Dylan on tour: Family reunion of the old, new folk

Joan Baez and Bob Dylan during one of the Rolling Thunder concerts.

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

It's news whenever Bob Dylan decides to perform, but his Rolling Thunder Revue, which hit the Forum last night, was extra special.

The show has brought the folk-rock idol together with many of the singers who figured in the earlier years of his career.

He shares the stage with Joan Baez, queen of the folk music boom of the early 1960s, with whom he was very close; Roger McGuinn, leader of the Byrds, the group that made Mr Tambourine Man his first number one folk-rock hit a decade ago; Rambling Jack Elliott, the protege of the late Woody Guthrie who met Dylan visiting in hospital when he first hit New York city in 1961, and Bobby Neuwirth, his former road manager and now aspiring leader of the current backup group.

The tour has also attracted several guest artists, including two of the most prominent of Dylan's "songwriting children" — Canadian Joni Mitchell and Gordon Lightfoot, both of whom were to play last night.

Rolling Thunder Revue started out five weeks ago, the artists traveling aboard three buses, and musicians advertising proceeding each stop. The Forum show was the second to last date of the tour, which finishes in Madison Square Garden later this week.

Originally planned to embrace small halls, to create a closer-to-the-people feeling, Rolling Thunder has forged its way into the larger arenas, primarily to cover the expenses of the tour. But as Baez mentioned in a telephone interview with CKGM-FM yesterday: "The same family feeling still gets across in the big audiences."

The idea for the reunion came to Dylan during the summer when he conducted an on the New York state scene — signing, jamming and drinking with his ex-cronies. He obviously feels in fine form, after a long recluse period following his 1966 motorcycle accident, which last year was broken by a triumphant return tour with The Band.

The tour is the rapper to perhaps the most successful tour of the 34-year-old singer's career.

He began by releasing his best album in ages (perhaps the best of all), Blood On The Tracks, a move away from his recent endless pursuit to a finely honed but deeply introspective. During the summer, he officially released his legendary Basement Tapes, a glowingly edited package of inspired home performances done spontaneously after his accident.

The jewel of this tour is a new song, entitled Hurricane, a blistering protest against the alleged frame-up of a murder charge of prizefighter Rubin "Hurricane" Carter in 1966.

JEWEL

The song is more than a "return" to the social-consciousness of his folk years. Dylan was always the best "protest" writer because he described real-life situations instead of slogans in songs that are just as vivid today. But Hurricane is clearly one of the most complex he's written.

The disc also debunks the myth that Dylan is not a "good recording artist."

This is a charged performance. An extra semi-Latin-jesse violin strain dots the galloping pace established by clanking drum cymbals and congas. The overtones are amazingly detailed and atmospheric narrative on the circumstances surrounding Carter's conviction, as well as underlining the larger moral issues, the songs as a breakdown with information that is not only of the moment but also universal.

Dylan doesn't join party, but the Thunder rolls on

By ANNE ROSENSTHROP
for The Gazette

Bob Dylan didn't make it to the Rolling Thunder Revue party after it opened in Toronto earlier this week.

But all the other participants did. I went too — not as a journalist but as a guest of one of the performers — and got a better insight into the singers' offstage personalities.

The Rolling Thunder Revue is of course an extravaganza — which appears in Montreal tonight — including Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Bobby Neuwirth, Joni Mitchell, Roger McGuinn and Ramsey Blakely. Also along is a host of backup musicians including Scarlet Rivera, Mark Ramos, Rob Stoner, T-Bone Burnett and Allen Ginsberg as poet-in-residence.

Dylan, it seems, is keeping aloof from the rest of the touring tribe. Whenever news like Baez and Mitchell bats wandered among the audiences, Dylan has secluded himself off from not only his public but most of his fellow performers.

Ramblin' Jack said he's hardly had a chance to talk with the tour's main man.

HOME BOY

A bunch of Toronto's folk and rock personalities also turned up at the party: Gordon Lightfoot, Ronnie Hawkins, David Clayton-Thomas, Christopher Ken-nedy and David Bas.

