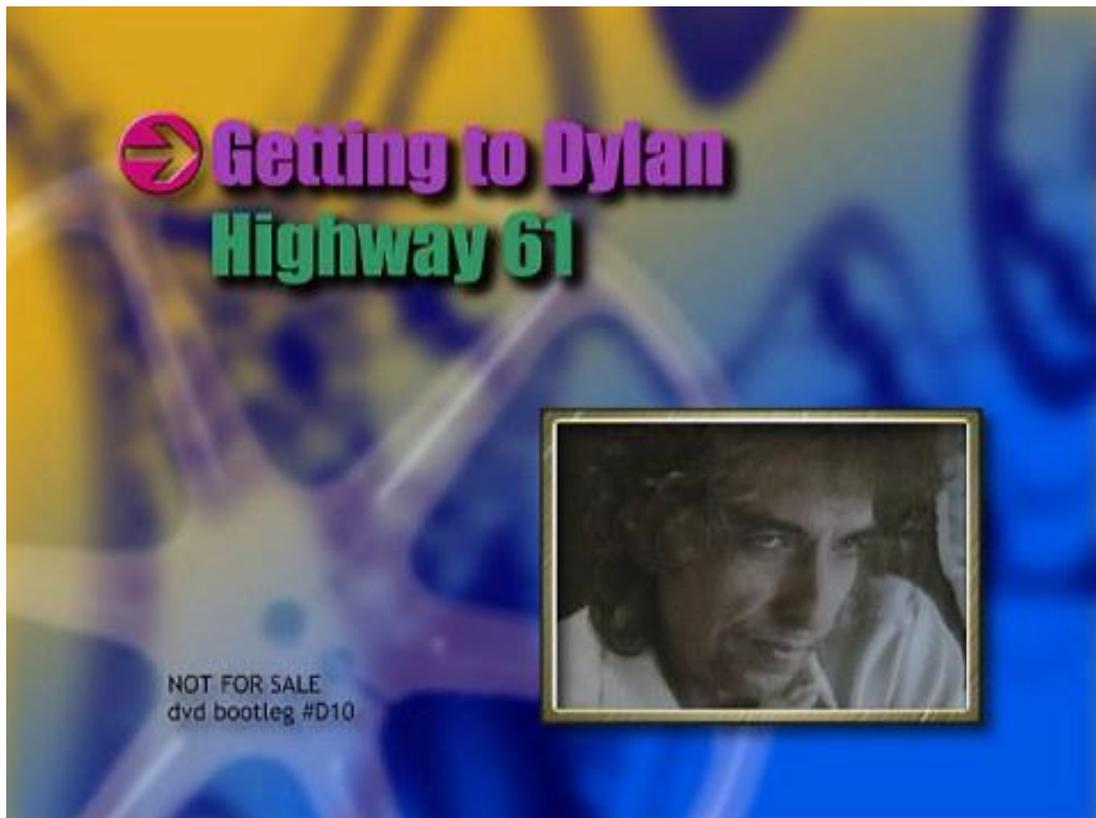


D010 GETTING TO DYLAN / HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED

Getting To Dylan was filmed during the making of *Hearts Of Fire* in 1986 and first shown on BBC2 on 19 September 1987. Running 52 minutes, picture quality is grainy at times but never less than watchable. That's more than can be said for parts of this film. At its heart is a compelling 22 minute interview, on camera, between a cagey Dylan and BBC producer Christopher Sykes, who adopts a craven, obsequious manner in dealing with his subject that makes you want to shake him. From its title on down, the film goes out of its way to make excuses for this walking-on-eggshells attitude, driving home the message that our coquettish star is extremely equivocal about being interviewed, consenting in the end only after three weeks of havoring - thus one wrong word from Sykes and Co, it suggests, and they'd be out the door quicker than the clapperboard man could shout *Cut!* Throughout the interview, a semi-standing and suspiciously sniffy Dylan scribbles a "portrait" of Sykes, which serves to disarm him, as presumably was the intention. (Since D's post-millennial ascendancy to Painter Of Renown, I wonder what that sketch is worth now?) When Bob mentions Trust Yourself, Sykes says "I don't know that song" - *so what's he doing on this gig, then?* At times Bob waxes eloquent in spite of himself, first on the subject of money and then in denying first any kind of relationship with his audience and then any interest in "fame". His words here ring hollow even as he speaks them - but from lap-dog Sykes, not a peep. Maybe his was a lose-lose situation. More likely he was the wrong man for the job*.



This mesmerising mid-section of the film aside, we get glimpses of the now-departed *HOF* director and ex-BBC man Richard Marquand (who describes Bob as "a real sweetheart") and Ian Dury. We get a chilling look into the everyday life of a superstar (on which subject in the interview Bob speaks very well). We see him sign several left-handed autographs. We're reminded yet again that he cannot act to save his life – in front of the camera he seems to have a debilitating reserve, or maybe restraint is a better word, for you can't help but feel that

something about his inhibition* is self-willed. Though giving so freely and spontaneously of himself in song with seeming ease, an ingrained reluctance to do the same on camera holds him back. The programme concludes with five minutes of run-the-clock-down junk-film, best forgotten. Interview five stars, all else two and a half.



[The artist at work ...](#)

Next on this DVD comes *Highway 61 Revisited*, fourth and last part of a 1993 *Arena* series called *Tales of Rock 'n' Roll*. The brief of each programme in the series was to look at the story behind a seminal song (the others being *Peggy Sue*, *Walk On The Wild Side* and *Heartbreak Hotel*). First shown on 8 May '93, this good-looking but ill-disciplined hour-long film seems less of a storytelling exercise than an excuse to make another doc about Bob (for it's become clear over the years that the *Arena* production team are all big fans). Things open well with the whole song presented in a form that, lifted out of here, would sit very nicely in the *Promo Videos* collection. There are several lovely extended vignettes of young Bob's Hibbing, with narration by boyhood pal John Bucklen as well as the late Robert Shelton (below), D biographer and early champion (check out the back of the first album). As you might expect, long clips from both *North Country Blues* and *Girl From The North Country* are used to good effect. The programme rambles up and down the Mississippi then across to New York, with fleeting nods to Elvis, Bessie Smith, MLK, John Lee Hooker. Bob's Jewish roots are briefly mentioned. Snippets from the 1962 Cynthia Gooding show remind us of what a put-on artist he ever was. Bucklen makes the most telling observation when he says he knew Bobby Zimmerman very well but felt he didn't know Bob Dylan at all. Perhaps more by accident than design, it is the factors feeding into this key metamorphosis that this enjoyable film catches best.



Robert Shelton (1926-1995)



Highway 61 that-a-way ...

THANKS BC

STARS Overall, four

* After reading the comments above, Mr Sykes posted this response:

Well, it's interesting (if a little painful!) to read Jim50's review ... Fair enough, but Jim gives the interview five stars. The interview exists because I made it exist. So why was I so obviously The Wrong Man For The Job? You should have a go yourself, Jim, and see how far you get! No hard feelings - I'm just pleased you enjoyed it.

* BD To Edna Gundersen, 31 August 1990:

It rubs me the wrong way, a camera. It doesn't matter who it is. Someone in my own family could be pointing a camera around. It's a frightening feeling. It's not really an instrument that's been elevated to that world of art. It's a machine. Cameras make ghosts out of people ...

NOTE Since this review was written, [D010](#)'s two films have started to circulate as separate items - *Getting To Dylan* numbered [D010.pal](#) and *Highway 61 Revisited* [D010.p2](#). Content in each case is as described above. Respective menu screens below:

