

## **Bob Dylan Musician,**

***Keith Negus.***

This file contains the pre-proof versions of Chapter One and Chapter Five from *Bob Dylan*, presented here in this format with the permission of Equinox Publishing. I have called this text *Bob Dylan Musician* because this was the original agreed title of the book right up to the moment just before publication when pressure from the US publisher resulted in the term ‘musician’ being reluctantly (from my perspective) expunged from the title. That word – musician – was there to concisely signal how my approach differs from most other books on Bob Dylan. I am interested in his work and practice as a musician, rather than his lyrics as poetry or the relationship between his biography and musical art.

The book contains five chapters, so these two chapters introduce and conclude the study. If anyone would like electronic copies of additional chapters I am happy to provide these, as long as they are used only for research and teaching.

Keith Negus  
June 2013

## CHAPTER ONE

### Surroundings

On 31 October 1964 Bob Dylan performed at the Philharmonic Hall in New York City, just two years after signing a recording contract and with four albums already released. Having quickly gained recognition as a folk ‘protest singer’ he was rapidly moving away from songs of social commentary and ‘finger pointing’. Dylan was beginning to use the popular song in a new and radical manner to explore more internal or subjective experiences, whilst experimenting with the sound, meaning and rhythm of words. Within three months, when recording his fifth album, no longer performing alone with acoustic guitar and harmonica, he was beginning to create an abrasive yet ethereal sonority, mixing the acoustic and electric textures of folk, electric blues, rock’n’roll, gospel, country and pop. The New York concert, recorded for a planned live album, was no longer indicative of Dylan’s music and its scheduled release was cancelled. Although it circulated amongst collectors, Columbia Records only released it nearly 40 years later as *The Bootleg Series Vol. 6, Bob Dylan Live 1964, Concert at Philharmonic Hall*. Like other releases in the bootleg series, the recording is a valuable document and provides a compelling insight into the way Dylan performed at the time.

Alone on stage with just an acoustic guitar and collection of harmonicas, Dylan creates an intimacy and immediacy of communication as he banters and jokes with fans throughout the performance. When he can’t recall the opening lines of ‘I Don’t Believe You’ his strumming stutters and he almost stops as he mumbles ‘Oh God’. ‘Here’s the second verse of it’ he says before pausing and then asking the audience ‘does anybody know the first verse of this song?’ A chorus of people yell out the opening line, and off he goes: ‘OK, this is the same song, it starts now’. A number of times during the concert his guitar goes out of tune or he needs to change to a different tuning. Early in the concert he’d started strumming the opening chords of ‘If You Gotta Go, Go Now’ and then halted to alter the pitch of his strings. As he’s tuning he quips ‘don’t let that scare you’, and following a pause during which he is adjusting the guitar, he then seemingly spontaneously says ‘It’s just Halloween, I have my Bob Dylan mask on’. The audience laugh knowingly, and then loudly applaud, as if they are colluding with him in their awareness of the stagecraft and characterisation that have become integral to this ‘authentic’ folk performer. ‘I’m masque-erading’ he says in response and giggles.

On a concert recording made less than two years later at Manchester Free Trade Hall on 17 May 1966 you can hear a very different dialogue with the audience (*The Bootleg Series Vol. 4, Bob Dylan Live 1966, The “Royal Albert Hall” Concert*). During the opening acoustic set of Dylan’s show the audience had listened to familiar and new songs in reverential silence and responded with enthusiastic but polite applause. When he returned for the second half, a vocal section of the audience was clearly outraged at Dylan’s decision to perform both old and new songs with a band of electric guitars, bass, drums and keyboards. At this concert there is no friendly banter prior to ‘I Don’t Believe You’. Instead, Dylan emphasizes how he’s moved on from his folk days by casually drawling ‘This is called “I Don’t Believe You” - it used to be like that and now it goes like this’. A snap on the snare drum and a pulsating bass introduce the song. It has been raised a tone in pitch from D to E – the ringing metallic timbre of the E chord, using all six strings of the electric guitar, and the higher pitch of Dylan’s vocal over the rhythms of the band, accentuates the song’s transformation from a slightly bemused, restrained acoustic folk lament about a lover who pretends they’ve never met, to a defiant electric blues, the anger spilling over from the specific events described in the lyrics and expressing a more general sense of disaffection.

British folk fans, familiar with and expecting acoustic music, were hearing one of the noisiest of early amplified rock gigs. Many were clearly bewildered. Some became audibly angry and continued slow handclapping and shouting taunts at the stage - responses that had followed Dylan on this tour. Just before the final song the recording captures the infamous shout of 'Judas!', followed by applause from a section of the audience. There is a pause and then Dylan retorts with the words that don't actually feature in the lyrics of the song with its title: 'I don't believe you'. There is a further pause before he spits out 'you're a liar'. The band cascades into 'Like A Rolling Stone', the song that was then defining how anger and alienation could be expressed in rock music.

These recordings and the specific incidents give an insight into a captivating performer, rapidly undergoing creative changes. They also highlight the way Dylan has always been primarily a performing artist. When he began songwriting he had already been performing for several years and the songs he started writing were created because he was dissatisfied with the limitations of his existing repertoire and wanted material that he could sing with conviction. Most of his early songs extended or developed some of the existing folk material that he had been playing in clubs and coffee houses.

Dylan's songs have usually been written from a performer's perspective. In the early 1960s, the songs were tailored to his rhythmic strummed guitar style, his bohemian folksy persona and the nasal folk-blues voice of his early recordings and concerts. In later years, the songs would be written to be performed by changing bands of musicians and to accommodate Dylan's engagement with various blues, country, ballad, gospel, rock and pop styles. The songs would then be continually refined and developed during subsequent performances – changed in response to the musical styles inspiring Dylan at the time, and changed in relation to the musicians available. The songs have also been reshaped over the years according to Dylan's decision to perform them on acoustic or electric guitar, or when playing acoustic or electric piano, or on those very rare occasions when he has put aside his instrument and sung at the microphone in front of a band.

Unlike many of his artistic peers who achieved their initial critical acclaim and commercial success during the 1960s, Dylan did not compose his songs with recording in mind, nor did he spend hours in the studio perfecting his music as a recorded artefact (as the Beatles and the Beach Boys began to do). The songwriter Paul Zollo once asked him: 'Until you record a song, no matter how heroic it is, it doesn't really exist. Do you ever feel that?' Dylan replied 'No. If it's there, it exists' (2003: 79). This is a very different attitude to the belief that a recording can be selected from various studio versions and live performances and deemed a 'definitive version' (Scobie, 2003: 254) - as if an 'original' can be isolated as a kind of *urtext*. As Dylan later remarked; 'a record is not that monumental for me to make. It's just a record of songs' (Rosenbaum, 1978: 70). Most of Dylan's recordings are a document of his songs caught at a particular moment in the life of the song and its author. The songs as recorded are usually identifiable in concert, but changes may be made to lyrics, melody, rhythm, tempo and harmony. This is why performance has been so central to his life as a songwriter and this is why Paul Williams argued that Dylan's 'finest work has been done ...outside of the confines of the recording studio' (1992: xiv).

The first officially released studio recording of a song is neither definitive nor authoritative. As Dylan observed in 1993: 'The songs I recorded in my past, they're almost like demos. I'm still trying to figure out what some of them are about. The more I play them, the better idea I have of how to play them' (cited in Muir, 2001: 92). During the same year he added: 'Time lets me find new meanings to every song, even in the older ones, and it's important to be always looking for new meanings. Yes, the body of the song remains the same but it wears new clothes' (cited in Roe, 2003: 90). Only very rarely have the new clothes included changes to lyrics; Dylan has found the new meanings in the music. You only have to listen to the New York version of 'I Don't Believe You' in October 1964 and the 'same' song at Manchester in May 1966, to realise that the new clothes can provide revealing insights into Dylan's

changing musical identity. His live performances have continually provoked audiences into thinking about the songs differently, sending listeners back to play the recordings again and to hear them in a new light.

The audience has always been part of Dylan's music as a tangible physical presence. From the fans that helped him remember the first line of 'I Don't Believe You', and the fan that felt disappointed enough to yell 'Judas!' there is a long history of communication between Dylan and his audience. This has ranged between those who have voiced their disappointment and their disapproval, to an almost ecstatic response – very often at the same concert. Fans have verbally objected or walked out in response to apocalyptic pronouncements inspired by self-righteous Christianity during the late 1970s, or the shambolic performances during the winter of 1991. Yet fans have roared their approval continually over the years. The good-natured banter between musician on stage and fans in the audience featured less after the early 1960s, but occasionally appeared during the mid-1990s. Dylan's concerts and performances on albums have continually inspired. Yet they have also offended, outraged and perturbed those listeners who assumed that they knew who Bob Dylan was, what he would sing about and what his music would sound like.

### **The mask and the musician**

Writing about how he has confounded his followers, a number of commentators have picked up on Dylan's quip about wearing the Bob Dylan mask. Rather than hearing it as a light-hearted, flippant or ironic remark it has been taken as an insight into Dylan's art and performing identity.

Stephen Scobie draws parallels with the way players in Greek and Roman theatre used masks 'to conceal identity and to express character' (2003: 46). Just as this enabled one actor to assume many roles, so too Dylan's mask of performance 'multiplies identity' and allowed 'identity itself to become an artistic construct' (2003: 47). Scobie stresses how the English term 'person' has evolved from the Latin *persona* and, referring to the writings of poet Ezra Pound, declares: 'There has always been an element of the Poundian *persona* in Dylan's work. In a strictly limited sense, a *persona* is an adopted voice: a poem in which the poet, though writing in the first person, is manifestly taking on the role of a fictional character' (2003: 48). He goes on to give examples in the poetry of Robert Browning and T.S. Eliot and argues that when Dylan sings 'I' in a song it is 'always, as a *persona*, as a mask' (48). Scobie cites Rimbaud's 'I is another', a phrase used by other critics when writing about the persona of Bob Dylan, and one which Dylan has also rather mischievously quoted back at them (see Crowe, 1985; Day, 1988), particularly when trying to deflect autobiographical interpretations of his work.

For Scobie Dylan's creativity cannot be narrowly located in his lyrics and music without acknowledging the parallel production of an idiosyncratic performing identity. It is not only his songs that have been creatively rearranged over time, so too has the appearance and manner of the singer. Scobie writes of what he calls 'the mask of originality' (48), pointing to how Dylan has adopted various personas, continually creating and discarding 'masks of himself' such as the 'protest singer, rock star and country gentleman' (ibid, 48). Scobie locates Dylan 'within the carnivalesque tradition of acting and masking' (49), his identity always in doubt, always out of reach and forever confounding the critical interpreter.

This is a vision of artistic identity refracted through drama, spectacle, poetry and fiction into popular music. It resonates with the idea that an artist creates her or his self simultaneously with their art and links the literary aesthetic of romantic poets and novelists to modern pop culture. One of its legacies is the now almost commonplace assumption that pop musicians are invented characters, continually subject to change as they are subsequently 'reinvented' – an idea that

frames both the critical interpretation and commercial marketing of numerous artists, including David Bowie, Madonna, Prince and Bruce Springsteen.

Dylan's awareness of the mask or persona, and the labour that goes with it, was seemingly signalled at a press conference during the 1980s when he said 'I'm only Bob Dylan when I have to be'. When asked who he was the rest of the time, he replied 'myself' (cited in Heylin, 2000: 4). For a famous musician to say such a thing – whether earnestly or flippantly - is not unusual. Many performers from across a range of music genres have made similar comments, aware of the need to create a distinction or a space between their public appearance and a more private sense of the self. It is one of the practical ways of coping with fame, a strategy for dealing with false information that may be circulated in the media. At one point in the documentary film of his 1965 tour of Britain *Don't Look Back*, Dylan is seen reading about himself in a newspaper declaring 'I'm glad that I'm not me' – realising that the public's knowledge of Bob Dylan is also created by the ideas and misrepresentations of others and not at all controlled by the masked man. To say 'I'm only Bob Dylan when I have to be' is also an acknowledgment of how a performer has to be an 'act' when they step out on stage or into the public realm.

It is the identity and music of this public act that concerns Lee Marshall in his study of Dylan's stardom. Adopting a sociological perspective, in contrast to Scobie's literary or poetic approach, Marshall is concerned with Dylan as a 'star-image' and is more emphatic about the futility of seeking a 'real', 'authentic' or 'true' man behind the mask. For Marshall neither biographical investigations nor lyrical detective work will reveal a concealed creator, because there is no hidden musician lurking behind the words and images. Dylan appears before us - singing, speaking, playing an instrument, writing words on a page, and introducing a record on the radio. As Marshall puts it; 'what you see is what there is and, while what we see may suggest to us a reality to which we do not have access, and while we may like to believe that there is something there, in the end, what we see is all there is' (2007: 38).

The biographer who wishes to get behind the 'star-image', or the critic who wishes to dislodge the performer's mask and so glimpse the 'naked' or 'true face' (Marcus, 1997) will still be, paradoxically, contributing to Dylan's star-image. Whilst I'm not quite as confident as Marshall in believing that 'there is no time when Bob Dylan isn't 'Bob Dylan'' (2007: 40), what finally comes over forcefully from Marshall's sociological reflections on Dylan's stardom is strikingly obvious yet extremely insightful: 'as fans and critics, we spend a lot of time and energy searching for the 'real' Bob Dylan. We already know the real Bob Dylan however: it is the one we hear on record, see on stage, read in interviews. Whatever we think, know or believe about Dylan, we think, know or believe *from what we see in front of us*, not from anything backstage' (2007: 41).

The music that has inspired and fascinated me has come from the Bob Dylan that has appeared in front of us - listeners, audiences, fans – reaching out to us from recordings, radios, stages, screens and words on a page. In front of us, most of the time, is Bob Dylan the musician – making music, talking about music, writing about music, even playing the part of a musician in most of his film roles. Yet, most writings about Dylan have tended to ignore his musicianship and the musical characteristics of his songs, focusing instead on lyrics and life story. I'm interested in Dylan's songs as music that is performed rather than written poetry (I'm not denying the importance of the words or the life story and I have drawn valuable ideas from biographies and studies of Dylan's lyrics). When Dylan's performances have been discussed, the emphasis has frequently been on the performance of a persona or character, rather than the performance of a musician. I hope this book begins to correct the view that there is little to say about the music – an assumption often implied and only occasionally stated explicitly in much writing about Dylan. In fact, there is much more to be said about Dylan's music and musicianship than I've been able to include in this book.

In dwelling on what I think is a neglected aspect of Dylan's creativity, I've drawn upon and emphasised certain biographical details that give an insight into how Dylan's artistic sensibility was formed. In this chapter I've homed in on the circumstances that shaped him and the contexts, experiences and surroundings that allowed him to pursue a musician's life and create himself as Bob Dylan the performer and songwriter.

## Home and family

The boy who would become the musician was born in Duluth, Minnesota on 24 May 1941 and named Robert Allen Zimmerman. He began using the stage name Bob Dylan sometime in the latter part of 1959, following a series of reflections about how he should present himself as a performer. Like any number of musicians, actors and actresses, and to a slightly lesser degree novelists and painters, Robert Zimmerman adopted a pseudonym with the aim of signalling an artist with a distinct identity. From his mid-teens Bobby Zimmerman had been putting considerable effort and time into creating what would become his Bob Dylan identity. He worked on his voice, his gestures, his guitar and piano playing technique, his hairstyle and clothing, his autobiography (the fictitious stories he would tell about his life) and, of course, his music and rhythms, lyrics and rhymes.

Before he adopted the name Bob Dylan he called himself Elston Gunn when playing piano and singing in a rock'n'roll band. When seeking a name he'd also considered dropping his surname and calling himself Robert Allen. But, it was 'Dylan' that encapsulated the identity he wished to present. As he recalls in *Chronicles Volume One*, he spent sometime thinking about how different names would sound when spoken and how they would look in print (spelt for example as Dillon). Not only did this stage name reference the poet Dylan Thomas, regardless of whether he'd read the poetry (not very pop or rock'n'roll in 1959), it was blunt Bob not the softer Bobby, that was preferred.

These name changes were, as Marshall (2007) emphasises, steps on a route towards stardom and the search for a name stopped with Bob Dylan. It sounded good when spoken. It looked good when written. It had a certain 'star' quality. The choice of surname – Dylan - was very different to the Jewish Zimmerman and has sometimes been construed as a denial of his background. This point is taken up by Michael Billig when discussing how Dylan and other musicians of his generation dropped their Jewish surnames:

For many Jews these changes of surname were no big deal. They were not breaking centuries of family tradition. Most of the surnames, in any case, had been acquired in the last hundred years, often imposed by the state authorities in Eastern Europe ... Robert Zimmerman might have been taking a predictable step when he emerged as Bob Dylan, but his parents had already helped him on the way. They had given him easily assimilable forenames: Robert Allen. He was not saddled, in the Christian north-west, with Isaac, Irving, or indeed, Abraham, like his father (2000: 121)

Dylan was also aware of how members of his family, along with many other immigrants to the United States had changed their names to avoid prejudice, and to become less conspicuous when *becoming* Americans, as did Bob's Lithuanian maternal grandfather Benjamin when he changed his name from Solemovitz to Stone.

Like many families in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, the Zimmerman family had first hand experience of migration and immigration to the New World. Bob's father was Abe (Abram) Zimmerman the son of Zigman and Anna Zimmerman, Jewish immigrants who had fled from the port of Odessa in the Ukraine after anti-Semitic persecution had escalated during the

early years of the twentieth century. Like so many immigrants, Bob's paternal grandfather Zigman 'gravitated to a place similar to the land where he was born' (Sounes, 2001: 31). Duluth was a busy port like Odessa and had a similar climate, characterised by short summers and long cold winters. Bob's grandparents came to the United States with three children, and a further three (including Bob's father Abram) were born in Duluth. Bob's mother, Beatty (Beatrice) Stone was from Hibbing, north of Duluth, a town to which the family would move when Bob was five years old. Her maternal grandparents were Jewish émigrés from Lithuania. Bob had a younger brother David, and some accounts have suggested that they were not particularly close as children (in order to emphasize the apparently solitary and detached quality of Bob's character). Throughout his life as a public figure, Dylan has understandably guarded his privacy. Whilst the two brothers are reported to have engaged in some shared business interests, little is known publicly of their sibling relationship. What we do know suggests that they are probably quite close. Close enough for Bob to trust David with a significant role in organising the studio sessions in Minneapolis that produced a number of the recordings that feature on *Blood On The Tracks* (Gill & Odegard, 2004).

From his earliest years Robert Zimmerman became aware of the significance and experience of being Jewish, of being connected with the old world within the new world. As he grew up, he was aware of family stories that he heard from his parents and grandparents. For a few summers in his early teens he attended the Zionist summer camps run by the Hadassah Club (Shelton, 1986: 45). At thirteen he undertook the formal ritual of the bar mitzvah, which involves the public reading of the Torah at a synagogue. In preparation he studied Hebrew with a Rabbi and he delivered the reading as a form of ritualistic chant known as a cantillation. His parents remembered that about 400 people attended Bob's bar mitzvah (Shelton, 1986: 36). In later life Bob would attend the bar mitzvahs for his own sons and occasionally acknowledged publicly an interest in the influence of his Jewish background and, perhaps inevitably, an awareness of anti-Semitism. Clinton Heylin quotes him as saying: 'I'm interested in what and who a Jew is, I'm interested in the fact that Jews are Semites, like Babylonians, Hittites, Arabs, Syrians, Ethiopians. But a Jew is different because a lot of people hate Jews' (Heylin, 2000: 329).

During a visit to Israel in 1971 he was asked why he didn't make a public declaration about his Jewish identity. He replied; 'There is no problem. I'm a Jew. It touches my poetry, my life, in ways I can't describe. Why should I declare something that should be so obvious?' (Shelton, 1986: 413). The influence is indeed obvious in Dylan's song lyrics, and many writers have referred to way he has drawn extensively on the Old Testament. The Jewish influence seems far less obvious when it comes to his music. In one of the few reflections on this point, Wilfrid Mellers' picked up on a comment in the liner notes for *Desire* where Allen Ginsberg had written of Dylan's voice in 'One More Cup Of Coffee' as 'Hebraic cantillation never before heard in U.S. song' (1976: 21). From this Mellers speculated on the Jewish influence in Dylan's music:

... although there is little direct musical evidence of his Jewish ancestry, the nasally inflected, melismatic style of cantillation found in extreme form in 'One More Cup Of Coffee' is more pervasive than might at first be suspected. Particularly in the songs concerned with the landscape and mythology of the Wild West and of the Texan, Arizonan and New Mexican deserts, Dylan's singing may rediscover age-old links between the Hebraic, the Moorish and the Spanish, and may also reveal affinities with the starker musics of the Red Indians themselves (1984: 221).

Mellers's inferences are intriguing. But, Dylan's vocal performance in 'One More Cup Of Coffee' is untypical and, apart from a few vocal slides on some of the other tracks on *Desire*, it's not easy to find 'pervasive' examples of these musical influences across Dylan's work as a whole.

In the early 1980s Dylan was again reported to be engaging with aspects of his Jewish background. The cover art for the album *Infidels* featured imagery of Jerusalem, although there was little evidence of Jewish sounds, the music being a rather bland blend of bluesy rock and light reggae. During his 1984 summer concert tour he observed the Jewish Sabbath by not giving concerts on Fridays and Saturdays (Cartwright, 1993: 122). In 1983 he responded to an interviewer's question about his 'so-called Jewish roots' in the following way:

Roots man – we're talking about Jewish roots, you want to know more? Check upon Elijah the prophet. He could make rain. Isaiah the prophet, even Jeremiah, see if their brethren didn't want to bust their brains for telling it right like it is, yeah – these are my roots I suppose. Am I looking for them? Well, I don't know. I ain't looking for them in synagogues with six pointed Egyptian stars shining down from every window, I can tell you that much (cited in Cartwright, 1993: 122).

Although the Zimmerman family observed the Jewish religion and were acutely aware of their background, like most immigrants to the United States they sought to and were actively encouraged to assimilate to an 'American' way of life. Bob became aware of being part of something much larger, a diasporic people with a history of having no identifiable homeland. But he was born in the United States and the transnational character of these Jewish ties were vague and abstract rather than a tangible part of everyday life. He grew up in a small place, at a slow pace. It was slightly detached – removed from the immediate traumas of the Second World War, away from the pace and density of life in the cities. In *Chronicles Vol One* Dylan recalled the games he played as a child in the country and remarked 'with not much media to speak of, it was basically life as you saw it' (2004: 232).

Robert Zimmerman grew up in a comfortable and supportive middle-class home. His father worked in management at Standard Oil until he contracted polio. After recuperating he went into partnership with his brothers at the Micka Electric retail store. Whilst biographers have sometimes picked up on ways that Bob's relationship with his father was occasionally strained (perhaps a generational commonplace at the time, and something that biographers of a rock musician might wish to emphasize), in his early teens he wrote sensitive poems that he presented to Abram for father's day. Abe died in June 1968 when Bob was twenty-seven.

Bob also wrote touching poems that he gave to Beatty for Mother's Day (Shelton, 1986). He was close to his mother throughout her life until her death in January 2000, when audiences noticed a marked sombreness as he took to the stage dressed in black. This closeness was visible when his mother appeared on stage with him during The Rolling Thunder Revue tour in 1975 and was regularly part of his entourage during the 1980s. According to the limited information available, Bob has continued to maintain close ties with his own children and grandchildren.

### **Words, sounds and dreams**

The poems that Bob wrote for and gave to his parents were indications of a growing interest in literature and poetry. During the 1960s his mother told biographer Robert Shelton of how he would shut himself away in his room, remembering

Bob was upstairs quietly becoming a writer for twelve years. He read every book there was ... I said to Bobby that you can't go on and on and on and sit and dream and write poems. I was afraid he would end up being a poet! Do you know the kind of poet I mean? One that had no ambition and wrote only for himself (cited in Shelton, 1986: 41-42).



Howard Sounes, like a number of commentators, has characterised Bob as ‘a solitary, contemplative child’ (2001: 40). This solitary and contemplative character was clearly an asset in developing his musical and literary sensibility – poets and musicians tend to have spent considerable time alone when thinking about, practising and perfecting their craft. When Shelton spoke with Bob’s mother she stressed that ‘He was never detached from family and friends, but he dreamt a lot’ (1986: 41). Dylan has often spoken and written of the way he daydreamed as a child. In an interview he recalled:

I had some amazing projections when I was a kid, but not since then. And those visions have been strong enough to keep me going today. ... I was born in, grew up in a place so foreign that you had to be there to picture it. ... in the winter, everything was still, nothing moved. Eight months of that. You can put it together. You can have some amazing hallucinogenic experiences doing nothing but looking out your window. There is also the summer, when it gets hot and sticky and the air is very metallic. There is a lot of Indian spirit. The earth there is unusual, filled with ore. So there is something happening that is hard to define (Rosenbaum, 1978: 62).

Dylan’s comments about his dreams and imaginings indicate that his sensibilities were influenced by the physical or material texture of the world that he was growing up in - the way it felt (hot, cold, sticky); the pace of life (nothing moving); the ambience of the ground and landscape (the earth). The weather – that unavoidable part of our environment that can have such an impact on our mood – is forever present in Dylan’s lyrics as rain, wind, storms, clouds, sky, thunder, and lightning. As he told an interviewer: ‘Environment affects me a great deal ... A lot of the songs [on *Time Out Of Mind*] were written after the sun went down. And I like storms, I like to stay up during a storm. I get very meditative sometimes’ (Pareles, 1997).

This sensitivity to surroundings and the imaginings they provoked clearly shaped his artistic sensibility. Sounes evokes the ambience surrounding the young child - the sights, the smells and the sounds:

The central hillside district of Duluth was predominantly Jewish and Polish, with a synagogue at the end of the road. There was a general store, a European bakery, the Loiselle liquor store, and a Sears Roebuck at the bottom of the hill. The weather was determined by Lake Superior, so vast and deep it remained icy cold throughout the year. Even in mid-summer, Duluth could be shrouded in frigid fog. There was a fresh ocean smell and the cry of seagulls. Ships approaching the landmark Ariel Bridge sounded their horns and a horn on the bridge blasted in reply. These were the sights and sounds that Bob grew up with as the Second World War raged to its end (2001: 34)

In *Chronicles Volume One* Dylan evocatively recalled this environment and its impact on his senses - the material, physical presence of sound, engulfing him and resonating within his body:

What I recall mostly about Duluth are the slate gray skies and the mysterious foghorns, violent storms that always seemed to be coming straight at you and merciless howling winds off the big black mysterious lake with treacherous ten-foot waves ... Ships from South America, Asia and Europe came and went all the time, and the heavy rumble of foghorns dragged you out of your senses by the neck. Even though you couldn't see the ships through the fog, you knew they were there by the heavy outbursts of thunder that blasted like Beethoven's Fifth - two low notes, the first one long and deep like a bassoon. Foghorns sounded like great announcements. The big boats came and went, iron monsters from the deep - ships to wipe out all spectacles. As a child, slight, introverted and asthma stricken, the

sound was so loud, so enveloping, I could feel it in my whole body and it made me feel hollow. Something out there could swallow me up (2004: 230, 273/4).

