

RAVINIA FESTIVAL

An Illinois Non-Profit Corporation

June 17, 1964

RAVINIA FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION

Presents

BOB DYLAN

There are few healthier signs of our times than that many of our young people heed and respect the grim pessimism of Bob Dylan. This drawn and weary balladeer writes songs as timely and as real as the gunshot that murdered Medgar Evers or the poverty that drove Hollis Brown to destroy his wife, his five children and himself.

Dylan is becoming a one-young-man Grecian chorus chanting of our sins of pride and prejudice and warning that the gods have

struck down men for less — if there are any gods, of course. Dylan seems, in his gloomy cynicism, even to question the validity of such a comforting notion.

His latest album, "The Times They Are A-Changin'" (Columbia, CL. 2105), is his most direct statement thus far. And as such, without any catchy songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind" or "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" to leaven it, it poses the sternest challenge to the loyalty of the following that has

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made Dylan the most successful serious young performer-composer in folk music.

These 10 ballads indict our times and attitudes in a blunt bill of particulars charging us with hypocrisy, injustice, cruelty, discrimination, prejudice, jingoism and, perhaps worst of all, indifference. The accusations are leveled in the best ballads Dylan has written yet, blunt and barren narratives that build inevitably to their tragedies in the best balladic tradition.

Dylan's style, admittedly, isn't easy to take for someone who is accustomed to pop singing, especially of the folkum variety. His voice is flat, nasal and limited in range, and he has confined his guitar and harmonica accompaniment to skeletal chording or a raw country blues framework. But he has style, unmistakably his own and ideally suited to his raw, outspoken material.

Some may question his right to set himself up as a conscience of society. After all, he's only 21 or so, with not much more than a high school education, and he dresses like a beatnik. But really, what other credentials does he need than talent, sensitivity, the gift of poetry, and the validity of his judgments—by these criteria, he more than justifies his right to be heard.

His ballad, "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll," is hardly more than simple reporting of a Maryland killing. Mrs. Carroll, a middle-aged Negro mother of 11 who was working as a barnmaid, was caned fatally last year by the burly son of an influential white family because he felt she had not served him quickly enough. The wheels of Maryland justice spun and William Zantzinger was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to six months in jail. It would be difficult to achieve greater impact in reporting this story than Dylan has done with his plain ballad.

The tragedy of "The Ballad of Hollis Brown" is in the meaninglessness of it and the seeming indifference of god and man to Brown's insurmountable poverty. After the poor South Dakota farmer has slaughtered his family and himself, "Dylan finds the ideal line to emphasize the awful absurdity of the deaths: "Somewhere in the distance, there's seven new people born . . ."

Genius makes its own rules and Dylan is a genius, a singing conscience and moral referee as well as a preacher. It's not without significance that a young man remarked that, for him, going to church meant going to a Dylan concert.

The usual words do not fit Dylan. Exciting is not right; disturbing is more accurate. He is a charismatic social symbol to his generation, the voice protesting the compromises of the adult world they never made. It has always been thus, but Dylan's generation, it strikes me, has more strength and more moral right going for it.

Dylan's songs are carved from the reality of the American dream contrasted to the unreality of how it is. And Dylan sings them out of his own experience. That he is frighteningly young is irrelevant; that he has been made wise by a poetic vision of truth is what's important.

Folk music is so much big business success today that it is a major part of show business. We have folk singers sprouting like weeds—some good singers and some good performers. What Dylan has is the poet's ability to transmit a message. His is the personal honesty of a Lenny Bruce. He makes you think; he gets inside you and you can't turn it off when you leave the hall. His anti-performance pose symbolizes the distrust of his generation for the conventions we have lived by and in favor of truth.

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