot of other places. I mean, they must be pretty rich, to be able to go someplace and boo. I couldn't afford it if I was in their shoes.

Other than booing, have the audiences changed much? Do they scream and get hysterical and rush on stage?

Oh, sometimes you get people rushing the stage, but you just, y'know—turn 'em off very fast. Kick 'em in the head or something like that. They get the picture.

You said that you don't know why you are so popular. That is in direct opposition to what most people who reach this level of popularity say.

Well, you see, a lot of people start out and they plan to try to be stars, I would imagine, like, however, they have to be stars. I mean I know a lot of those people, you know? And they start out and they go into show business for many, many reasons, to be seen, you know. I started out, you know, like this had nothing to do with it when I started. I started from New York City, you know, and there just wasn't any of that around. It just happened.

Don't misunderstand me, I agree with your right not to have to care, my point is that it would be somewhat disappointing for the people who think that you feel towards them, the way that they feel towards you.

Oh—well, I don't want to disappoint anybody. I mean, tell me what I should say—you know, I'll certainly go along with anything, but I really don't have much of an idea.

You have a poster there.

Yeah, it's a poster somebody gave me. It looks pretty good. The Jefferson Airplane, John Handy, and Sam Thomas and the Mystery Trend and the Great Society and all playing at the Fillmore Auditorium this Friday, December 10th, and I would like to go if I could, but unfortunately, I won't be here, I don't think, but if I was here, I certainly would be there.

What's more important to you: The way that your music and words sound, or the content, the message?

The whole thing while it's happening. The whole total sound of the words, what's really going down is—it either happens or it doesn't happen, you know. That's what I feel is—just the thing, which is happening there at that time. That's what we do, you know? That is the most important thing, there really isn't anything else. I don't know if I answered your question.

You mean it might happen one time, and it might not happen the next?

We've had some bad nights, but we always take good cuts for the records. The records are always made out of good cuts and in person most of the time it does come across. Most of the time we do feel like playing. That's important, to me; the aftermath, and whatever happens before, is not really important to me; just the time on the stage and the time that we're singing the songs and performing them. Or not really performing them even, just letting them be there.

If you were going to sell out to a commercial interest, which one would you choose?

Ladies garments.

Bob, have you worked with any rock & roll groups?

Uh, professionally?

Or just sitting in or on concert tours with them.

No, no, I don't usually play too much.

Do you listen to other people's recordings of your songs?

Sometimes. A few of them I've heard. I don't really come across it that much though.

Is it a strange experience?

No, it's like a, more or less like a, heavenly kind of thing.

What do you think of Joan Baez's interpretations of your earlier songs?

I haven't heard her latest album, or her one before that. I heard one. She does 'em all right, I think.

What about Donovan's "Colors" and his things? Do you think he's a good poet?

Ehh. He's a nice guy, though.

I'm shattered.

Well, you needn't be.

Are there any young folksingers you would recommend that we hear?

I'm glad you asked that. Oh, yeah, there's the Sir Douglas Quintet, I think are probably the best that are going to have a chance of reaching the commercial airways. They already have with a couple of songs.

What about Paul Butterfield?

They're good.

Mr. Dylan, you call yourself a completely disconnected person.

No, I didn't call myself that. They sort of drove those words in my mouth. I saw that paper.

How would you describe yourself. Have you analyzed ..

I certainly haven't. No.

Mr. Dylan, I know you dislike labels and probably rightfully so, but for those of us well over thirty, could you label yourself and perhaps tell us what your role is?

Well, I'd sort of label myself as "well under thirty." And my role is to just, y'know, to just stay here as long as I can.

Phil Ochs wrote in 'Broadside' that you have twisted so many people's wigs that he feels it becomes increasingly dangerous for you to perform in Public.

Well, that's the way it goes, you know. I don't, I can't apologize certainly.

Did you envision the time when you would give five concerts in one area like this within ten days?

No. This is all very new to me.

If you were draftable at present, do you know what your feelings might be?

No. I'd probably just do what had to be done.

What would that be?

Well, I don't know, I never really speak in terms of "what if" y'know, so I don't really know.

Are you going to participate in the Vietnam Day Committee demonstration in front of the Fairmont Hotel tonight.

No, I'll be busy tonight.

You planning any demonstrations?

Well, we thought—one. I don't know if it could be organized in time.

Would you describe it?

Uh—well it was a demonstration where I make up the cards you know, they have—uh—they have a group of protesters here—uh perhaps carrying cards with pictures of the Jack of Diamonds on them and the Ace of Spades on them. Pictures of mules, maybe words and— oh maybe about 25-30,000 of these things printed up and just picket, carry signs and picket in front of the post office.