Sound is very important in early life. The unborn baby initially orients itself to the sounds in its environment and the rhythms of the mother's body (DeNora, 2000). When we are born, before we can focus our eyes on any visible object, we become conscious of a world of sound - we quickly learn to recognise the sound of pleasure, of pain, of joy, of anxiety. We soon realise how the sounds we make have a physical impact on those around us. The baby's cry is not simply a pre-verbal message. The young child's scream has a material, physical impact – it sets the air vibrating. If you are close enough you will physically feel it.

The term 'soundscape' was introduced by R Murray Schafer (1993) to indicate how the sonic environment influences our perception and knowledge. He coined the term 'soundmark' (from landmark) to emphasize how 'keynote sounds of a landscape' can imprint 'themselves so deeply on people hearing them' (1994: 10). Philip Tagg (1994) has developed this theme in a number of writings, covering music from Mozart to hip-hop, sounds from animals to motorbikes, places from twentieth century India to Medieval Europe. His point is that sounds which surround us influence the music we make and listen to, shaping how we understand the world we inhabit.

Like many composers, songwriters and performers, Bob Dylan has always been acutely aware of the sound and the texture of his surroundings. Shelton quotes a friend Sybil Weinberger remarking 'He was so aware of his surroundings, in every situation, it was almost like he couldn't write fast enough. Dylan would get thoughts and reactions and he would stop on a street corner and write things down' (1986: 136). Dylan himself has recalled how, when he first came to New York City, he found the sound of trains comforting:

I'd seen and heard trains from my earliest childhood days and the sight and sound of them always made me feel secure. The big boxcars, the iron ore cars, freight cars, passenger trains, Pullman cars. There was no place you could go in my hometown without at least some part of the day having to stop at intersections and wait for the long trains to pass. ... The sound of trains off in the distance more or less made me feel at home, like nothing was missing. ... The ringing of bells made me feel at home, too (2004: 31).

In his reflections on the impact of the 'sonic environment' Schafer has written more generally of how trains have imparted a repertoire of rhythms, pitches and timbres into human life; the chuffing engine, the escaping steam, the rattling of coaches, the clatter of tracks, the squeaking of wheels (Schafer, 1994: 81).

Like a number of writers, Albert Murray has referred to the extensive railroad imagery in blues titles and lyrics and written of how the sound of the blues has been influenced by trains and bells. Of the significance of the 'heroic beat' of steam trains with their bells and whistles, he writes:

The influence of the old smoke-chugging railroad-train engine on the sound of blues music may or may not have been as great as that of the downhome church, but both have been definitive, and sometimes it's hard to say which is the source of what. ... one call-and-response sequence may have derived directly from the solo call of the minister and the ensemble response of the congregation in the church service; but another ... may well have come from the solo call of the train whistle and the ensemble response of the pumping pistons and rumbling boxcars ... some of the great variety of bell-like piano sounds that so many blues musicians, piano players in particular, like to play around with may sometimes be stylizations of church bells ringing for Sunday Morning Service, sending tidings, tolling for the dead, and so on; but most often they seem to be train bells (Murray, 2000: 124).

Murray notes the way cymbals can evoke the percussive effect of ‘locomotive steam’, and points to the more obvious impact of train whistles on guitar and harmonica styles. Others have written of how chugging train rhythms have influenced blues guitar styles. Paul Oliver has noted how railroad workers would arrange the steam whistles on trains so that they would play a basic tune: ‘on the Illinois Central, the famous I.C. which ran from Chicago to New Orleans, the firemen would send a rudimentary blues wailing across the Delta by “quilling” on the whistles’ (1990: 64). Murray, and to a lesser extent Oliver, have evoked the subtle ways that the sounds of the environment become part of a musical style and its craft conventions, informing the sensibilities and sonic palette of musicians.

The percussive blues pattern, the locomotive rhythm and the imagery of train, also present in country music, continued to be an integral strand of mainstream popular music during the latter part of the twentieth century – running from Elvis Presley’s rendition of ‘Mystery Train’ in 1956 to Kraftwerk’s ‘Trans-Europe Express’ in 1977; from David Bowie’s ‘Station To Station’ in 1976 to OutKast’s ‘The Train’ in 2006. The imagery and the sound of trains has always been an integral part of Bob Dylan’s music, absorbed both directly and through the blues. It was particularly present during the 1960s, right from the ‘steadily building locomotive rhythms on the guitar thrust up against exquisitely sustained train whistle vocalizations’ (Williams, 1990: 67) on ‘Rocks And Gravel’ performed in 1962 through to the railroad, engine and train imagery and more subtle use of locomotive rhythms and metallic timbres that Dylan transmuted into the textures of *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*.

Dylan has quite consciously thought of his music in relation to the sonic textures of the environment, with trains and bells featuring in how he hears his sound. On one of the few occasions when an interviewer has asked him about this he reflected:

The closest I ever got to the sound I hear in my mind was on individual bands in the *Blonde on Blonde* album. It’s that thin, that wild mercury sound. It’s metallic and bright gold, with whatever that conjures up. That’s my particular sound. I haven’t been able to succeed in getting it all the time. Mostly, I’ve been driving at a combination of guitar, harmonica and organ, but now I find myself going into territory that has more percussion in it and rhythms of the soul ... It was the sound of the streets ... That ethereal twilight light, you know. It’s the sound of the street with the sunrays, the sun shining down at a particular time, on a particular type of building. A particular type of people walking on a particular type of street. It’s an outdoor sound that drifts even into open windows that you can hear. The sound of bells and distant railroad trains and arguments in apartments and the clinking of silverware and knives and forks and beating with leather straps. It’s all – it’s all there. ... no jackhammer sounds, no airplane sounds ... water trickling down a brook. It’s light flowing through the ... [interruption by interviewer] ... crack of dawn ... music filters out to me in the crack of dawn (Rosenbaum, 1978: 69-70).

Again, in this quote, Dylan is bodily attuned to the texture of his surroundings and its sounds becoming music. It’s a specific mixture of sounds that he wants to incorporate – it’s bells, distant railroad trains, trickling water, but not airplanes. And, he attempts to convey the way it filters to him as music at the crack of dawn, a moment when the body may be coming out of dreams or when we can allow the mind to freeplay in a semi-dreamlike state.

A different series of dreams, soundtracks and environments were available to the young Bobby Zimmerman through the growing mass media of radio, television, records and movies. Tentative broadcasts had begun in the USA in the late 1930s, but television only started to become a widely used domestic medium from the early 1950s. The Zimmerman family had a television set in 1952

and although broadcasts were infrequent and reception often poor, the small screen brought the sounds and images of musicians directly into the home. Elvis Presley and Hank Williams appeared along with a world of escape into Westerns, science fiction and slapstick.

Like so many young people growing up in the United States during the 1950s, Bobby Zimmerman dreamed himself home from the cinema after seeing the romantic, rebellious misunderstood characters portrayed by the vulnerable James Dean and the defiant, leather-clad Marlon Brando (Shelton, 1986). The exaggerated idiosyncratic movements of Charlie Chaplin's caring and dishevelled tramp also had a formative influence on his approach to performance. Dylan told Shelton 'He influences me, even in the way I sing. His films really sank in' (1986: 125). In New York during 1961 Dylan would often tell rambling, formless, open-ended, stream of consciousness shaggy dog stories in between songs. The audience found them funny, often responding more to 'his wit than to his slow, serious, intense material. Audience reaction led him to play Chaplinesque clown' (Shelton, 1986: 109).

Radio had been introduced during the 1920s and Dylan was, in his own words, 'always fishing for something on the radio. Just like trains and bells, it was part of the soundtrack of my life' (2004: 32). Bobby Zimmerman turned his radio dial at night and stayed listening to the early hours of the morning, tuning into broadcasts of recordings by blues singers, such as Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, country singers such as Hank Williams and the Carter Family, crooners such as Frank Sinatra. Dylan acknowledged his debt to and love of radio when he became a softly spoken DJ and hosted the series *Theme Time Radio Hour* throughout 2006 and 2007. Although the young Bobby Zimmerman went to concerts, attending one of the last performances by Buddy Holly, it was radio and records that inspired him to want to make music of his own.

### **Becoming a musician**

Bob did not grow up in an overtly musical family, although his father had played violin when he was a younger man and Bob's mother could play the piano. The family house had a baby grand piano, and parents Abe and Beatty encouraged their sons to develop an interest in music. When Bob was about 11 years old he was given a few piano lessons by a cousin. Whilst his brother David persevered with formal tuition, Bob taught himself to play the piano from listening, experiment and observation. Typical of a self-taught pianist with a love of rock'n'roll and blues, and for whom Little Richard was a particular hero, Bob developed a highly rhythmic style of piano playing. He once recalled; 'I used to play piano like Little Richard style. Only I used to play, you know, an octave higher, and everything came out ... His mistake was he played down too low ... I played everything high, and it amplified' (cited in Williams, 1990: 38).

Whereas classically trained pianists are tutored to emphasise melodies covering wide pitch ranges and to explore numerous chords and scales, in blues, rock'n'roll and rock music the piano is often far more significant for its contribution to rhythm and for the way it may support singers or instrumentalists with rhythmic vamping or riffing (in contrast to the noodlings of classically trained pop and jazz pianists). Although some audience members were surprised when Dylan began playing electric piano on stage during October 2002, the piano had been the instrument he played most frequently during his early years as a musician. One of the first groups he formed with two friends was a vocal trio called The Jokers. Sounes reports that they performed 'wherever they could find a piano, including high school dances' (2001: 48). They also performed on a local television talent show and in the summer of 1956 they paid to make a 78-rpm recording of 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' and 'Earth Angel'. One of Bob's first girlfriends, Echo Star Helstrom, recalled that 'he could play the piano like an old blues guy' (Sounes, 2001: 53).

Bob also tinkered around with a saxophone and trumpet before teaching himself to play acoustic guitar. Like so many popular musicians, Dylan had no formal musical tuition. He learnt from the basic advice about chord shapes, picking and strumming given in do-it-yourself guides and by listening to recordings, observing other musicians, heeding their advice, experimenting alone, and from endlessly talking with friends and musicians about music. As a teenager Bob developed a skill that is vital for musicians who do not perform by 'reading' notation - the ability to listen intently and to absorb and acquire melodies, chords and rhythms through the ear (rather than by interpreting a schematic representation of music with the eye). Throughout Dylan's life many musicians who have performed with him have commented upon his ability to grasp songs very quickly and to absorb music from his surroundings. The term 'sponge' features in many comments. Singer Liam Clancy is not the only person to have likened Dylan during his early years as a performer to 'blotting paper. He soaked everything up. He had this immense curiosity' (Clancy, 1987: 21). Folk musician Martin Carthy used the same analogy: 'Bob Dylan's a piece of blotting paper when it comes to listening to tunes. If he doesn't learn the tune, he learns the idea of the tune and he can do something like it' (cited in Heylin, 2000: 106).

Dylan also developed the ability to transpose a song almost instantly – that is, to change the key of a song without having to think too much about it. Changing key most obviously means that a singer pitches their voice higher or lower, the vocal chords tensing, straining or relaxing and so affecting the timbre of the voice. A change of key may also suggest different melodic shapes in the same register, and imply different fingerings on the guitar. A change of key generates various aesthetic decisions concerning melody, chord and timbre; some keys will allow more open, ringing chords that use all six strings (E or A), or chords can be played on three strings to create a softer or stabbing effect. Like other folk and blues guitarists, Dylan experimented with different guitar tunings. In the early 1960s he often used 'dropped' tunings, lowering the pitch of the bottom string from an E to a D or a C, giving an extended and deeper bass resonance.

Not long after The Jokers, Bob became leader and played piano with The Shadow Blasters. Very much influenced by Little Richard, at one of their shows in a school auditorium they took to the stage dressed in pink shirts, dark glasses, and with hair brushed into quiffs. Although strolling around Hibbing with an acoustic guitar slung over his shoulder, and despite the acquisition of a cheap electric guitar, he continued to play piano in bands and eventually formed a trio of guitar, drums and piano billed as Bobby Zimmerman and The Golden Chords. In 1958 he played with this band, standing at the piano, moving backwards and forwards, up and down - something he would be doing 48 years later on stage. By early 1959 Bob was performing as Elston Gunn and The Rock Boppers with a repertoire that blended doo-wop and rock'n'roll. In the summer of 1959 he also managed to talk himself into Bobby Vee's backing band The Shadows and pounded the piano for a couple of gigs.

Bobby Zimmerman's music making was not unusual. Many young people around the world formed bands at school in the wake of rock'n'roll. Yet, there was a characteristic of his early approach to performing that has been commented upon by those who witnessed it: he did not seem unduly concerned about rehearsal. As Sounes comments:

In later life, Bob became notorious in the music business for performing improvisational shows after sketchy rehearsals or no rehearsals at all. This unusual, almost jazz like approach helped him remain a fresh and dynamic performer, but it sometimes drove his band members to distraction. He was just as relaxed about rehearsals back in high school. Bucklen [friend and band member] recalls that Elston Gunn and his Rock Boppers did not rehearse together even once for their show. Bob was relaxed enough to go out on stage and see what happened (Sounes, 2001: 62).

