



Do look back, it's alright— a little nostalgia and some new material with the Rolling Thunder Revue



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The last time Bob Dylan went on tour, it was just himself and his old backup band. They did only their own songs and the emphasis was upon their musical accomplishments of the previous years.

Last Saturday at the Niagara Falls Convention Center the spotlight shifted. There were performances by many of the individuals who had affected or had been affected by Dylan's long, meandering process of musical growth. Dylan still tended to hold center stage, his very presence forcing the other musicians to defer to him. For a majority of the concert, however, Dylan was not even on stage, while the others maintained, on their own, the musical spirit which Dylan keyed.

This spirit was immediately touched when Bob Neuwirth came on stage with Guam, the backup band for the Revue, and said, "Welcome to our living room." This informality pervaded the show as musician after musician woke up for the strange afternoon starting time to come out and play a few songs.

Spider Ronson

Guam eased the crowd into the stream of things with some quick, light country numbers. Aside from Neuwirth the group contained T-Bone Walker on rhythm guitar, an excellent pedal-steel/dobro/fiddle player whose name escapes me and Mick Ronson on lead guitar who climaxed

this early set with a song that showcased his guitar virtuosity.

Beginning the overwhelming series of walk-ons with Ronee Blakely, discovered through her appearance in the film *Nashville*. She has a powerful, wide ranging voice which she accompanied on piano to sing a ballad off of her recently released album. Out came Joni Mitchell to do a duet on the next Blakely song and then to do two songs of her own, alone on the stage with just an acoustic guitar. My Joni Mitchell fan friends tell me the songs were new, but they followed in the rhythmic and melodic modes of her previous work. Time factors pushed her off at this point, the standing ovation crowd grumbling as to why Joni couldn't do just one or two more songs.

Mr. D. delivers

But it was time for Ramblin' Jack Elliot to do his three songs. Elliot does some good guitar strumming and even better yodeling vocals. Clearly, his presence and style have influenced Dylan's own all-encompassing musical approach.

Then, Dylan finally ambled on and he quickly proved that all those old songs are still part of him. In a recent interview, he stated, "I can relate, on some level, with every song I wrote." "When I Paint My Masterpiece" and "It Ain't Me Babe" were both done differently than the originals but still exquisitely. The beat, the phrasing fit so perfectly that this version could just as easily have been the first. Out came his harmonica, delivering the searing,

drawn out, not quite on key chords, melodies. He also performed a number of new songs which promise to make his newly recorded album just as much a classic as the others.

Dylan, hunched over the mike with his acoustic, or jumping from musician to musician with his electric, revived songs that covered every period: "The Times They are a Changin'," "Just Like a Woman," "I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine," "Simple Twist of Fate."

Joan Baez came out for about seven songs after the intermission including a lovely a capella of "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" and Roger McGuinn for "Chestnut Mare" and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" which drew a Baez-induced 6,000 part harmony.

Dylan as heavyweight

During such a mind boggling afternoon, it's very hard to pinpoint the climax. "Like a Rolling Stone" and "This Land is Your Land," the final two numbers, were definitely contenders. For myself, however, it was the powerful singing of Dylan's new single "Hurricane." After nearly 15 years of writing, this song proves that Dylan is still number one. In it, he uses the jailing of Rubin Carter as the story line for a moving, cutting song which displays an enormous level of vitality and inventiveness. It's a song which helps you remember that even though Bruce Springsteen may be called "another Dylan," Dylan was and is the best, and he can still be just as sarcastic, enigmatic and rocking as ever.



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