

D016 FOR THE POPE AND FOR THE PEOPLE

This hotch-potch of a disc offers Bobs delightful, disappointing and dire in about equal measure. We kick off on a sunny Athens hillside under eggshell-blue skies, with a majestic Parthenon behind framed by Van Morrison on the left facing Bob on the right, each clutching an acoustic guitar. Morrison leads Bob through a duet of Crazy Love, then sings Foreign Window with Bob on harmonica. Another Morrison-led duet, One Irish Rover, rounds things off - sound, picture, setting all fine. But then comes a lengthy run of "rough footage" from the same shoot - we sit through Crazy Love again then one and a half takes of It Stoned Me, all in poor video over imperfect sound, which adds nothing to what went before but, rather, demeans it. A badly-shot live H61 from Bob's Athens gig of two nights later also less than dazzles.



Over to the Orbison Tribute and a radiant Roger McGuinn launches into Tambourine Man, which, though enjoyable in its own right, is made more so by the fact that you know what's going to happen - and yes, at the end of verse one, on shambles Bob. McGuinn wants him to sing. He's reluctant. He's crotchety. The way McGuinn wins him round is endearing to see and by the end of the song the two have their heads into one mike going at it like Beauty and the Beast. (Who's which? You guess.) T Man, like JLaw, is a song that seldom if ever sounds bad, and this version, thanks mainly to McGuinn, hits the spot nicely.

Then another from the depths of a particularly smelly barrel as Bob rips through a breakneck Chimes (*it used to be like that, now it goes like this ...*) before a smirking Bill Clinton and family. D seems to be doing a particularly bad parody of himself - if he performed like this in one of those Greenwich Village imitator contests, he'd be lucky to survive the cut. In front of Clinton, you may think, so what? But it's in front of Abe too (yes, look over Bob's shoulder and there he sits) which makes it a whole other sacrilegious bad scene.

Swiftly on to two meets and three songs with Willie Nelson. Heartland is a poor song which, despite their best efforts, the two can't make fly; Pancho and Lefty (first pic below) soars. Though D sings it well here, Stephen Foster's* maudlin Hard Times is a song I've never really taken to. Why he would choose it (for the album) over the wonderful You Belong To Me is a mystery. (But then he held back McTell, didn't he? And Series Of Dreams. And Dignity. Seven Curses. Abandoned Love. Oh, *Bob!*) Supper Club footage - one verse of OTMM and two of Queen Jane - is a dark, blurry and ultimately unsatisfying tease. Next comes the full set - Watchtower, JLaw, Seeing The Real You, H61 and Forever Young - from the 1995 R&R Hall of Fame Gala. Springsteen joins in on the last to good effect, though all is eminently watchable (and listenable) once you get used (second pic below) to Bob's gold lamé shirt.



And so to the reason I acquired this DVD and why I would advise anyone with more than a passing interest in Bob to do the same. He steps up to sing Frank Sinatra a birthday song and so we get to see a Dylan all too rarely glimpsed - 100% on the money, paying full respect to his song, an artist in words and music delivering a wonderful, word-perfect, flawless, priceless performance (its first in 31 years!) of Restless Farewell. Following this full five-verse *tour-de-force* we're shown the broadcast version which has fuller sound but, sadly, verses two and four missing. Compare Bob's performance here to the one in front of Clinton then ask yourself which man you think he has greater respect for.

Another short piece of Tokyo-shot, barrel-scrape nonsense brings us to Bob-Meets-Pope from Bologna 1997. Though presented here in fine shape, I'm afraid I can't warm to this at all. D and the band stand on a big empty sound-stage with the Pope and his court way off to one side, so for a start the thing is staged in a way that's visually unappealing. The Pontiff sits through proceedings stiff and inert (as you might expect from a 77 year-old man in poor health) looking down like a frail and disapproving emissary from another colder and less liberal world. There's a grinding clash here of

two cultures that are fundamentally irreconcilable and singing these songs (Heaven's Door, Hard Rain, Forever Young) before this man seems somehow both distasteful and inappropriate. Neither, in closing my eyes, do I hear anything arresting or memorable and, having watched this ill-starred event once, it's likely to be some time before I return. Others may get more from it. I hope they do.



THANKS B, as ever

STARS Four (but miss Restless Farewell at your peril)

* Responding to the suggestion that D is the "best songwriter of all time", ER sage harmonica albert wrote this:

I think it's a little premature to announce that Bob is the best all-time anything, except the best Bob Dylan ever.