It was an interesting and very friendly party. During the evening Joan Baez dedicated a song to Montreal songwriter Jesse Winchester and at the party Joan and his manic formed the band for an enjoyable chat. I had with the "queen of folk music."

Despite his reputation as one of rock's sanest, Roger McGuinn, founder and leader of the Byrds, seemed to be a very likable guy. Wearing a Stetson hat of the Italian cowboy shirt Roger wore during throughout the night, engaging in conversation with anyone.

Joni Mitchell was the elegant lady at the affair in a very happy frame of mind, also wandered about chatting and distributing cigarettes to one and all.

Ramblin' Jack Elliott was forever rambling about big events, cowboy hats and boots and strung calls out on Ian Tyson's ranch.

Making smart in a corner was Allen Ginsberg. He had no shortage of people to listen to his tales of metamorphoses such as Jack Kerouac and seemed genuinely interested in meeting those who cared to introduce themselves.

In all, no one seemed to mind that Dylan had shunned the party. They all had a real nice time without him.

Syncopated sinners beware: It's that old devil rock music

By MIKE BOYKO
Chicago Daily News

CHICAGO — Because of my interest in rock music, the following news item out of Tallahassee, Fla., caught my eye:

TALLAHASSEE — Burning rock records for its "appeal to the flesh," a Baptist church has begun a campaign to put the torch to records by Elton John, the Rolling Stones and other rock stars.

Some $2,200 worth of records were tossed into a bonfire this week after church officials labeled the music immoral.

The Rev. Charles Boykin, assistant pastor and youth director at the Lakewood Baptist Church, said he had seen statistics which showed "of 1,000 girls who become pregnant out of wedlock, 900 committed fornication while rock music was being played."

It was the last part — the amazing statistic — that intrigued me. I envisioned getting a portable radio and blasting rock music at the first 1,000 women I met.

But first I decided to get further details from Rev. Boykin. I phoned him and we had the following interview:

Where did that statistic come from, the one about all those girls getting pregnant while listening to rock music?

Accurate

"I want to be accurate, so let me correct you. They didn't all listen to it DURING the sex act. I was speaking of listening to it as a prelude to fornication, as well as during."

I see. But rock music was involved in all but 10 pregnancies out of 1,000 cases?

"That's right. It was sort of like a Gallup Poll of unwed mothers."

And who promoted the statistics?

Mike Boyko, the Chicago Daily News' Politics-spewing columnist, sometimes turns to music when he's not worrying about politics or Mayor Richard Daley.

"This man. He's from West Virginia. Or maybe Virginia. He stopped in our church one day and gave us the statistics."

He's a professional poll taker?

"Oh, no. He's an evangelist. He travels all the time."

And you believe his statistics?

Relationship

"Oh, yes. There's a definite relationship between illicit sex and any music with a syncopated beat. That covers rock and country music and even some Gospel music."

Goodness, a decent girl can get in such grand with demands on. Tell me more.

"Well, the live bass tones of the bass drum and the bass guitar cause people respond sexually."

(They make me get my fingers in my ears. Am I strange?)

But the syncopated beat has been around a lot longer than rock music, hasn't it?

"That's right. And the debauchery began when Benny Goodman introduced swing music."

Benny Goodman caused debauchery?

"That's right. His music had a syncopated beat."

Then why weren't lots of girls getting pregnant because of his music?

Open Sex

"They were, but it was unwanted sex. When Goodman had a concert in Los Angeles in 1938, there was open sex."

In 1938?

"That's right. The syncopated beat did it."

How about Glen Miller, Lawrence Welk?

"When they use the syncopated beat, yes."

Remarkable. I wouldn't have thought Lawrence Welk capable of such sensuality. It makes one wonder what really goes on in all those nursing homes.

It doesn't matter whether a song is slow or fast. It is the syncopated beat. You can trace it all the way back to the jungles, where the beat was introduced. It is primitive, pulsating, hypnotic."

Hard charming? Then what kind of music should a nice girl listen to if she doesn't want to be swept up by a jungle, animal instinct?

"Well, the syncopated beat is not predominant in patterns songs or a most Gospel music."

Even Bach

How about classical music?

"I'm not advocating all classical music. In his later music, Bach introduced some syncopated beats."