Whilst Bob Dylan has spent a lot of time alone, learning to play music (listening to recordings, playing instruments) and writing songs, the skills he has acquired and the songs he has learned and written exist to be brought to an audience, not to be perfected in a rehearsal room or studio. His playing always had to be a performance for someone - his father, mother and grandmother; his girlfriend and her parents; his high school friends; and eventually the unknown public in concert halls and at festivals. As he remembered, 'I needed to play for people all the time. You can say I practiced in public and my whole life was becoming what I practiced' (Dylan, 2004: 16).

After leaving high school Bob enrolled at the University of Minnesota in September 1959. Although nominally studying music as his major subject, he attended very few classes and eventually dropped out. It was in Minneapolis St. Paul that he became inspired by folk music. After hearing Odetta's highly rhythmic acoustic gospel influenced folk, he swapped his electric guitar for a good quality acoustic guitar. This allowed him to perform in the clubs and coffee bars of the bohemian Dinkytown area. As an acoustic guitar player with a repertoire of folk music he extended his technique of practising in public. Numerous people who were around at the time, cited in various articles and memoirs, are emphatic in stressing how he performed seemingly without regard for those who didn't like his singing and stage manner. Dylan recalled 'I'd either drive people away or they'd come in closer to see what it was all about. There was no in-between' (2004: 18). One of his biographers concurs about this period: 'Very few people felt lukewarm about Dylan; they either loved or hated him' (Shelton, 1986: 116). This encapsulates Dylan's relationship with audiences throughout his life as a performer. Anecdotes recounted by fans I have met over the years tell a story of curious audience members attending only one show and being driven away, whilst others have been captivated and keep coming back.

The folk aesthetic that he now embraced as Bob Dylan was quite different to the rock'n'roll that he had been playing. Acoustic sound was valued; folk ideology rejected the mass culture of television, Hollywood movies and electric pop music. The folk crowd romanticised the outsider, the oppressed, and the bohemian in opposition to the complacent conformity of middle-class affluence. To be taken seriously, to be an authentic folk singer required a particular type of self-presentation. Out of necessity - to be an insider, to gain credibility - Bob began concealing details about his background whilst making up a range of often highly colourful biographical tales, including stories about running away from home, itinerant travelling, working in circuses and even being an orphan. He was not lying from vanity or conceit, nor was it a coherent and calculated attempt to create the Bob Dylan persona. Many of his stories were far too implausible and inconsistent. His strategy - if it can be called that - at least initially, was both pragmatic and defensive. He was seeking to obscure the fact that this scruffy kid, singing blues and old ballads with a nasal voice and badly tuned guitar, was actually a clean cut young man from a middle-class Jewish household. Those who got to know him were very soon aware of these fictions, and once he began releasing albums it didn't take long for a journalist to 'expose' details of his family background in a sarcastic article in *Newsweek* in November 1963.

If he'd called himself Elston Gunn to sound rock'n'roll and performed in suitable rock'n'roll attire, then he was equally aware that the bohemian folk singer Bob Dylan would need more than just the name. Yet he was also seeking something that answered a deeper need. He was at the age when many people who have recently left their family home are asking themselves just who they are now that they are out in the world on their own. He initially found inspiration in Woody Guthrie's memoir *Bound For Glory*. He was captivated with the life, identity and music of Guthrie, just as he had been enamoured of Little Richard. He began to imitate Guthrie's guitar playing and vocal style, he dressed like him, he absorbed the Oklahoma inflection of Guthrie's speaking voice. As he sung them, Dylan began to identify with the subjects and characters of Guthrie's songs; he connected with the way Guthrie gave a voice to the underdog, the downtrodden and the dispossessed.

Dylan's infatuation with Guthrie came at a moment when he was seeking direction and questioning his own identity. Robert Shelton remarks that 'the change of summer 1960 grew out of a genuine need for a new identity' and Shelton quotes two friends: Gretel Hoffman remembering; 'He was very open about it. He explained that he was building a character' and Tony Glover adding 'He said it was an act, but only for about two days. He said: "After that, it was me"' (Shelton, 1986: 75).

Here again it is possible to overstate the novelty and the calculated wisdom of the adoption of a Bob Dylan persona. Some writers have described the bohemian folk singer as role, a claim most bluntly asserted by Larry Smith who portrays it as a pose used during what he rather cynically calls Dylan's 'folk-posturing period' (Smith, 2005: 17). More plausible is Shelton's view that it was an extension of his character. Dylan was comfortable being 'studiously unkempt' (Shelton, 1986: 108). He happily adopted a hip, beat inflected argot and folk style. But, acting out the part of bohemian folk singer was not going to lead very far unless he could make an impact as a musician.

In Minneapolis Dylan significantly developed his acoustic guitar playing. He began to find a distinct singing voice, he worked hard on his harmonica playing and began tentatively doodling around with his own versions of folk songs. He was in Minneapolis St. Paul for just over a year. In December 1960 he evidently decided that it was time to move on. He arrived in New York City about a week later. From New York he would be able to visit Woody Guthrie (who was ill in a New Jersey hospital suffering from Huntington's chorea), and he would also have more opportunities for contact with record companies.

### **Becoming a recording artist**

Dylan's life in Greenwich Village has been recounted on many occasions (Shelton, 1986; Hajdu, 2002; Van Ronk, 2006). He began playing in the small folk clubs and coffee houses, he quickly established a presence in the far from unified folk scene - as always he would drive some people away. He voraciously absorbed much of the music and culture of New York - he was reading widely, he was listening to a lot of folk music on record and in the clubs, he was watching and talking to blues singers, he was thinking about the phrasing and dynamics used by jazz musicians particularly when they were performing with rhythmically delivered beat poetry, he was attending theatres and cinemas, and generally reflecting on the structure of popular songs and dynamics of performance.

Just ten months after arriving in New York City, in October 1961, Dylan signed a contract with Columbia Records. His first album *Bob Dylan* was recorded over two afternoons in the November and released in March 1962. It did not sell well, and it is said that many staff at Columbia Records were sceptical of his potential. But, it got him greater recognition, it boosted his confidence and it gave him momentum and the motivation to develop his own songwriting. His second album - *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* - is generally recognised as a major recording in popular music history. In 2006, 45 years later Bob Dylan released *Modern Times* his 32nd studio recorded album for Columbia. Apart from a brief moment during the early 1970s when Dylan was renegotiating for better terms and released *Planet Waves* and *Before The Flood* on Asylum (subsequently assigned to Columbia), he has always been a Columbia recording artist.

The music business is often spoken of pejoratively as a corporate machine, an industry that sucks in talent, chews it up and spits it out. Anyone who has been given a hard time by record companies will know that this is an apt metaphor. But, professional creative musicians who have been around as long as Bob Dylan tend to have experienced the music business less as an abstract processing machine and more as a series of relationships with particular people. Their artistic career and development of musicianship has often been assisted by specific people, and disputes that have led

to the courtroom have concerned the incompetence or devious practice of individuals (and not the automated workings of a machine). Considering how much has been written about Dylan, there has been little detail about his business dealings. In scratching the surface of a large and under researched subject all I want to do here is to highlight three key industry people (from many) who played an important part in Dylan's early commercial career as a contracted musician.

I have already mentioned Robert Shelton at various points in this Chapter as I have been drawing on his biography (Shelton, 1986). Shelton was the folk music critic for the *New York Times* when Dylan was trying to establish himself in Greenwich Village, and having become an acquaintance he wrote a review of a performance at Gerde's Folk City that appeared in the newspaper on 29 September 1961 with the headline 'Bob Dylan: A Distinctive Folksong Stylist'. The review was important recognition, signalling Dylan's talent within the folk world and to a wider circle of readers. Personnel in the record companies also noticed it. In a succinct article Shelton captured key features of Dylan's style at this moment. He wrote of him as 'a cross between a choirboy and a beatnik ... Mr. Dylan's voice is anything but pretty. He is consciously trying to recapture the rude beauty of a Southern field hand musing in melody on his back porch. All the "husk and bark" are left on his notes, and a searing intensity pervades his songs'. Shelton described Dylan as 'bursting at the seams with talent', noted that he was vague about his background and concluded that 'it matters less where he has been than where he is going, and that would seem to be straight up' (Shelton, 1986: 111). A few months later, under the pseudonym Stacey Williams, Shelton would be writing the liner notes to Dylan's debut album.

Dylan was very excited about the review, and attendances at his performances increased sharply. For Shelton it was the beginning of a relatively close relationship with Dylan. He frequently spoke at length with the musician and was given access to his parents. Although they seemed to drift apart during the 1970s, Shelton's biography benefits from the access he had to Dylan in the ten year period after the review was published, and is particularly strong on his family background. It was shortly after Shelton's review had appeared that Dylan signed with Columbia Records, and it is generally agreed that Shelton's review played a part in convincing the company's executive John Hammond that he was doing the right thing in signing Dylan. There are conflicting stories about whether Hammond had seen Dylan live, and questions about his familiarity with Bob's repertoire, and the extent to which he acted in response to Shelton's eulogy. Even if there was no direct causal link, Shelton was vocal in folk circles in drawing attention to Dylan's talents. Singer Liam Clancy thought that Shelton 'more than anyone, was responsible for Bob Dylan. He pushed and pushed and pushed' (cited in Heylin, 2000: 75). Shelton himself believed Hammond's decision was driven by instinct and an awareness of Dylan's growing reputation; it was an intuitive judgement.

Hammond was born in 1910 into a wealthy family and studied violin at Yale before dropping out and taking up music journalism. With the economic support of his family he became involved in promoting and recording jazz and blues musicians and joined Columbia Records in 1958. He has been characterised as an old style 'music man' who set out to 'discover' talent, his aspirations artistic rather than primarily financial. His motives were also undoubtedly liberal, he wrote for a left leaning journal *New Masses* and he supported a large number of black artists in various ways. He recognised the significance and supported the music of Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday, along with Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, Benny Carter, Lester Young and Aretha Franklin. Hammond provided a link between the pre-war world of jazz and blues and the post-war folk revival and development of rhythm and blues and rock music. He was involved with Pete Seeger, then Leonard Cohen and in later years with Bruce Springsteen. Hammond was respected for his judgement throughout the music industry, and Dylan was well aware of the significance of being signed by such a figure.



A third character entered the story just after Dylan signed with Columbia. He was Albert Grossman and would become Dylan's manager from August 1962 until 1971. Subsequently, the pair were involved in lawsuits about royalties and payments during the early 1980s. Grossman had been promoting folk singers and had jointly set up the Newport Folk Festival, astutely recognising that the 1950s folk movement would have broader public appeal. He was managing Odetta, which impressed Dylan, and clearly believed that Dylan could become a major music star beyond the folk world. Grossman initially attempted to get Dylan out of his recording contract, realising that the musician had been less than twenty-one years old when he committed himself to Columbia. Grossman insisted that Dylan allow him to negotiate another contract on his behalf. As Dylan recalls:

Hammond had believed in me and had backed up his belief, had given me my first start on the world's stage, and no one, not even Grossman had anything to do with that. There was no way I'd go against him for Grossman, not in a million years. I knew that the contract would have to be straightened out, though, so I went to see him. The mere mention of Grossman's name just about gave him apoplexy (2004: 289-90).

Grossman was equally furious that Dylan's ethics and loyalty to Hammond had led him to re-sign to Columbia without negotiating a better deal. Columbia contested Grossman's claim by arguing that Dylan had confirmed the contract by recording for the company after the age of 21 (Hammond, 1977). Eventually a compromise was worked out and the three parties – Dylan, Grossman and Columbia - worked together. Grossman played an important role in the transition that saw Bob Dylan move from a folk singer to an international rock star. Whilst the manager would often keep a low profile and insisted to Shelton that Dylan would have made it, with or without him, there can be little doubt that Grossman contributed to Dylan's success.

Grossman recognised the importance of Dylan's songs and encouraged him to write more. As a businessman on a percentage of Dylan's earnings, he realised their publishing potential. More money could be made from cover versions by better-known artists, such as Grossman's other act Peter, Paul and Mary who had a hit with 'Blowin' in the Wind' and these renditions would also publicise Dylan as a songwriter.

At a time when few popular performers wrote their own material Grossman also recognised the value of the critical acclaim Dylan was gaining for his songwriting. Grossman understood that Dylan was a new type of popular musician and he was concerned with maintaining Dylan's image of artistic integrity as well as exploiting his commercial potential (realising that the two were not mutually exclusive). Grossman did not allow Dylan to be promoted as a typical popular musician, in cheap gossip magazines and lightweight television shows. Dylan was, in general, presented as an artist who should be taken seriously.

When Grossman is mentioned in biographies of Dylan he often appears as a rather devious and shadowy figure, with little appreciation of the part he played in Dylan's success as a musician. Shelton implies that Grossman influenced Dylan's aesthetic direction in a subtle and understated manner, although he is rather vague about how he did this. The film maker D. A. Pennebaker thought that one of Grossman's major contributions was to keep Dylan focused because he had a tendency to 'go off at spurious tangents' (cited in Heylin, 2000: 97). Dylan would stay pretty focused until 1966. After that, he would indeed go off on spurious tangents. Whether or not it had anything to do with Grossman's declining influence, he would be all the more interesting for it.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Music

Writing about his songs in *Chronicles Volume One* Dylan made this observation:

For sure my lyrics had struck nerves that had never been struck before, but if my songs were about the words, then what was Duane Eddy, the great rock-and-roll guitarist, doing recording an album full of instrumental melodies of my songs? Musicians have always known that my songs were about more than just words, but most people are not musicians (Dylan, 2004: 119-120).

