

D002 ... 'TIL OUR EYES GO BLIND

In 1965 D toured the UK as a solo acoustic "folk" act for the last time. Compared to the Herculean touring schedules that future years would bring, this blow-through was a very modest affair - eight shows in eleven days, with single concerts in six provincial cities followed by two on consecutive nights at London's Albert Hall. By the time he opened in Sheffield on 30 April, *BIABH* (released 22 March) had already put the writing on the wall: this was not just another everyday tour, it was a *farewell* tour - though at the time the artist was more aware of that than his devoted fans. Filmmaker Don Pennebaker was one of the party, his brief to shoot and produce a documentary record of the jaunt, which he duly did: *Don't Look Back* was released in 1967 to mixed reviews. But by then Dylan (and Pennebaker) had been back through northern Europe (17 dates in Scandinavia, Ireland, Paris and the UK) again. Thinner, curlier, booted, suited and (more to the point) with a *group* in tow, it was a decidedly *different* Mr D on show this fourth time around. It used to be like that, now it goes like this ... A *hello* tour, maybe? Pennebaker did the bizz again, bagging lots more invaluable footage, both inside the concert hall and out. This tour was twice as long - more chances to shoot. What's more, whereas *DLB* had been a shoestring b&w affair, this '66 venture had money behind it - an advance from ABC Television sufficient to fund a Technicolor production. As things turned out, the network received nothing of use and the advance had to be repaid. But this payback delivered the raw footage into Dylan's hands and it was he, with co-conspirator Howard Alk, who finally put together and released (though not until 1971) *Eat The Document*. In the years since, more or less poor copies have circulated among fans wanting primarily to see the clips of '66 concert footage it contained. Lately, of course, Scorsese's tour-de-force *No Direction Home* has obviated that desire. But now, just when you felt that maybe you didn't need *ETD* on your shelf after all, here it is, presented as never before, fit to make you change your mind a second time.



... Are you ever yourself at any time?



Bloody disgrace! A traitor! He wants shootin'!

So what have we? We have the complete film, 52 minutes, without credits or extras, looking (screenshots above / below) and sounding just fine. And what are we to make of it? Really something? Too much of nothing? Pretentious guff? Art? Or maybe all those things and more?

Fans might think it first and foremost a missed opportunity, for, without doubt, it could have been *better* - meaning more on-message. Still, it is what it is. We see an early sneak preview of the *L&T* moustache. We're reminded of what an oil and water musical match D and Cash ever were (though the bond of friendship between them was clearly strong). The film's

fixation on travel and modes of transport adds little to a mix otherwise spiced nicely with snippets of song both as performed live on stage and (better yet) under acoustic construction in anonymous hotel bedrooms. But, though throughout his career D has dallied repeatedly with film and filmmakers - the medium clearly holds for him an enduring fascination - the creative return or "product" of this dalliance has e'er been comparatively slight. When the history of popular music comes to be written, D's name is certain to cast a giant shadow - but cinema? No - a brief footnote, if that. His engagements with the medium may be considered (dismissed?) as no more than a by-road (albeit an intriguing one) along the course of his majestic life's journey. All the same, whatever you may feel about D and cinema, *ETD* remains an important artefact. As the result of his first creative adventure in film, it tells a revealing tale of its own. But in the perspective of his career, it also stands as direct antecedent of that second, more substantial but equally rum cuckoo's egg, *Renaldo & Clara* - the two as closely and indivisibly linked as *Bob Dylan and Freewheelin'* or *Slow Train Coming* and *Saved*. But how much of a coincidence is it that the *raison d'être*, the saving grace and ultimately the salvation of both these films is the wonderful, incomparable music at their core? (Yes, because had D stepped on stage in 1975 and performed like Billy Parker, would *R&C* be any more sought after now than the wretched *Hearts of Fire*? And, as for the music in *ETD*, the only pity is that there's not more of it.) '66 and '75 are arguably Bob's two finest musical hours. Did the flame burn so very bright that he believed, hands-on-fire, nothing beyond him? Or did some unspoken inner voice tell him these precious moments must be preserved on film come what may? Who knows? All you can do is watch and listen, gawp and smile, scratch your head and think to yourself (not for the first time) how lucky you are. Find, play, enjoy.



THANKS PC

STARS Four