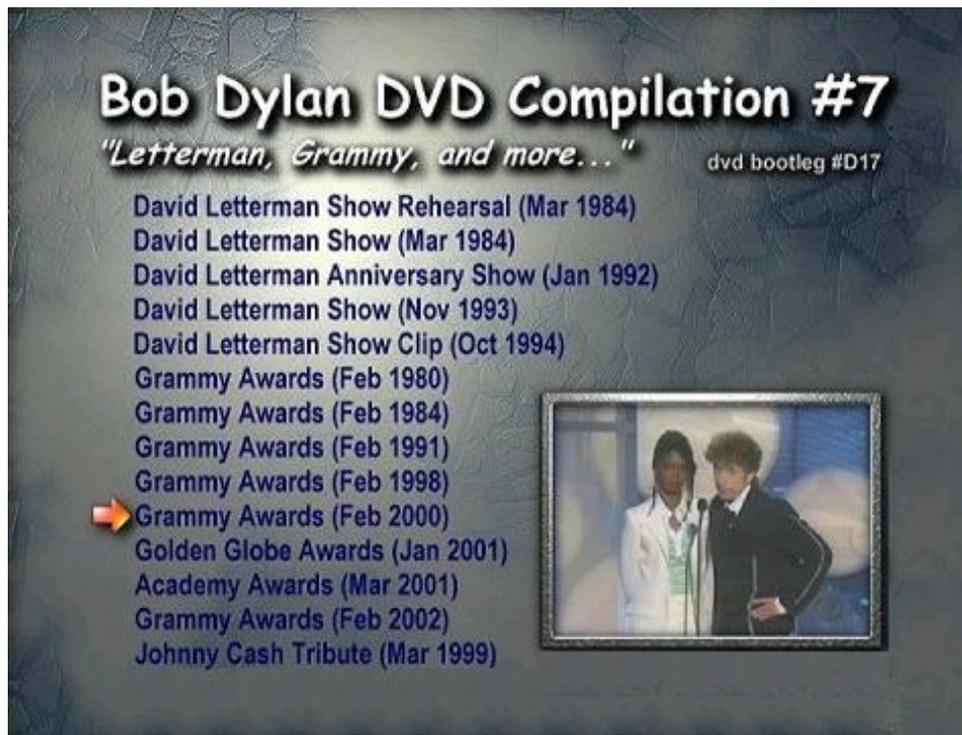


## D017 LETTERMAN, GRAMMY AND MORE



As most readers here will already know, there's a certain pleasure attached to watching film - especially pro-shot film - of Bob that has nothing to do with music. In one of the mid-eighties *Telegraph* magazines, John Lindley expressed it like this:

*Even without singing or playing at all, Bob Dylan is a knock-out on stage. Whatever you call it - charisma and magnetism both seem inadequate words, too commonplace and suggesting something too unspecific - whatever it is, Dylan has it in abundance. It's that nervous energy, that cool, that visible intelligence and panache which is present in virtually every move and gesture he makes. Watch The Last Waltz, Renaldo & Clara, Concert For Bangladesh, Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid and it is evident in them all. Dylan had it on this ['84] tour, had it back in 1965 in Don't Look Back and, though we haven't seen the film to prove it, you can bet he had it on those freezing nights at The Gaslight as the sixties rolled in.*

And that's what's best about D017 - the up-close-and-personal look it gives us at myriad sideshow Bobs, such as rehearsal-room Bob, punk Bob, post-punk Bob, God-fearing Bob, alien life-form Bob, vaquero Bob (great hat - see pic below), tongue-tied Awards Ceremony Bob (with this persona shedding off successive layers of skin to become, against all odds, Old Hand Bob), Tribute Bob ... Besides his day job, of course, all this other is decidedly small beer - except that, at each and every one of these prestigious gatherings there's a spontaneous naked affection inspired by his presence that speaks volumes about the special place he's secured in a whole generation of hearts. It's not clear he wants it or welcomes it, though it would appear he's learned increasingly to live with and at least tolerate it. But though we may smile

knowingly at the gaucheness of his non-singing public appearances, truly it can't be easy to be Bob Dylan - for a day, never mind a lifetime.

Which makes his comment about being happiest on stage (i.e. *playing*) easier to understand and that's surely where we all best appreciate him too. But in the live performance stakes, sadly, [D017](#) is not strong. In the 1992 Letterman slot it offers us a LARS in which a stage full of luminaries knock out an up-tempo backing track that an assertive vocal could have made fly. But Bob - constitutionally averse to these group-hug occasions - sings all through like a kitten wanting its milk. The Forever Young (Letterman '93) that follows, together with the powerful soy bomb\* Love Sick (from *TOOM* by Bill Dylan!) (Grammys '98) prove the two musical high spots here. D's refusal to be phased by the strange turn of events in the latter is impressive. Equally noteworthy is his performance of the 2001 Oscar night Things Have Changed, beamed live into LA via satellite from Sydney. He sings the song with extreme, almost exaggerated care. He also fearlessly fronts up to the camera (pic below) in a way very rare for him - both indicative of what this award, in seeming contrast to all the others, means to him (a conclusion since confirmed by the statuette's subsequent appearance on stages around the world). And the Nicholson/Dylan double act (plus nice montage) at the 1991 Grammys is compelling, with D's acceptance speech here inscrutable yet touching. Another John Lindley moment.



Many heap praise upon the '84 Letterman set with the Plugz. Michael Gray declares its Jokerman *wondrous, an impassioned, howling anthem* and *glorious amphetamine anarchy* whilst the performance as a whole he considers *a transcendent mainstream television moment*. But give us a break, Michael. In neither rehearsal (pic below) nor broadcast is there the least inkling of rapport between singer and band. They may look the part and walk the walk, but talk the talk? (Or, perhaps more apt, squawk the squawk?) Not in my house. Letterman '84 is more fun to watch with the sound off than on, that's how "transcendent" it is. And Jokerman? An exercise in perversity, ineptitude and futility; tantamount (given the magnificent original) to criminal assault. Over the top? Yes, of course, but then MG knows all about that, for he also believes that D *disappointed everyone by chickening out of taking [the Plugz] on the road for his 1984 European Tour ...* Hmmm. In the past 25 years, it's true that Bob has fronted a number of bands easier on the ear and better suited to his style than the Taylor / McLagen / Sutton axis of 1984. You can see one of them - his *best* band - on this DVD's penultimate track. But are the Plugz (aka Cruzados) another? Answer that and you'll go a long way towards deciding whether [D017](#) is your cup of meat or not.

**THANKS** Gloucester Old Spot

**STARS** In this earthly domain full of chocolate and pain (Folk Process in action!) there are worse DVDs than this around - but better too. Three stars.



\* The interloper (pic) with **SOY BOMB** painted on his chest is 26 year old Michael Portnoy, a dancer deeply involved in "art of the moron" (his words). Each member of the audience behind Bob, including Portnoy, had passed an audition the day before the show and stood to earn \$200 apiece for "putting out good vibes". Portnoy lost his cheque in exchange for brief notoriety. Sadly, Radio City Music Hall did not press charges.