Not only do musicians know that the songs are about more than words, so do the audiences who sing along with Bob at concerts or with recordings, or with songs in their head as they walk down the street. The fans applauding his harmonica solos, and those who dance, know that the songs are music in motion before they are words on a page.

Despite the importance and influence of Dylan's wordplay, the obsessive lyric sifters frequently manage to discuss his songs with barely a mention of his voices and vocal gestures, let alone obvious musical characteristics such as melody, rhythm, chords, texture and timbre. Despite their opening caveats (acknowledging that they are dealing with songs), it is soon apparent when reading Christopher Ricks or Michael Gray (to cite the most prominent) that they are preoccupied with lyrical detective work (locating sources, making connections) and interpreting the words of the pop song narrowly in terms of their semantics.

Many authors acknowledge that the songs are more than words, but then conveniently forget this so that they can discuss the lyrics set out on the page. I will cite one example as an indication of the reasoning and rhetorical sleight of hand that occurs here. Michael Gilmour (2004) sets out to understand the significance of the Bible in Dylan's songs. When explaining his approach he refers to the following comment by Dylan: 'Some people, when it comes to me, extrapolate only the lyrics from the music. But, ... the music has just as far-reaching effect' (cited in Gilmour: 7). Gilmour cites Dylan talking about how people neglect the performance and the 'feel' of the music. He then decides to ignore the views that he's just quoted, and patronisingly continues: 'But with all due respect to the songwriter ... we will focus on the written word in this book'. He then explains why he prefers to do this, using a type of reasoning that is typical of writers who dissect Dylan's lyrics: 'One advantage of the written format is that the reader has the opportunity to slow down, reflect, and cross-reference in a way that the recorded songs do not permit, much less the live performance of a song in concert' (Gilmour, 2004: 7). Such an approach completely misunderstands how the popular song works its magic. Songs are not something we read slowly on a page, reflecting and cross-referencing as we go. Songs unfold as music in time, connecting with our bodies in a manner far removed from the intellectual contemplation and reflection implied here.

Related problems are apparent in Aidan Day's *Jokerman*, subtitled 'reading the lyrics of Bob Dylan'. Although he acknowledges the prominence of Dylan's voice, he dismisses its musical significance in these terms:

Typically, the voice engages the line of the melody but its simultaneous jarring, atonal separation from the music, together with the relentless subordination of musical elements to the exigencies of verbal order, opens a space which registers a distance and an unease

involving both singer and listener. The singing voice at once solicits and rebuffs. The gratifications it offers are uncomfortable ones (Day, 1988: 2).

To claim that music is subordinate to verbal order is inaccurate and misleading. It is far more likely that the words in Dylan's songs are chosen – or edited during songwriting – to suit the music. This is apparent from accounts of Dylan's recording sessions (Heylin, 2000) and from listening to officially available and unofficially distributed recordings of studio outtakes and rehearsals. Dylan's words often work as sounds, used for their phonetic, rhythmic and evocative character rather than their semantic or representational qualities; for the sonorous quality of the rhymes within the music. Or, as Dylan commented when referring to 'Everything is Broken', 'The semantic meaning is all in the sounds of the words' (2004: 173-4) - a point the reading literary scholars often seem unable to hear.

Day refers to the 'atonal separation' of the vocal melody from the music. As far as I am aware, all of Dylan's songs have a clear tonal centre, all melodies work in relation to more or less distinct keys, scales or modes, and I cannot hear the voice deviating from this. So, I'll assume that Day is using the term 'atonal' in an inaccurate way, to emphasize the idea that Dylan's voice jars on the listener. Now, it is common for those who don't like Dylan to dismiss his voice as grating. Day allows for this opinion because he wants to hear a similar sound, but claim a value for it. Drawing on modernist high-art aesthetics (valuing art that seeks to shock, cause difficulty, challenge expectations) Day argues that Dylan solicits and rebuffs and offers an 'uncomfortable pleasure'.

This argument doesn't stand up to the evidence of how Dylan's melodies, rhythms and voices draw us in, how Dylan's songs intimately engage with his listeners. It ignores how the tunes quite cleverly, and occasionally deceptively, using the well-developed rhetoric of the popular song form, draw us in with their many melodic lines and musical hooks. The vast majority of Dylan's songs are about love, loss and human relationships; their melodies and delivery are more likely to encourage closeness rather than distance. That feeling of intimacy can be experienced at a concert, or when listening to a recording. Many people – both critics and fans – have sought comfort and solace, along with joy and an impulsive freedom, in the songs of Dylan (rather than uncomfortable pleasures).

Betsy Bowden acknowledges this when referring to the way Dylan's songs have resonated with her emotions, spoken directly to her experiences of life and helped her 'articulate what kind of a woman I did not want to be' (2001: 54). In *Performed Literature* she argues that the persuasiveness of Dylan's vocal performance arises from his skill as a singer in shifting and sliding between pitches and singing with an irregular metre. In thinking about this, she develops some very detailed analysis of the way Dylan uses his voice, drawing on ideas from the study of orality and performed poetry to show the contrasting sounds and sentiments that the same word can convey, the varied duration of a word in different performances of a song and the use of accents, phrasing and a range of vocal timbres. Yet Bowden, like Day, is quite dismissive of Dylan's music and the musicality of his voice. She asserts that there's not much for musicologists to say about Dylan's songs and confidently states: '... without words most Dylan melodies and chord changes would be boring' (2001: 1). The melodies could only be judged boring according to a very specific (and unstated) aesthetic of complexity, one that developed during the late-Romantic and early modernist period. These melodies are certainly not boring according to the aesthetics of folk, blues and pop music. Equally, the chords are only boring if you believe what you see in songbooks and not what you hear on recordings and at concerts.

That seemingly simple word - boring - is an index of some of the obstacles that those of us studying popular music continually find in our paths. When much high theory confronts popular and folk culture it often reaches the pejorative conclusion that these musics are formally simple and repetitive. Hence, a further assumption is made - this must be boring. Some writers have attempted to challenge this view by arguing that popular culture is just as formally complex as canonical high

culture. Christopher Ricks (2003) does this with his detailed analysis of Dylan's lyrics, finding connections to Tennyson, Shakespeare, Rossetti, Blake, the Bible, Homer, amongst others – but not managing a single mention for Lennon and McCartney, the latter point noted by Anthony Quinn (2003) when reviewing Ricks's book *Dylan's Visions of Sin*.

The search for complexity in popular culture, allied to the desire for scholarly legitimacy for such a project within the academy, again leads away from the distinguishing qualities of Dylan's music. We should pay more attention to the pleasures, practices and aesthetic value of repetition and formal simplicity – the way repetition and simplicity work for us as musicians and as listeners. Dylan is firmly within a performed popular song, rather than a 'performed literature', tradition and he is a singer of songs way before he is a 'poet' to be scrutinised and cross-referenced on the page.

Interviewed about his songwriting Dylan once said: 'The melodies in my mind are very simple, they're very simple, they're just based on music we've all heard growing up' (Zollo, 2003: 73). Studies of Dylan might benefit from accounts of the value of simplicity and how Dylan works hard to achieve this simplicity, as a contrast to the studies that make his music seem so complicated, complex, elevated and distanced from everyday experience.

### **Rising and falling**

One way of approaching his music is to think about how Dylan's songs convey meaning through the melodic contour of the song, in particular through the use of rising and falling pitch. Anyone who has listened to blues and rock music will be familiar with what has variously been called the 'holler', the 'shout and fall' or the 'tumbling strain'. Peter Van Der Merwe speculates that the holler is 'probably as old as song itself: a series of improvised, constantly varied strains, all descending to the same low point and often to the same figure'. He calls it 'the true "endless melody"', without any further organizing principle beyond the grouping of the strains into irregular waves, which themselves taper from high to low' (2004: 444).

Although the shout and fall pattern may well be ancient, we rarely encounter it in such a regular sequence but as part of a song. Being a major pattern in blues, it is prevalent in Dylan (and much blues inflected rock music). A dramatic rise in pitch followed by a quick drop characterises songs that entail a tense 'affective outpouring', a musical gesture characterised as 'self-offering of the body' and then a more relaxed, inward looking descent (Middleton, 1990: 207). This pattern structures 'A Simple Twist Of Fate', a tale of lost love narrated with very little change in pitch until the voice rises in every verse on the words 'straight', 'freight', 'gate', 're-late', 'wait', 'late', and each time falls in resignation, returning to that inescapable 'simple twist of fate' (this shout and fall pattern crops in a number of songs on *Blood on the Tracks*).

There is a more subtle variation in 'My Back Pages', the song in which Dylan renounced his role as public spokesman, signalling his desire to move away from writing songs for causes and wish to write only for himself. It is in the hook line of 'I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now'. When he was so much older the voice tenses and the pitch rises, the emotion is outward. As he feels younger, the singing muscles relax, the pitch falls, and he returns to the inner self rather than the public figure. The first part of 'Cold Irons Bound' is structured around a similar shout and fall; 'I'm beginning to hear voices' (rise), 'there's no one around' (fall), and then he descends further until he is way down deep in the mist and feeling like he doesn't exist.

A sudden rising and falling pattern is a key feature of Dylan's songs. It is one of the ways he conveys emotion and uses melody to add dynamism and drama to the narrative. A few of the other songs where you can find this pattern to a greater or lesser extent: 'The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll', 'I Don't Believe You', 'It Ain't Me Babe', 'Gates of Eden', 'It's All Over Now, Baby

Blue' (a sudden drop of an entire octave when it's all over), 'As I Went Out One Morning', 'Drifter's Escape', 'I'll Be Your Baby Tonight', 'Crash On The Levee (Down in the Flood)', 'Wedding Song', 'You're A Big Girl Now', 'New Pony', 'Solid Rock', 'Driftin' Too Far From Shore', 'What Good Am I?', 'Million Miles', 'Till I Fell In Love With You', 'High Water (For Charley Patton)', 'Rollin' and Tumblin'.

Less abrupt, more subtle and extended patterns of rising and falling pitch can be found throughout Dylan's songs. 'Mr. Tambourine Man' is characterised by constantly descending lines. It is one of Dylan's most original and extraordinary melodies. Unusually for a pop song, it commences with the chorus and starts on the subdominant (IV) chord of Bb rather than dominant or root chord of F. The melody is contained within an octave, using all 8 notes of the major diatonic scale, and he starts singing at the highest pitch (F) as he hails his guide 'Hey Mr. Tambourine Man' and requests 'play a song for me'. Throughout the song he calls out with the same highest note of the melody - 'take me', 'I'm ready' - until he joyfully proclaims 'yes, to dance'. The imagery conjured up by weariness, amazement and the singer's dream like state, constantly cascades downwards, until his declaration to come 'following you' is delivered on the lowest pitch of the melody, an octave below the first pitch (F), as if he's reached his decision, calm and contented to follow the Tambourine Man. Elsewhere, in 'One More Cup Of Coffee' the fall in pitch is predictably associated with descending into the valley below. In 'Slow Train', the ominous train is introduced with a slightly hesitant rising of pitch at the end of the phrase, as if signalling a glimpse of Christian hope amongst the despair and disgust within the secular world.

In concert Dylan has often modified the melodic contour of his songs, particularly by introducing an unresolved ascending pitch. It's very obvious on the version of 'Most Likely You Go Your Way And I'll Go Mine' on *Before the Flood*, a recording of his 1974 US tour with the Band. On the studio version, on *Blonde on Blonde*, he sings 'you say you love me and your thinking of me but you know you could be wrong', with the word 'wrong' relaxed, somewhat resigned, slightly descending. In the live version the word 'wrong' is snarled and declamatory, delivered with a sudden rise in pitch that leaves the word hanging in the air, as if an unchecked angry outburst, the word spat out rising in the air away from the singer.

Some of Dylan's performances during the late 1990s were characterised by a technique (or habit) that some of his more critical fans called 'upsinging' – changing the melodic pattern at the end of phrases to ascend when those familiar with the songs expected a descent. Some wrote of this as irritating and speculated as to whether its purpose was to preserve Dylan's voice when he was playing so many gigs a year (Muir, 2001), although it would probably be more relaxing for the voice to descend. Upsinging is a way of sending the words out to the audience without claiming them back; propelling them out into the world, without drawing them back into the self. Perhaps it is significant that this often occurred with songs that he had performed many times before, such as 'Blowin' in the Wind' or 'Tambourine Man', numbers that almost seemed like public property by this time.

### **Never-ending melodies**

Another deceptively simple musical device is the riff – a short rhythmic melodic phrase often repeated continuously for the duration of a song. Paul Williams has emphasised the riff as the key to how Dylan's music works, particularly in concert. Williams writes: 'It's all in the riff. That's the secret of Bob Dylan's music ... the riff calls forth the great vocal performances'. Of concert performances he writes: 'when ... the band is directed to vamp on the riff for long non-vocal passages, the riff itself starts speaking to the song's listeners as though these were whole new verses of evocative, mind-blowing, Bob-Dylan-in-his-prime lyrics' (2004: xiii). Acknowledging how Dylan

has been able to achieve a similar effect through the distinct voices that he gives to harmonica solos, Williams stresses how, on good nights, Dylan is able to do this through the riff.

