

POP

# Dylan, Baez, Mitchell... they just kept coming

BY ROBERT MARTIN

The Rolling Thunder Revue went on so long and contained so many stars that it almost concealed an important fact: the re-emergence of Bob Dylan as a major creative force in popular music.

Rolling Thunder, as Dylan calls his travelling caravan of folk and rock artists, included performances last night at Maple Leaf Gardens (there'll be another one tonight) by Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell, Ramblin' Jack Eliot, former Byrd Roger McGuinn, and David Bowie's protege, Mick Ronson. They just kept coming. "Anything can happen with the Rolling Thunder," singer and master of ceremonies Bobby Neuwirth said, and I believed him. It wouldn't have been particularly surprising if the ghost of Woody Guthrie had joined the cast of thousands.

With all those stars, each of them capable of carrying a concert in his own right, the evening was a long one. It started at 8 p.m. and went on past midnight.

Dylan himself didn't appear until the show had been going for an hour and a half. He bounced on to the stage, wearing jeans, a shirt and vest, and the hat he wore in Sam Peckinpah's Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid. He launched into When I Paint My Masterpiece, and the title was significant. It contained the promise that Dylan has not folded up shop as a writer, and the rest of the show fulfilled that promise.

New songs like Isis, and Hurricane, about convicted murderer Ruben Carter, firmly replanted Dylan on his long-abandoned throne as the king of protest singers. Hurricane told the story of a boxer who, Dylan feels, has been unjustly imprisoned for nine years. It showed that he has come full-circle when compared to The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll, a song he wrote more than 10 years ago—and sang last night—that also deals with injustice in America. Carroll, a poor woman, was clubbed to death by a cane-wielding aristocrat, William Zanzinger. He received a six-month sentence.

Isis is harder to place. It appeared to combine Greek mythology with the folklore of the American West and is a song that should reward careful analysis. Still, for the first time in years, I'm looking forward to Dylan's next album with anticipation rather than dread.

It also elicited from Dylan the most dramatic delivery I've seen in five performances over the past two years. With his fists clenched he bellowed out the lyrics over the throbbing of the band, especially Scarlet Rivera's screaming violin.

Musically the band was—dare it be said?—better than The Band who used to back Dylan. Mick Ronson, rock-influenced lead solos added fire to even the most mundane Dylan compositions like Tonight I'll Be Staying Here With



Bob Dylan at Maple Leaf Gardens: re-emerging as a major creative force in pop music.

You. The group also contained three rhythm guitarists, two drummers, a bass-player and a pedal steel guitarist who doubled on violin. Roger McGuinn played banjo and Ronnee Blakely—I knew I'd forget somebody—played piano as well as singing a couple of songs.

The contrast in styles between the performers was enough to leave the mind reeling. Blakely whined out

country music, Eliot sang Woody Guthrie's tribute to Pretty Boy Floyd. Mitchell sang a new song that she said she's writing as the tour progresses and a late arrival, Gordon Lightfoot, added Sundown among other songs.

Dylan's return to touring was the pop event of 1974, simply because he hadn't been on tour for eight years. In the hysteria that greeted the return of the pop messiah, many people over-

looked the fact that Dylan gave mechanical, disinterested performances during which he sometimes couldn't even remember his own lyrics.

Rolling Thunder is the pop event of 1975 because Dylan is providing the finest performances of his career, singing the best new material he's written in years and has assembled a group of performers the like of which we may never see again.