Aha! I suspected an attack of Bach. The old hipster fostered by exposure. Have you introduced any other scientific research, besides the Traveling Evangelist Poll?

"Well, we made some tests with pianos. We played classical music for one group of pianos, and rock music for another group, and we didn't play any music for a third group.

"The pianos that were exposed to classical music grew in the direction of the speakers.

"The pianos that weren't exposed to any music grew straight up."

And — let me guess — the pianos that listened to rock music between ed and all but 14 of the pianos became pregnant, right?

"No the pianos that were exposed to rock music just grew away from the speakers. Then they died."

Well, that's better than breaking your daddy's heart.

DECISION

Ottawa, November 27, 1978

The Canadian Radio-Television Commission announces the following decision affecting applicants:

Decision CRTC 78-813

MINGAN, QUEBEC — 7810421100

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Application to amend its Broadcasting Licence for CBMA, Moncton, Quebec to change the frequency from 1250 kHz to 740 kHz

Decision APPROVED

Ron LaRoche,
Director General of Licensing

Canadian Radio-Television Commission / Conseil de la Radio-Télévision Canadienne

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Gzowski livens up CBC-FM

The most lively addition so far to the CBC's new English language FM network is Gzowski on FM, the weekday 4 to 6 p.m. magazine show because on the arts — all of them, you note completed additions.

The Gzowski show replaced a program called Entertainment, a meeting music series devoted to what's called "light classics." Its unfortunate fans were stumbling less than enchanted with the replacement, especially since Gzowski seemed to go out of his way to shock them in his first show by interviewing a drag queen and allowing several four-letter words to get by in another interview.

Listener protest

It struck me at the time as a foolishly defiant gesture and a short-sighted approach to a new audience. There were protests from listeners all along the FM network and there are still some objections to the Gzowski show, especially from Montreal listeners.

But there are indications now that the show is gathering audience, and that's good because it's usually a very interesting couple of hours.

Gzowski on FM may venture anything from a half hour conversation with, say, Andre Gagnon or Kate Reid to a radio lesson in prairie of a poet or a chat with wax-nose singing star Barbara Ann Scott.

On Tuesdays there's a new segment called Tradio where people can trade old books, records, etc. On Friday there's the Battle of the Bands, today between The Canadians Bronte and The York Woods.

Radio & TV
by John Kraft

But most of all there's that rare kind of music and stationary that

Gzowski listed to a few art on host of This Country In the Morning.

Informal broadcaster

For my money Gzowski is one of the finest informal broadcasters in the country. He talks to the microphone as if it were an old friend, though in a somewhat more restrained vocabulary than he normally uses off the air.

Gzowski has the skill, and it is a skill, of being almost genuinely present with each interlocutor, whether he's alone at the mike or talking to a studio guest. He's totally honest, without self-consciousness or artifice, and at the same time he's totally professional.

The former boy wonder of the magazine world (he was managing editor of Maclean's at 25) is now full of enthusiasms and curiosity at 41 and still looks as if he's just gotten in from a tandem baseball game. If it's anytime between May and October he probably has.

He's been accused of being cocky, fiercely competitive, a jock, a womanizer, and of course a star. It's probably all true in some degree, along with the utterly brilliant mind, the easy laughter, and the openness to people, places and ideas.

Sounds Unlikely

There are two problems about Gzowski on FM in this area. One is that the CBC-FM signal is very difficult to pick up in some parts of Montreal, including Westmount. The other is that it's running against Sounds Unlikely, the local weekday 4-6 p.m. series.

Sounds Unlikely, with hosts Wayne Grigsby and Katie Malloch, is a good show too, and matures much more information about what's happening right here — movie reviews, theatre news, and interviews with people who are doing interesting things in and around Montreal.

However, I'm told by those who drive home between 4 and 6 p.m. in the afternoon that the weather reports aren't always what they might be and that traffic reports are often inadequate. I must admit that I haven't listened with them things in mind, but I will from now on.

It's unfortunate that CBC AM and FM should be competing with each other thusly. It would obviously be better alternatives if each show were scheduled against something quite different, perhaps straight music.

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