Not all Dylan's songs are riff based. But many are, and in these it is that repeated phrase that drives the selection and articulation of words with music. As Dylan explained to Bill Flanagan: 'a lot of times *riffs* will come into my head. And I'll transpose them with the guitar or piano. A lot of times I'll wake up with a certain riff, or it'll come to me during the day. I'll try to get that down, and then the lines will come from that.' (Flanagan, 197: 106). The riff allows the song to form, to take shape; it provides an integral part of the architecture of a song. It is the cyclical, non-goal directed, repetition of musical phrases and verbal sounds that draws us in, allowing us to enter the song. The riff becomes the song, and words and vocal melody are held in tension to the riff, intimated by and implicated in the riff.

The riff-based character of Dylan's songs has become ever more pronounced and emphasised in live performance, but there are many studio recordings providing ample evidence of how Dylan's songs are built around riffs. A few examples: 'Maggie's Farm' (particularly in concerts during the 1970s and 1980s), 'Outlaw Blues', 'It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)', 'All Along The Watchtower', 'Down In The Flood' (particularly live), 'New Pony', 'Solid Rock', 'In The Garden' (live), 'Seeing The Real You At Last', 'Everything Is Broken', 'Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum', 'Subterranean Home Sick Blues' (live), 'Lonesome Day Blues', 'The Levee's Gonna Break'. The riff shapes the song, and the words are chosen to convey the meaning of the song as it arises from the interplay between vocal and riff.

If Dylan's songs are not based on a riff then they are, almost without exception, based on a pattern that is usually referred to as strophic – built on a sequence of changing chords that are continually repeated, perhaps with minor variations in the metre, texture or timbre. In principle, this is similar to the repetition and circularity of 12-bar blues patterns. Numerous folk and popular song traditions around the world are strophic.

Strictly speaking a 'strophe' is usually considered a verse unit or a stanza, and many of Dylan's songs are based on much smaller 'loops'. So, for example, 'All Along The Watchtower' is based on a single repeated loop of three chords that recur every 3-4 seconds; 'Isis' is based on another three chord sequence repeated every 4 seconds. Other songs may have more obviously strophic sequences; the strophe of 'Man In The Long Black Coat' is composed of two repeated sequences of about 8-9 seconds, a very similar 'chorus' of a similar length before the cycle recommences. The song that originally filled one side of a vinyl LP when *Blonde on Blonde* was first released, 'Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands' has two verses followed by a chorus, repeated five times. The musical components that make up the continually repeated unit can be represented as [a a b a a b c c d e e]. The full sequence lasts for nearly two minutes before we go around again. Sometimes Dylan will add a short section somewhere in the middle ('Man In The Long Black Coat'), sometimes not ('Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands').

Recurring strophic patterns or loops, and repetition are very important in popular songs. You don't have to listen to a song for long to become familiar with its basic structures and melodic shape. The musician or songwriter can use this to draw the listener in by introducing subtle changes of tempo, or texture or by playing with the dynamics of the song. 'Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands' is an example of a song in which Dylan used a repeating, cyclical pattern to gradually build intensity through the music, the rather contrived lyrics almost becoming secondary to the emotional narrative of the 'thin, wild mercury sound'. He recorded this song in Nashville with musicians used to playing songs that were made for radio and expecting it to be finished after about three minutes. While recording they would build for a climax, in anticipation that the song was about to end, and then find that Dylan was beginning yet another verse. The musicians then had to build the song up again, and

again, adding something extra each time. It got to the point where they were unsure when the song would end (Sounes, 2001: 242). This probably contributes to the vitality and dynamic intensity of this 11-minute performance.

Just as strophic patterns are fundamental to Dylan's songwriting, so too are pentatonic melodies. Formally, a pentatonic scale consists of five notes within the interval of an octave. The most obvious example that is of the black notes on the piano; these 5 notes make up the intervals of a pentatonic scale, and you can pick out various tunes on them, notably 'Auld Lang Syne'. Like many self-taught pianists Dylan developed a preference for the keys (pitch centres) that contain more of the black notes of the keyboard (such as C#/ Db – the key that 'Like A Rolling Stone' was composed in before it was recorded in C). The black notes are one of the easiest ways of picking out pentatonic melodies, and I think it's no coincidence that Dylan once discussed his songwriting in these terms:

On the piano, my favourite keys are the black keys. And they *sound* better on guitar, too. ... when you take a black key song and put it on the guitar, which means you're playing in A flat, not too many people like to play in those keys. ... the songs that go into those keys right from the piano, they sound different. They sound deeper. Yeah. They sound deeper. Everything sounds deeper in those black keys (Zollo, 2003: 75).

Dylan's view is less to do with any mystical properties of the keys. It is partly a technical issue. He acknowledges that when playing with guitarists it is usually necessary to transpose into a different key (from Bb to A, or from Ab to A or G), simply because the chords are harder to finger on the guitar; this creates a different timbre because there are fewer open strings sounding in the flattened chords. Additionally, when playing on only the black notes of the keyboard, or in keys (pitch centres), which contain more black notes, there is a greater tendency to pick out pentatonic melodies. It may be that some of Dylan's 'deeper songs' – or the ones he feels are deeper – are based on pentatonic melodies, rather than the more regular diatonic scale. 'Blind Willie McTell' (in *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3*), one of Dylan's greatest songs, is pentatonic and sung almost entirely with the black notes of the piano (in the key of Eb/ D#).

Music theorists have tried to classify pentatonic 'systems' by identifying recurrent pentatonic scales or modes, comprised of such sequences as C, Eb, F, G, Bb (minor pentatonic) or C, D, E, G, A (major pentatonic). If you run up and down these notes you will get a sense of a pentatonic feel (they tend not to use 'leading' semi-tone intervals). In practice (like the so called blues scale or blues mode), pentatonic melodies are not based on such systematic and regular sequences. Many of the melodies of Dylan's songs are based on five notes or fewer, and when occasional extra notes appear they do not detract from a strong pentatonic mood. This is clearly the influence of Dylan's immersion in Delta blues, folk ballad, gospel and the enduring legacy of children's rhymes. Wilfrid Mellers has written that 'pentatonic formulae prevail in folk music in all cultures at all stages of evolution and are, indeed, spontaneously uttered by little children, even by those living in complex societies moulded by industrialism, literacy and, in musical terms, by harmonic concepts' (1981: 144). Pentatonic melodies predate the use of standard triadic guitar chords and modern piano tuning, which is another reason why there may be no necessary 'functional' relationship between vocal melody lines and chords, and why the interaction between the chord and vocal may be assumed by classically trained musicians to contain 'dissonance' (even if not heard as dissonant by musicians or listeners).

On Dylan's first album, recorded in the autumn of 1961, 'Song To Woody' is a pentatonic melody based on the notes A, B, C#, E, F# - and it was still the same 5 note melody, but in G, when he was performing it live during 2000. Forty-five years later, the final song on *Modern Times*, 'Ain't Talkin'' uses a pentatonic melody based on G#, B, C#, D#, F# with an occasional slight flattening of the D# and very infrequent flattening of the B. In between these recordings are numerous songs that

use a clear pentatonic melody, just *some* of these being ‘Masters Of War’, ‘The Ballad Of Hollis Brown’, ‘She Belongs To Me’, ‘It’s All Over Now Baby Blue’, ‘Ballad Of A Thin Man’, ‘I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine’, ‘I Am A Lonesome Hobo’, ‘The Wicked Messenger’, ‘All The Tired Horses’, ‘Father Of Night’, ‘Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door’, ‘Dirge’, ‘Isis’, ‘Sara’, ‘Changing Of The Guards’, ‘Baby Stop Crying’, ‘Señor’, almost the whole of *Slow Train Coming*, quite a bit of *Saved*, well over half of the songs on *Shot of Love*, ‘I and I’, ‘Seeing The Real You At Last’, ‘When The Night Comes Falling From The Sky’, ‘Dark Eyes’, ‘Brownsville Girl’, most of *Oh Mercy*, not much of *Under The Red Sky*, well over half of *Time Out of Mind*, ‘Things Have Changed’, the blues songs on “*Love and Theft*” including ‘Lonesome Day Blues’ and ‘High Water (For Charley Patton)’, and the folk- and blues-derived songs on *Modern Times*. Many other songs have distinct pentatonic sections, again identifying just a few would include the verses of ‘It Ain’t Me Babe’, ‘It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)’, ‘I Threw It All Away’, ‘Tonight I’ll Be Staying Here With You’, ‘Covenant Woman’ and ‘Jokerman’. Numerous other songs have a pentatonic feel even if not ‘purely’ pentatonic (and there are rarely pure scales, modes, and notes in popular music anyway).

Pentatonic melodies share characteristics with many other resources in Dylan’s sonic palette – they don’t appear to go anywhere. Their prevalence in numerous folk styles around the world, their ‘natural’ melodic shape (moving in whole tones or minor thirds, derived from fourths and fifths) and their lack of the modern ‘leading’ (semitone) note are qualities which for Mellers are indicative of certain metaphysical properties:

Such tunes therefore have little sense of temporality; far from trying to ‘get somewhere’, they live in an existential present, affirming our identity with Nature, even with the Cosmos, cradling us on the bosom of the unconscious deep, winging us into the air. They either induce acceptance – of ‘fate’, of what life does *to* us – or offer some kind of religious sublimation; what they do not do is to attempt to boss Nature or to assert one person’s will at the expense of others (1981: 144).

Many of Dylan’s songs can give the impression of being suspended in a permanent now. In ‘Not Dark Yet’, a song with an almost entirely pentatonic melody, this is explicit in the lyrics when Dylan sings ‘I know it looks like I’m moving, but I’m standing still’. Dylan’s songs can take us on a never-ending cyclical journey, returning again and again to the point we thought we’d just left, inducing an experience of the present at one removed from linear clock time; a characteristic they share with much folk, devotional and mystically inclined music that uses pentatonic melodies. In contrast, Dylan’s more assertive songs (such as ‘Like A Rolling Stone’) tend to be diatonic. In general Dylan’s songs are distinct from much popular music, a marked contrast from those songwriters who quite deliberately construct their songs to develop, to progress, to go somewhere – whether this is attempted through modulation (a change of key) or a developmental structure (the addition of new elements to the song).

‘All Along The Watchtower’ has a pentatonic melody sung with a basic strophic song structure: the repeated chord sequence of C#m, B, A (on *John Wesley Harding*), or Am, G, F (for most concerts during the 1970s), or Bm, A, G (for much of 1980s and 2000s). The strophic structure, the use of riffs, the pentatonic melody, and verses that can be delivered in any sequence, allow the song to last for as long as Dylan wishes. The song form and structure contain no logical point of resolution or conclusion; this has to be realised in performance (and it is difficult to fade out as if it were a recording). In earlier years, the final line of ‘the wind began to howl’ would often be followed by sonic stylisation of howling winds on the harmonica or guitar before the band were eventually brought to a halt after some extended riffing. In later years, particularly in 2005 through 2006 when the song became the final number in the set, ‘All Along the Watchtower’ would be brought to a close by Dylan concluding the vocal on the eighth line as initially recorded - ‘none of them along the line know what any of it is worth’ - and the band then hitting a final conclusive (even corny), defiant



ringing B major chord (rather than the anticipated minor) to end the song and close the concert. (As an aside, Dylan's concerts have usually ended in an upbeat manner; his albums have often ended with a reflexive, introspective song).

### **The magic of the chant and minor third**

Many of Bob Dylan's songs use a chant, in Richard Middleton's (1990) terms, or an incantation in Wilfred Mellers' (1984) terms. Chants catch the moment where speech meets singing, using repetition, emphasizing rhythm and tending towards one pitch. The verses of two of his greatest songs are largely chants: 'It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)' is more or less chanted on one note with occasional shifts up a minor third; much of the verses of 'Like A Rolling Stone' are also chanted on the note C (over a rising chord sequence common to many songs of the late 1950s and early 1960s).

Chanting is integral to human cultures from work songs and children's games to secular festivities and sacred rituals. The chant unites us in the playground; the chant helps us get the job done; the chant helps our team score the winning goal; the chant helps us get closer to our god; the chant unites us at a political rally or demonstration; the chant allows us to celebrate all manner of events in our lives. Yet, the significance of the chant has been ignored or dismissed, for the same reason that scholars look down on apparently 'simple' melodies. This is what Bowden writes about 'A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall': 'The entire song is one of Dylan's more monotonous. Its melody is almost a chant: the vocal range is less than an octave, and only in the penultimate line of each stanza do notes occur more than a third apart' (2001: 14). Technically, the tune may be literally 'monotonous'? But why should the narrow vocal range be singled out for criticism? As for the third, this is a significant little musical interval, particularly the minor third.

The minor third interval (a distance separating pitches of a tone and a half, in contrast to the gap of two whole tones that characterise the major third) crops up again and again in Dylan's melodies, as it does in much popular music. According to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* the descending minor is a 'universal manifestation of the melodic impulse' and a characteristic of children's singsongs around the world (Ringer, 2001: 363). For those unfamiliar with musical terminology, the opening two notes of the vocal melody of 'Hey Jude' descend over the interval of a minor third, as does the Oasis song 'Live Forever', and when children make fun of each other their mocking singsong ('nah-nah, nah-nah') is based on the minor third. This interval can be heard in the intonation of speaking. A notable example is when Dylan addresses 'señor', in the song of this name (on *Street Legal*), using the word for the second time with a questioning rising minor third before asking 'can you tell me where we're heading?' As Peter Van der Merwe has remarked:

One of the great puzzles of music is the mysteriously satisfying quality of the minor third. ... Why should such an awkward interval like the minor third ... come so readily to the human voice? Why should it have the air of what can only be called solidity? The primeval chant consisting ... of nothing but a falling minor third appears in places as different as the Catholic liturgy and the school playground (1989: 121).

The melody of 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' combines the chant and minor third. It is mostly sung on one pitch, the note C (a flattened 'blue' third in A) with occasional drops down to the pitch a minor third below (A), every time Dylan sings 'look out kid'. The influences on 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' are quite easy to detect and have been acknowledged by Dylan over the years. As he once said: 'It's from Chuck Berry... A bit of 'Too Much Monkey Business' and some of the scat singers of the '40s' (Hilburn, 2005: 74). It is certainly possible to hear the influence of Louis Jordan's scat, acknowledged as an influence by both Berry and Dylan. Others have detected 'Taking It Easy' written by Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger (using the pseudonym of Paul Campbell).

Inspired by Berry's dissatisfaction with schooling, menial jobs, domesticity and respectability, 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' is a list of caustic observations about the impact of institutions, authority and respectability, sometimes described as a blend of beat poetry and rhythm and blues.

In Chapter 4 I quoted Christopher Ricks referring to the 'Skeltonic raids' that produced 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'. The same stance is adopted by Mike Marqusee who links the song to the "rude railings" of the ... sixteenth-century English poet John Skelton ... Although he was certainly unaware of it, Dylan makes frequent use of "Skeltonics" – short, irregular lines in which rhyme is the only fixed principle' (2003: 136). This is yet another example of the appropriation of Dylan for a high culture agenda and a literary tradition to which he doesn't really belong (and which the writer even presumes him to be 'unaware of').

Marqusee also boldly claims that the song is 'an obvious forerunner of hip-hop' (136). This is an assertion that has been made with tedious regularity when Dylan scholars have focused on their man isolated from the surrounding music culture. Heylin writes that 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' 'presaged the advent of rap' (2000: 181); Paul Williams writes that 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' ... can be heard as a brilliant early example of rap music' (Williams, 1990: 126); Nigel Williamson writes that "'Subterranean Homesick Blues" can lay claim to be the world's first prototype rap song' (2004: 156). To make such a claim is to completely misrepresent and to undermine the historical tradition from which hip hop and rap have emerged, and to accord Dylan an influence that is completely unwarranted, particularly when allied to an assertion that the song's lineage is European literary Skeltonics and not African-American scat, blues and r'n'b (styles that quite clearly feed rap). 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' is more derivative than innovative. Not a lesser song, but another example of Dylan as imitator rather than instigator - in turn Elvis Costello's 'Pump it Up', REM's 'It's The End Of The World As We Know it' and Stephen Still's 'Seen Enough' owe a debt to 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' and continue the musical lineage.

Bob Dylan's music is loaded with riffs, strophic cycles, blues sequences, shout and fall patterns, pentatonic melodies, minor thirds and chants – all heavily indebted to blues, folk, gospel and country. It is music that takes the pleasures of repetition, of circularity, of the recurring familiar tune, of apparent stasis and integrates them with that characteristic Dylanesque poetics and rhyme, delivered with his idiosyncratic and intense range of voices.

## **Dylan's Rhythms**

The riff, the rhyme and the chant gain much of their power from rhythm as much as repeated, cyclical melodies. Chanting emphasises the pulse or beat – the rhythmic melody – the sound of the word with the beat. Chants are popular, in life as much as in music, because we tend to enter melody through the rhythm. When children learn songs, they tend to beat out the rhythmic pattern of the instrumental or vocal melody first. They then work out the other rhythms and pulses in the music. Only after all this do they then learn the pitch changes that make up the melody. Lucy Green (2005) found this when she researched the way school children learn to play songs together among friends. When children learn to play music by listening they intuitively respond to the rhythms of the melodies. Regardless of genre, children beat out the rhythm of the main instrumental or vocal melodies before working out the pitches of these melodies. Green suggested that this might be a stage that people go through as they acquire musical skills and start to recognise pitches. It implies that when people respond to music they are reacting to the movement or flow (the pulse or beat) as much as to the pitch contours of the melody (and this occurs way before they figure out the lyrics).

In classical music, value is accorded to the pitch of the melody and harmony over and above rhythm. This is not the case in most popular music, particularly that derived from blues and folk. In Dylan's music the melodies are integrally tied up with rhythms. That's how we experience them as listeners

and that's how the audience enters and becomes part of these songs. The pitches of Dylan's melodies are played out and off against the rhythms of his vocal delivery, and with the rhythms of instruments. Williams heard this characteristic when listening to Dylan's early songs, performed on acoustic guitar in 1960s, observing that 'a primary aspect of his songwriting and performance, is a kind of percussive lyricism, as if every word were a pulse in a rhythmic flow' (1990: 69).

Dylan has acquired this percussive lyricism, using words as a pulse in a rhythmic flow, from his immersion in the blues. Jeff Todd Titon highlights this quality when discussing blues singers, particularly Charley Patton who 'was able to give a sequence of dynamic accents to a vowel sound held through successive pitches, lending a percussive rhythmic effect which could – and did – contrast with the rhythm of his guitar accompaniment' (1994: 144). Patton along with Robert Johnson was a big influence on Dylan, not only musically and lyrically but also in terms of how they used rhythms.

All Delta blues players used rhythmic irregularities when performing. According to Charles Ford's detailed analysis, Charlie Patton used 5 and 7 beat bars fairly systematically at the end of 4 bar sections, whereas Skip James seemed to perform 'with no concern for hypermetre, metre or even beat' (Ford, 1998: 71). Ford characterises Robert Johnson as 'systematically irregular', and sets himself the task of going through Johnson's available recordings and trying to work out how many bars are contained within specific sequences, calculating the number of beats in bars and estimating where the bar lines fall. It is not easy and in frustration Ford remarks 'sometimes Robert Johnson's rhythmic irregularities are ambiguous, if not downright indecipherable' (80). When he attempts to analyse 'Preaching Blues' he is forced to admit that the song 'challenges the validity of my analytic method more obviously than any other' (82). After setting out his rhythmic analysis as sequence of numbers Ford then adds an even larger caveat: Having 'spent hundreds of hours ... attempting to measure this music against a constantly, though minutely varying pulse ... I have indeed found the metre highly elusive!' (86).

Ford's study of Robert Johnson's rhythms is fascinating. He demonstrates the problems, if not the outright futility, of approaching rhythm through the concepts of bars, beats and regular pulse. He highlights an important quality, found in the music of many great musicians who have adroitly applied rhythmic irregularity when creating a groove or feel.

When playing folk songs Dylan had followed Pete Seeger's advice that singers should avoid predictability when repeating melodic sequences, doing this by holding notes in unexpected places and adding extra beats (see Chapter Three). The combined influence of irregularities absorbed from folk ballads and blues can be heard on recordings when Dylan is just playing acoustic guitar and harmonica, or piano. He will introduce subtle variations in tempo (slowing down, speeding up, seeming to hesitate). He will add or drop beats, appear to start a verse or chorus slightly early, and sing verses and choruses in slightly different ways. This is apparent in all his early albums and particularly noticeable throughout *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, notably on 'My Back Pages', 'Ballad In Plain D' and 'Chimes Of Freedom'. It is a feature that those who attempt covers of Dylan's songs often neglect, so that their versions can sound strangely rigid.

It is harder to hear these irregular inflections when Dylan is performing with a band, as the arrangement and drummer's timing tends to regularise the pulse. Yet the irregularities are often still there. They are noticeable on *Oh Mercy*, particularly on 'Ring Them Bells' and 'What Good Am I?' when Dylan is directing the songs from the piano. Although irregular vocal deliveries are a characteristic of Dylan's songs, he has rarely arranged songs with systematic or structured irregularities. A rare, notable exception is 'We Better Talk This Over' on *Street Legal*, which switches from a regular four-beat pulse to an occasional 'bar' with five beats, as if to emphasize the

awkwardness of the circumstances evoked in the lyrics (lovers needing to sort out problems in their relationship).

Although he has given many interviews Dylan has rarely spoken about rhythm. His most extensive discussion of rhythm can be found in *Chronicles Volume One* in a section that a number of people have found baffling, Phil Sutcliffe describing it as ‘incomprehensible to laymen and opaque to musicians’ (2006: 68). This is a passage where Dylan reflects on how his stage performances in the middle of the 1980s had become ‘habit and routine’ characterised by ‘a casual Carter Family flat-picking style’. Thinking about how he might reorient his guitar-playing on stage he recalled advice given to him by the jazz and blues musician Lonnie Johnson back in 1962. Johnson had demonstrated an approach that Dylan remembered as ‘a style of playing based on an odd- instead of an even-number system’ (2004: 157). Here is an extended edited extract:

It’s a highly controlled system of playing and relates to the notes of the scale, how they combine numerically, how they form melodies out of triplets and are axiomatic to the rhythm and chord changes ... The method works on higher or lower degrees depending on different patterns and the syncopation of the piece ... The system works in a cyclical way. Because you’re thinking in odd numbers instead of even numbers, you’re playing with a different value system. Popular music is usually based on the number 2 and then filled in with fabrics, colors, effects and technical wizardry to make a point. But the total effect is usually depressing and oppressive ... if you are using an odd numerical system, things that strengthen a performance begin to happen and make it memorable for the ages. You don’t have to plan or think ahead. In a diatonic scale there are eight notes, in a pentatonic scale there are five. If you’re using the first scale, and you hit 2, 5 and 7 to the phrase and then repeat it, a melody forms. Or you can use 2 three times. Or you can use 4 once and 7 twice. It’s infinite what you can do, and each time would create a different melody. The possibilities are endless. A song executes itself on several fronts and you can ignore musical customs. All you need is a drummer and a bass player, and all shortcomings become irrelevant as long as you stick to the system. With any type of imagination you can hit notes at intervals and between backbeats, creating counterpoint lines and then you sing off of it. There’s no mystery to it and it’s not a technical trick (Dylan, 2004: 157-8).

Dylan then goes on to write about how it ‘works on its own mathematical formula’, commenting that ‘the number 3 is more metaphysically powerful than the number 2’ and claims it is ‘a style that benefits the singer. In folk oriented and jazz-blues songs, it’s perfect’ (159). Dylan self-consciously adopted this approach, he says, from the late 1980s to revitalize his playing. He was aware that audiences familiar with his songs ‘might be a little confounded by the way they now were about to be played’ but he was determined that the songs would be driven by the way ‘triplet forms would fashion melodies at intervals’ (160), rather than the existing lyrical content.

There are many things to say about this and I’ll restrict myself to four points. First, a thought that has probably crossed the minds of many people; is Dylan putting us on? Within the context of the memoirs as a whole, I think this is unlikely. The fact that he takes considerable space to discuss this shows how important it was to his music at this moment. It appears to be a genuine attempt to convey the system that started guiding his live performances. Second, Dylan is not explaining this as a schooled music theorist, nor as a musician trained in the terminology of art music. He’s explaining it from the experience of a self-taught musician. It is hard enough to convey these ideas with any clarity whatever vocabulary you choose to use. So, it should not be judged according to formal music theory. Third, it seems fair to assume that like any ‘system’ it works as a guiding principle, not as a set of rigid rules. So, when Dylan uses the pentatonic (five note) scale for melodies, it doesn’t mean that every single note of a song can be plotted according to just these five notes. Fourth, the explanation is an attempt to convey the quite conscious way that rhythm allowed him to

rethink how he formed melodies, delivered words and combined rhythm, melody and chords. The triplet was the catalyst that allowed him to change the approach to how he re-arranged and performed songs in concert. It freed him up to rethink rhythmic patterns and the way syncopation might intersect with and be implicated in the melody of a song (and vice versa). Forming melodies out of the numbered notes of the scale and creating rhythms out of pulses of 2 and 3 are linked. It's an idea and an impulse he feels when he plays (again, quite regardless of whether it correspond with formal music theory).

Dylan adds a degree of clarity with an example: 'Link Wray had done the same thing in his classic song 'Rumble' ... Link's song had no lyrics, but he played with the same numerical system' (160). Dylan opened some of his shows at Brixton Academy in London with 'Rumble' just after Link Wray died in November 2005. Wray's track can be heard in 4/4 time but with triplets, making it more like a 12/8 blues, with a descending guitar line of accented triplets at the end of each sequence. Similar triplet patterns can be heard in a lot of his songs, and much popular music has drawn from the way folk and blues integrate faster pulses of three with or against a slower pulses of two, creating an overall swinging or rocking motion (it can be heard on 'Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall It' or 'Isis' or 'Man In The Long Black Coat').

It was from the late 1980s, with the Never Ending Tour, that Dylan began to self-consciously experiment with the vertical and horizontal axis of his songs (rather than the textures of his bands). With the flutes, saxophones, keyboards, and gospel vocals dispensed with in favour of bass, guitar and drums, the arrangement of Dylan's songs in performances began to display a greater interest in the vertical layering of rhythm and melody against each other, and the horizontal way in which the melody and rhythm unfold and enfold each other in time. This can be heard if you think of Dylan's songs in performance as composed of rhythms and, in your mind, you try to factor out the pitch of the melodies and the meaning of the words: Listen to the rhythm of the vocal line, the way the words are rhythmically delivered, along with the rhythms of the guitar, the rhythms of the harmonica. It's not easy, and it may not provide 'evidence' of his 'system', but it gives a pretty clear indication of how he uses rhythm and melody in his arrangements.

