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978-0-521-88694-9 - The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan

Edited by Kevin J. H. Dettmar

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO BOB DYLAN

A towering figure in American culture and a global twentieth-century icon, Bob Dylan has been at the center of American life for over forty years. *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan* brings fresh insights into the imposing range of Dylan's creative output. The first Part approaches Dylan's output thematically, tracing the evolution of Dylan's writing and his engagement with American popular music, religion, politics, fame, and his work as a songwriter and performer. Chapters in Part II analyze his landmark albums to examine the consummate artistry of Dylan's most accomplished studio releases. As a writer Dylan has courageously chronicled and interpreted many of the cultural upheavals in America since World War II. This book will be invaluable both as a guide for students of Dylan and twentieth-century culture, and for his fans, providing a set of new perspectives on a much-loved writer and composer.

KEVIN J. H. DETTMAR is W. M. Keck Professor and Chair of the Department of English, Pomona College, California.

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BARBARA O’DAIR is the editor of *Trouble Girls: The Rolling Stone Book of Women in Rock*. She has been a senior editor at *Rolling Stone*, *Entertainment Weekly* and the *Village Voice*, the executive editor of *Details*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *More*, and *Reader’s Digest*, and the editor-in-chief of *Teen People* and *Us*. She has contributed essays, reviews and other articles to a wide variety of magazines, newspapers, and books. She holds an MFA in poetry and lives in New Jersey with her family.

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CHRONOLOGY OF DYLAN'S LIFE

- 1941 Robert Allen Zimmerman, son of Abram and Beatrice ("Beatty") Stone, born May 24 in Duluth, Minnesota.
- 1948 Abram relocates the Zimmerman family to Hibbing, Minnesota where Robert Allen spends the rest of his childhood.
- 1959 After playing in high school rock bands, he moves to Minneapolis and enrolls at the University of Minnesota. Hearing Odetta in a record store, he trades his electric guitar for an acoustic to begin performing folk music.
- 1960 Becomes involved in local folk scene, playing the Dinkytown area of Minneapolis. Adopts and performs under the name Bob Dylan (a nod to the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas); legally changes name two years later.
- 1961 Moves to New York where he seeks out his ailing idol, Woody Guthrie. Begins performing regularly at folk clubs and coffee houses of Greenwich Village. Becomes romantically involved with the 17-year-old Suze Rotolo, whose political and artistic commitments make a profound impression on Dylan; the relationship survives many rough patches until the summer of 1964. His September show at Gerde's Folk City reviewed favorably by Robert Shelton in the *New York Times*; signed to a record deal with Columbia by John Hammond.
- 1962 First album, *Bob Dylan*, featuring two original songs, "Talking New York" and "Song to Woody," and covers of traditional folk material, released. Sells only 5,000 copies. Dylan referred to as "Hammond's Folly."
- 1963 Releases *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* in May; contains mostly originals ("Blowin' in the Wind," "Masters of War," and "A Hard

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Rain's A-Gonna Fall") with two covers ("Corrina, Corrina" and "Honey, Just Allow Me One More Chance"). Refuses to play the *Ed Sullivan Show* after an attempt to censor his set list. Joan Baez invites Dylan to tour with her; they become romantically involved. Performs at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August.