What words?

Oh, words: "camera," "microphone"—"loose"--just words—names of some famous people.

Do you consider yourself a politician?

Do I consider myself a politician? Oh, I guess so. I have my own party though.

Does it have a name?

No. There's no presidents in the party—there's no presidents, or vice presidents, or secretaries or anything like that, so it makes it kinda hard to get in.

Is there any right wing or left wing in that party?

No. It's more or less in the center—kind of on the Uppity scale.

Do you think your party could end the war with China?

Uh—I don't know. I don't know if they would have any people over there that would be in the same kind of party. Y'know? It might be kind of hard to infiltrate. I don't think my party would ever be approved by the White House or anything like that.

Is there anyone else in your party?

No. Most of us don't even know each other, y'know. It's hard to tell who's in it and who's not in it.

Would you recognize them if you see them?

Oh, you can recognize the people when you see them.

How long do you think it will be before you will finally quit?

Gee, I don't know. I could answer that you know, but it would mean something different probably for everybody, so we want to keep away from those kind of sayings.

What did you mean when you said .. .

I don't know, what things were we talking about?

You said I don't think things can turn out on a .. .

No, no, no—it's not that I don't think things can turn out, I don't think anything you plan ever turns out the way you plan.

Is that your philosophy?

No, no. Doesn't mean anything.

Do you think that it's fun to put on an audience.

I don't know, I've never done it.

You wrote a song called "Mama, You Been On My Mind." Do you sing it in concerts?

No I haven't. No I haven't.

Are the concerts fun still?

Yeah. Concerts are much more fun than they used to be.

Do you consider them more important than your albums, for instance?

No. It's just a kick to do it now. The albums are the most important.

Because they reach more people?

No, because it's all concise, it's very concise, and it's easy to hear the words and everything. There's no chance of the sound interfering, whereas in a concert, we've played some concerts where sometimes they have those very bad halls. You know,

microphone systems. So it's not that easy for somebody to just come and listen to a band as if they were listening to one person, you know.

Do you consider your old songs less valid than the ones you are putting out now?

No, I just consider them something else to themselves, you know for another time, another dimension. It would be kind of dishonest for me to sing them now, because I wouldn't really feel like singing them.

What is the strangest thing that ever happened to you?

You're gonna get it, man.

What is the weirdest thing that ever happened to you?

I'll talk to you about it, later. I wouldn't do that to you.

What areas in music that you haven't gotten into do you hope to get into?

Writing a symphony—with different melodies and different words, different ideas—all being the same which just roll on top of each other and underneath each other.

Mr. Dylan, when would you know that it was time to get out of the music field into another field?

When I get very dragged.

When you stop making money?

No, when my teeth get better—or God, when something makes a drastic—uh—when I start to itch, y'know? When something just goes to a terrifying turn and I know it's got nothing to do with anything and I know it's time to leave.

You say you would like to write symphonies. Is this in the terms that we think of symphonies?

I'm not sure. Songs are all written as part of a symphony—different melodies, different changes—with words or without them, you know, but the end result being a total . . . I mean they say that my songs are long now, y'know, well sometime it's just

gonna come up with the one that's going to be one whole album, consisting of one song. I don't know who's going to buy it. That might be the time to leave.

What's the longest song you've recorded?

I don't know. I don't really check those things, they just turn out long. I guess I've recorded one about 11 or 12 minutes long. "Ballad of Hollis Brown" was pretty long on the second record and "With God on Our Side" was kind of long. But none of them, I don't think, are as much into anything as "Desolation Row" was, and that was long, too. Songs shouldn't seem long, y'know, it just so happens that it looks that way on paper, y'know. The length of it doesn't have anything to do with it.

Doesn't this give you a problem in issuing records?

No, they are just ready to do anything that I put down now, so they don't really care.

What happens if they have to cut a song in half like "Subterranean Homesick Blues"?

They didn't have to cut that in half.

They didn't have to but they did.

No they didn't.

Yeah?

No. You're talking about "Like a Rolling Stone."

Oh, yeah.

They cut it in half for the disc jockeys. Well, you see, it didn't matter for the disc jockeys if they had it cut in half because the other side was just a continuation on the other side and if anybody was interested they could just turn it over and listen to what really happens, you know. We just made a song the other day which came out ten minutes long, and I thought of releasing it as a single but they would have easily released it and just cut it up but it wouldn't have worked that way so we're not going to turn it out as a single. It's called "Freeze Out" you'll hear it on the next album.