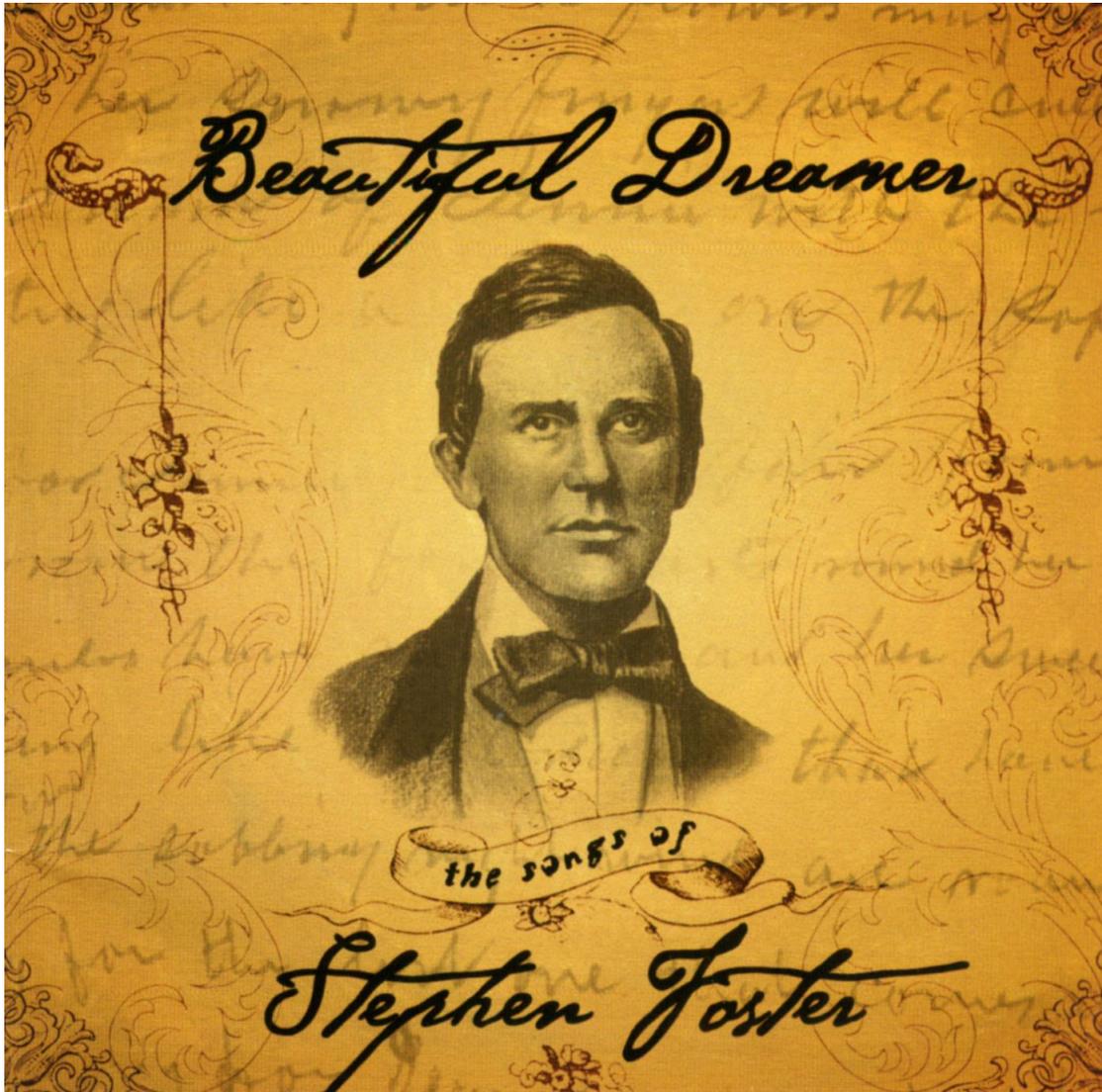
Homer would have to be the greatest songwriter in history. His work has lasted almost 3000 years, was so powerful that it was recalled and preserved in oral tradition for hundreds of years, was influential (and remains so) in forging a national and ethnic identity for Greeks, and has set the standard for narrative poetry in many languages besides ancient Greek. He also worked in the most difficult form, the epic. I'll bet he played a kick-ass lyre, too. Pindar would be right behind him.

Solomon, or whoever composed the Psalms, I'd rank behind Pindar, but some would put him first with good reason.

George & Ira Gershwin, Hoagy Carmichael, Irving Berlin and Cole Porter could all be ranked ahead of Dylan for song composition.

Duke Ellington also is a more important composer of songs than Bob.

Someone already mentioned Stephen Foster, who was the first person to try (with mixed success) to live off songwriting and was the first songwriter to collect royalties. His songs have lasted 160 years. Bob has some ground to make up there.



Stephen Foster (1826-1864), pre-eminent US songwriter of the nineteenth century, known as "the father of American music" even though, like George Gershwin, he died very young. Wrote Oh! Susanna, Campdown Races, Old Folks At Home (aka Swanee River), Beautiful Dreamer, Hard Times, My Old Kentucky Home, Jeanie With The Light Brown Hair and more.

Bob is certainly the greatest folk-rock songwriter of his generation. I can't think of anyone remotely close to him. But "all-time best" is meaningless hyperbole usually coming from someone who has no competence to make such a judgement. A lot of that going around.

For more HA wisdom, see Alphabet Series [DXXX.15](#) review.