- 1964 *The Times They Are A-Changin'* released. Meets the Beatles at Kennedy Airport in New York; reportedly introduces the group to marijuana. *Another Side of Bob Dylan* appears, marking the beginnings of his turn from the folk genre.
- 1965 Dylan gives "Mr. Tambourine Man" to Roger McGuinn; it becomes a major hit for the Byrds. Ends relationship with Baez; marries Sara Lowndes (sometimes spelt "Lownds"). Releases *Bringing It All Back Home* in March; the album has a decidedly different sound from the previous folk recordings, featuring heavy electric arrangements alongside some acoustic tracks. Dylan is booed when he performs an electric set at the Newport Folk Festival. Releases the all-electric *Highway 61 Revisited* with the definitive single "Like a Rolling Stone" in August. Hires backing band the Hawks (later the Band) featuring Robbie Robertson and Levon Helm for tour supporting the album.
- 1966 Records *Blonde on Blonde* in Nashville. Embarks on a world tour where he performs split sets at every stop, first performing solo on acoustic guitar and harmonica, then, backed by the Hawks, delivering a high-voltage electric set. In July, mysteriously crashes his Triumph 55 motorcycle outside Woodstock, NY. Dylan begins withdrawal from public performing and recording.
- 1967 While recovering, records several sessions with the Hawks in their nearby Woodstock basement (which become the first widely distributed bootlegs); sessions later released by Columbia as *The Basement Tapes* (1975). In October and November records *John Wesley Harding* in Nashville.
- 1968 In January, appears for the first time in public since his crash, performing three songs at the Woody Guthrie Memorial Concert.
- 1969 Releases an all-country album, *Nashville Skyline*. Appears on the first episode of Johnny Cash's television show in May, performing three songs with the host. Headlines the Isle of Wight festival in

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- England in August, having rejected offers to perform at the Woodstock Music Festival.
- 1970 *Self-Portrait*, an album comprised mostly of covers, is released and poorly received. *New Morning* released to more favorable reviews. On June 9, receives honorary doctorate in music from Princeton University.
- 1971 Performs at ex-Beatle George Harrison's benefit concert for Bangladesh. The single "George Jackson" is his only studio release of the year. Conducts recording sessions with Allen Ginsberg (still unreleased).
- 1972 Worked on Sam Peckinpah's film *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, providing the songs (released on the 1973 soundtrack album) and acting as "Alias."
- 1973 Records *Planet Waves* (released in January 1974) with the Band, and begins rehearsing for a supporting tour after leaving Columbia for the Asylum label.
- 1974 The Bob Dylan and the Band tour recorded and released as *Before the Flood*. Begins recording *Blood on the Tracks* (1975) in September, once again on the Columbia label.
- 1975 Visits boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter in prison and pens "Hurricane," a single depicting the fighter's wrongful conviction in a triple-murder case in Paterson, NJ. Embarks on Rolling Thunder Revue tour, featuring T-Bone Burnett, "Ramblin'" Jack Elliott, Allen Ginsberg, Roger McGuinn, Joni Mitchell, and Joan Baez.
- 1976 As the Rolling Thunder Revue continues, Dylan releases *Desire* featuring collaborations with playwright Jacques Levy. It is his last number 1 album for thirty years. Appears at the Band's farewell concert, documented by Martin Scorsese (*The Last Waltz*).
- 1978 Releases *Street Legal*. Marriage to Sara ends in divorce. *Renaldo and Clara*, a four-hour film directed by Dylan, using concert footage of the Rolling Thunder Revue and starring himself alongside Joan Baez, is released to poor reviews.
- 1979 From January to April, participates in Bible study classes at the Vineyard School of Discipleship in Reseda, CA. Releases

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- gospel-inspired *Slow Train Coming*, winning the Grammy for “Best Male Vocalist” for the song “Gotta Serve Somebody.”
- 1980 Second “born again” album released: *Saved*. Tours, reviving songs from a number of his 1960s recordings.
- 1981 *Shot of Love* released, featuring both Christian-influenced and secular material.
- 1982 Travels to Israel; it is rumored that he rejects his born-again Christian status.
- 1983 Releases *Infidels* to critical acclaim.
- 1984 Appears in March on *Late Night with David Letterman*, backed by a punk band, performing three songs. *Real Live* samples the subsequent European tour.
- 1985 Releases *Empire Burlesque*. Performs to poor reception at Live Aid backed by Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood; performs to higher acclaim at Farm Aid, backed by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.
- 1986 Tours with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. *Knocked Out Loaded* released. Secretly marries backup singer, Carol Dennis (they divorce in 1992).
- 1987 Embarks on summer tour with the Grateful Dead (sampled on *Dylan and the Dead*, 1988), to mostly poor reviews. Has successful tour of the Middle East and Europe with Petty.
- 1988 *Down in the Groove* poorly received. Records with supergroup the Traveling Wilburys alongside George Harrison, Tom Petty, Roy Orbison, and ELO founder Jeff Lynne. Inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, introduced by Bruce Springsteen. Begins “The Never Ending Tour” (and has continued touring to present).
- 1989 Records and releases the well-received *Oh Mercy* with producer Daniel Lanois. Accompanied by “Political World” music video on MTV.
- 1990 Reunites with the Wilburys (sans the deceased Orbison) for a second album: *The Traveling Wilburys Vol. 3*. Releases *Under the Red Sky* with contributions from George Harrison, Slash, Stevie Ray Vaughn, and Elton John. Named a *Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*, France's highest cultural honor.