One specific song that Dylan has discussed in terms of its rhythms is 'Cold Irons Bound' which first appeared on *Time Out of Mind* in 1997. The song is imbued with desperation for a love that has died. The narrator is either bound in cold irons (chains), or bound for a destination called Cold Irons. Dylan has spoken of the initial recording made with Daniel Lanois in these terms:

Yeh, there's a real drive to it, but it isn't close to the way I had envisioned ... there were things I had to throw out because this assortment of people just couldn't lock in on riffs and rhythms all together. ... I feel there was sameness to the rhythms. It was more like that swampy, voodoo thing that Lanois is so good at. I just wish I'd been able to get more of a legitimate rhythm-oriented sense into it. I didn't feel there was any mathematical thing about that record at all. The one beat could've been anywhere, when instead, the singer should have been defining where the drum should be (cited in Muir, 2003: 251)

There are many rhythms running through this recording, most obviously a recurrent beat of 3, 3, 2 over or within a more regular rock pulse of 4/4. It's not difficult to sympathise with Dylan's reservations about the 'swampy' production with too much going on. He rerecorded the song for the film *Masked And Anonymous*, released on the soundtrack album in 2003. On this version the drums are playing far more directly to, and off against, the vocal line.

By the summer of 2006, 'Cold Irons Bound' had been rearranged again, the rhythm punchier, sparser, yet more direct and more obviously a blues. Seeing Dylan in Bournemouth at this time I was struck by his position at the keyboard on stage and the way he made constant eye contact with the

drummer, George Receli. This was pronounced during ‘Like A Rolling Stone’ when Dylan constantly looked towards Receli as he sung. An interplay developed with the rhythm of the lyrics being played off and to the tom-tom and snare drum. As the song built, Dylan began splitting and spitting the lyrics in a stabbing staccato ‘you’re in – vi – si - ble you’ve got no se - crets to con - ceal’, the rhythm of the vocals driving the song forward. It was a vivid an example what Dylan meant by ‘the singer defining where the drum should be’.

This was also an example of Dylan directing the band during the realisation of a specific arrangement of the song, something that he has done more noticeably since playing keyboards on stage. Throughout the NET, Dylan seems to have found a means of arranging songs in such a way as to avoid the extremes that characterised some of his earlier tours, between the elaborate, tight arrangements of 1978 (initially organised by Rob Stoner), when there would be little change from night to night (the arrangements and size of ensemble restricting the opportunities for variation and spontaneity) and the looseness and outright chaos of some performances during the mid-1980s (when no one seemed to be directing). It has clearly been a gradual process, and dependent upon the musicians that Dylan has employed and his apparent willingness to convey his musical ideas to them; there were occasional moments during the early 1990s when the song’s architecture would collapse into disorganised chaos. One of the appeals of Dylan’s concerts for his fans is the anticipation of the new arrangements that he has continually introduced over the years, particularly when returning to the stage after a short break in touring. On one of the few occasions that Dylan has commented on his song arrangements he told Jonathan Lethem:

I’ve heard it said, you’ve probably heard it said, that all the arrangements change night after night. Well, *that’s* a bunch of bullshit, they don’t know what they’re talking about. The arrangements don’t change night after night. The rhythmic structures are different, that’s all. You can’t change the arrangement night after night – it’s *impossible* (2006: 78).

Again, Dylan stresses that it’s the ‘rhythmic structures’ that are varied, that are modified and allow for improvisation from night to night. From his earliest recordings and performances, the rhythms of the instruments (even the lone acoustic guitar) have never been simply an ‘accompaniment’ in Dylan’s songs. They have been integral to the changing sonic architecture of the songs. And – with all those words to play around with – it has so often been the voice that defines, even dictates, the rhythms of Dylan’s music.

### **Inside the melody and the melody inside**

When people dismiss Dylan’s melodies as ‘simple’ they are bringing to this description a whole bunch of assumptions about the formal qualities that characterise good melodies, consciously or inadvertently derived from the study and criticism of western art music. So far I’ve argued that this ignores the way melodies work in folk, blues and pop music. I want to end this book by taking one step further and draw on the writings of Gino Stefani (1987) who has argued that the study of popular music should develop an alternative approach to melody, one that is connected to the experiences of listeners. He writes that melody should be treated as

that dimension of music which everyone can easily appropriate in many ways: with the voice by singing, whistling or putting words to it; with the body by dancing, marching etc ... melody ... is what people appropriate most in music ... there is no doubt that the most prominent feature (is) that it is “singable” ... Oral melody is the voice of pleasure: nature teaches us so from childhood (Stefani, 1987: 21-3).

From an early age we learn to love what many critics have dismissed as simple, boring and repetitive melodies (whether nursery rhymes, festive chants, devotional tunes or pop songs). This is what

makes them aesthetically important in our lives and worth discussing. John Lennon instinctively knew this, which is, perhaps, why he recycled the three note descending melody of 'Three Blind Mice' in so many of his songs. In his detailed study of the Beatles music, Wilfred Mellers called this a 'refrain which is so fundamental to John's music' (1976: 176). It can most obviously be heard in the 'love, love, love' of 'All You Need Is Love', and in 'Oh Yoko' and 'My Mummy's Dead'. The nursery rhymes that children sing, dance, clap with, often entail chants on one pitch; or short walks up and down the scale; rising or falling thirds and fourths. So do the songs that people carry with them and sing when working, doing domestic chores, in the shower, on the street or concert.

Bob Dylan's melodies and rhythms do not exist as isolated structures or texts, but as songs that connect with and are embedded into people's lives. This can be illustrated with reference to the song 'It Ain't Me Babe', first released in 1964. Following an observation made by a newspaper reviewer at the time, many writers have noted that the 'No, No, No' refrain of this song, coming out in 1964, can be heard as a response to the Beatles 'Yeah, Yeah, Yeah' refrain of 'She Loves You' released the previous year. Bowden is just one writer who has made this point about the two early songs: 'The Beatles had until then sung simple love-song lyrics in adapted gospel style; Dylan, adapting blues style, exactly reversed the sentiments. 'She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah,' they sang, and he sang 'No, no, no, it ain't me babe'' (2001: 104). Whether or not this was a conscious response, and whether there was any irony intended, there were many ways that Dylan and the Beatles musically commented on each other's work throughout the 1960s. This includes complementary homage (Lennon's 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away' and 'I'm A Loser'; Dylan's band arrangements on *Bringing It All Back Home*; Harrison's 'Long, Long, Long' with its acoustic guitar and organ texture, and chord sequence with descending bass line borrowed from 'Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands') and more ironic or sarcastic references (Dylan's '4th Time Around' which comments on 'Norwegian Wood' and McCartney's 'Rocky Raccoon' which pokes fun at the wild west imagery of *John Wesley Harding*).

Both The Beatles and Dylan sing 'yeah, yeah, yeah' / 'no, no, no' over three notes descending within the interval of a minor third, and the same notes at that (G, F#, E), but they are quite obviously harmonised differently. The Beatles melody is more directly related to the underlying chords, while Dylan's is a typical bluesy folk melody that bears only a tenuous 'functional' relationship to the chords. Either way, the melodies of the main chorus hook are the same.

In approaching the songs of Dylan and The Beatles, a music analyst may not wish to detach the melody from the chords, rhythms, instrumentation and so on. But, drawing on Stefani's suggestion, we can think of melodies as tunes that are heard, appropriated and sung independent from the chords and harmony - sung by listeners in their everyday lives, whether or not they are listening to a recording. When they are sung by fans at concerts, performers gain a tangible sense of how their tunes have connected with the public. This can be heard on the performance of 'It Ain't Me Babe' on the album *Real Live* recorded in England and Ireland during the summer of 1984, when Dylan stands back from the microphone and allows the crowd to sing the 'no, no, no,' refrain (it can also be heard on many bootlegs since that time).

People have been singing along at Bob Dylan concerts since at least the 1974 US tour with the Band. Singing along seemed to gain momentum at Dylan concerts during the middle of the 1980s, particularly from 1984. Paul Williams recounted this episode from Dylan's European tour of that year:

An Italian television station filmed three and a half songs from the Barcelona (Spain) concert. The footage of the last encore, 'Blowin' in the Wind', is priceless. Dylan had been encouraging the fans to sing along on the choruses to this song for about two weeks, but on this evening the crowd - who had been wonderful all through the performance, despite the fact

that it didn't start till after midnight – caught Dylan by surprise. They start singing – loudly and in fine harmony – at the start of the first chorus (no doubt they all saw newspaper or TV coverage of the Madrid concert two days earlier), and Dylan is visibly moved. He sings the next verse in his best 'big and earnest' voice, and then choreographs the singalong with a verve that would make Pete Seeger proud (Williams, 1992: 259).

Bob Dylan might not be the most obvious musician to sing along with—after all, he is not usually perceived as someone who goes out on stage to entertain and engage in dialogue with a crowd. Yet, in other respects he is heir to the legacies of a type of social, communal music making that refracts back from contemporary pop and rock through folk and blues, to street sung broadsides and work songs, to the melodic observations of medieval troubadours and the sacred rhythms of Christianity and Judaism. There are many characteristics common to the rich sonic tradition that I'm attempting to signal with these brief words. The most notable is the way melodies in the popular song work at the intersection of speech and singing, the elevated and the mundane—the song starts when talk becomes music, when the ordinary becomes special.

Despite the historical importance of communal singing in folk and popular culture, some writers have taken exception to people singing at Dylan concerts. Andrew Muir endorses comments made by Ian Bell who had written of Dylan's changing song arrangements and argued that they were 'challenging the audience even to attempt to "sing along" with songs they thought they knew. As a believer in corporal punishment for lachrymose community singing, this writer, for one, owes him a debt' (cited Muir, 2001: 191). Muir comments 'this writer makes it two'. It's highly unlikely that Dylan's exploration of his songs in concert is motivated by such a simplistic desire to subvert and undermine audience attempts to sing along. If anything, the new melodies and rhythms are often playing off and held in tension to the previously heard melodies and rhythms – whether it becomes tangible when people try to sing, or whether the audience become aware of it as the song unfolds against their memory of how the song last sounded.

After a concert in Barrowlands, Glasgow in June 2004, the Expecting Rain website had a number of contributions from people who had been at the gig and who remarked upon the singing and the way Dylan responded to it. According to what was written by audience members, the fans were loudly singing along with 'Just Like A Woman', 'It Ain't Me Babe' and 'Like A Rolling Stone'. According to one audience member Dylan was pointing at the audience and conducting them during 'Like A Rolling Stone'. Then he said (something like, there are minor variations in how four people recount what he said) 'We've played that thousands of times and people try to sing along, but nobody can ever do it' or 'we've done that song a thousand times and no one's kept up like that'. He then mimed the opening lines of 'All Along The Watchtower' while the crowd were singing.

Singing along symbolically and tangibly affirms a relationship between musician and audience. The audience enters the song, participates in it and the artist often stops singing and lets the audience take over. Singing along with choruses is also one of the clearest examples of how the words of pop songs become detached from their semantic significance within the song's lyrical narrative or argument. These are quite clearly not the words read on paper. The 'no, no, no, it ain't me babe' refrain becomes a phrase in itself, appropriated, incorporated into the breath of many singers. It can resonate as a defiant riposte to whoever or whatever is bugging an individual audience member in their lives at that moment, and, at the same time, it is a celebration of the magic of Dylan's song. During an earlier tour with the Band in 1974 Paul Williams heard 'It Ain't Me Babe' as 'a song of not just personal but collective freedom' (1992: 8).

During live performances of 'Like A Rolling Stone' the chorus tends to elicit two responses: Some audience members sing the words and melody, others cheer in response to 'How does it feel?' In concert, that phrase 'How does it feel?' is no longer addressed to a character in the lyrics. Instead, it



is transformed, becoming ‘how does it feel?’ in the here and now of the concert. It becomes a multi-vocal celebration of how it feels to be part of the moment and the history of Dylan singing this song. During Dylan’s 1974 tour with the Band, Bowden heard the response to this song – the audience singing ‘how does it feel?’ – as ‘reinforcing the feeling that each listener is not alone but rather part of a community all of whom know how it feels’ (2001: 94). Whilst the idea of the audience sharing in the values of a ‘rock community’ has been thoroughly questioned since the 1970s (see Frith, 1983), the song has continued to resonate with a collective spirit at concerts, whatever community is being projected, imagined or desired on any particular night.

There is, paradoxically, something quite profound about the way an apparently simple tune can allow large numbers of people to participate in singing along with that melody, sometimes without being fully aware of the meaning, or without even worrying about whether they are singing the correct words. It’s quite possible to sing along with songs (at a concert or recording) and be unaware of the full lyrics, or the correct lyrics – you can sing some words and sing the nearest sounding word to others. And we should not underestimate how people sing along with songs without opening their mouths. It is also possible to sing along - aloud or in the mind - whilst not necessarily agreeing with the apparent sentiments. The contrast between personal belief and lyric is only a contradiction if you assume that songs communicate via the meaning of the words alone, *and* that participation implies agreement with a songs semantic content. ‘We’ are sharing in the sonics, not the semantics.

Singing a song is one of the most embodied, physical ways of putting ourselves into music. Appropriating melodies, putting our stamp on them, chanting them when we are engaged in routines in our homes, when walking down the street or at a concert is how we enter the songs of Bob Dylan and the music of Dylan becomes part of our lives.

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