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- 1991 Receives lifetime achievement award at the Grammy Awards ceremony; performs "Masters of War" in protest at the first US Iraq invasion on the show. *The Bootleg Series Vol. 1–3* releases a number of previously discarded but now praised Dylan recordings.
- 1992 *Good as I Been to You* released; features acoustic versions of old folk tunes.
- 1993 *World Gone Wrong*, an acoustic blues album, released.
- 1994 Appears at the twenty-fifth anniversary Woodstock '94 Festival. Performs on MTV's *Unplugged*, releasing a live album of acoustic versions of some of his electric classics.
- 1997 In January, reteams with Lanois to record *Time Out of Mind*. Before the album's scheduled spring release, suffers a near-fatal heart infection, pericarditis. Recovers to begin touring by mid-summer; performs for Pope John Paul II in the fall. *Time Out of Mind* released in September, peaking at number 10 on the Billboard charts, his highest position in twenty years. In December, President Clinton presents Dylan with a Kennedy Center Lifetime Achievement Award.
- 1998 Wins first "Album of the Year" Grammy for *Time Out of Mind*. Tours the U.S. in the fall with Van Morrison and Joni Mitchell. The legendary 1966 "Royal Albert Hall" *Concert* released by Columbia.
- 1999 Tours with Paul Simon.
- 2001 Single "Things Have Changed," written for the film *Wonder Boys* (2000) wins a Grammy, a Golden Globe, and an Academy Award for best song. The Oscar statue tours with Dylan atop an amplifier as he performs. Releases "*Love and Theft*" in September to high critical praise.
- 2003 Pens "Cross the Green Mountain" for the film *Gods and Generals*. Releases his own film (in collaboration with Larry Charles) *Masked & Anonymous* to poor reviews.
- 2004 Dylan publishes his autobiographical prose work, *Chronicles: Volume One*.
- 2005 The four-hour Martin Scorsese documentary *No Direction Home* is shown on television to a wide US audience, released to DVD,

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and accompanied by new bootlegs from the early 1960s. Records “Tell Ol’ Bill” for the film *North Country*.

- 2006 Records and releases *Modern Times*. The album marks his first number 1 album in thirty years. At 65, Bob Dylan becomes the oldest living artist to hit the top spot. He also begins eclectic weekly “Theme Time Radio Hour” broadcasts.
- 2007 It is reported that Dylan is spearheading a collaborative project to record the lost Hank Williams catalogue (songs penned, but not recorded, by the country artist at the time of his death).
- 2008 In September Dylan publishes two poems, “17” and “21,” in the *New Yorker*, from a forthcoming book, *Hollywood Foto-Rhetoric: The Lost Manuscript*. Bootleg Series Vol. 8, *Tell Tale Signs* – rare and unreleased recordings from 1989–2006 – is announced for October release by Columbia.

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A NOTE ON DYLAN'S LYRICS

Lyrics quoted in the book are taken variously from writers' personal transcriptions of the recordings, Dylan's "official" website (bobdylan.com), and from the published collection, *Bob Dylan, Lyrics: 1962–2001* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004). In some cases the official published versions of song lyrics differ, sometimes significantly, from what one hears in the recordings; the contributors have used their discretion in determining which "version" of a song's lyrics to use.