

D021 SEVEN HARD RAINS and more

A song is like a dream, and you try to make it come true (BD, Chronicles)

If a close encounter with Bob's 1962 masterpiece A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall appeals to you, then D021 is a good place to start. However, if you want to do the job properly, I suggest that, before sitting down with it, you hunt up two other discs - *The Gaslight Tapes* audio and DVD [D236.su](#) - to give not seven Hard Rains, but nine:

(i) Highway Of Diamonds ~ *Gaslight* 1962 (6:39)

Lack of video should not be a problem. Close your eyes and imagine a bohemian coffee-house scene - it's easy. This very early recorded version is well worth a spin for several reasons. First, the song, still fresh-minted, is clearly dear to its tow-headed author, who delivers it with fearless, open-throated confidence to careful, controlled, insistent guitar - a performance from one so "unlearned" of stunning precocity and hypnotic power. Listen to the way that more voices join in at each refrain as song and singer win them. What we're privileged to eavesdrop on here is not the birth exactly but, rather, the eruption from its chrysalis of a phenomenon - the more astounding because so unexpected - self-named *Bob Dylan*. What a thrill to have been there this night.

Second, don't miss the line (a Woody reference?) subsequently cut from verse three and never heard again. And third, a note about dates. A prevailing myth surrounding the song is that D was moved to write it by the Cuban Missile Crisis of 14-28 October 1962, a two week period in which the threat of imminent nuclear war shrouded the Earth with fear. Interestingly, this myth seems to have been both started and perpetuated by D himself. Here's an excerpt from Nat Hentoff's *Freewheelin'* sleeve notes (their content clearly based on one or more interviews with Bob):

... in this song about the psychopathology of peace through balance of terror, Dylan's images are multiply (and sometimes horrifyingly) evocative ... (Dylan calls Hard Rain) "a desperate kind of song." It was written during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 when those who allowed themselves to think of the impossible results of the Kennedy / Khrushchev confrontation were chilled by the imminence of oblivion. "Every line in it," says Dylan, "is actually the start of a whole song. But when I wrote it, I thought I wouldn't have enough time alive to write all those songs so I put all I could into this one."

In April 1963 D told Studs Terkel:

Every line in (Hard Rain) really is another song ... I wrote that when I didn't know how many other songs I could write. That was during October of last year ... during that, uh, blockade, I guess is the word ... I was a little worried

and as late as May 1965 was still insisting to *Melody Maker's* Ray Coleman:

I wrote (Hard Rain) at the time of the Cuban crisis. I was in Bleecker Street in New York ... just (hanging) around ... wondering if it was the end ... Would ... the next day ever come? ... It was a song of desperation ... a song of terror. Line after line after line, trying to capture the feeling of nothingness.

Nice story, Bob - trouble is, a tape exists of him singing the song at a Carnegie Hall hootenanny on 22 September 1962 - i.e. three weeks before the missiles were first spotted and the "crisis" began. So the best that can be claimed on its behalf is that, like 1964's *It's Alright Ma* (which anticipated "naked"/shamed Presidents Nixon and Clinton), *Hard Rain*, too, proved uncannily prescient.



Gaslight



Quest

(1) Song Of A Poet ~ *Quest* 1964 (6:00)

D drafted the original lyric on Hugh Romney's battered Remington. Romney (aka Wavy Gravy) recalled:

That song kind of roared out of the typewriter. It roared through him the way paint roared through Van Gogh

and here's how Peter Blankfield (later Wolf), another Village folkie, remembers its *Gaslight* debut:

He put out these (pages) ripped out of a spiral notebook and ... (started to sing Hard Rain) ... He finished ... it and no one could say anything. The length of it, the episodic sense of it. Every line kept building and bursting.

As is well-known, the song's familiar parent/child, question/answer framing device derives from Lord Randal (Child Ballad #12). The first of Child's fifteen recorded variants begins

*O where ha you been, Lord Randal, my son?
And where ha you been, my handsome young man?*

After Lord Randal answers in two lines, nine further quatrains follow in the same QAAA format. (Lord Randal, we learn, has been poisoned by "eels fried in a pan" served up by his "true-love". His hawks and hounds, given the leavings, are already dead. "Sick at the heart", he bequeaths to his mother, sister and brother his wealth and estate and to his true-love "hell and fire".)

In contrast to the ballad's conventional structural symmetry, the five verses of Bob's apocalyptic reinvention run to nine, eleven, eleven, ten and sixteen lines, with the counterpoint between building tension (verse) and resolution (refrain) all the stronger for this irregularity; from this departure from classical narrative form. For our second take, and

D021's first, we're in early-sixties, monochrome, low-budget TV country. After the January 1964 release of his third album, *Times*, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation offered D a precious half-hour promo opportunity. First transmitted in January 1961, *Q for Quest* (later just *Quest*) was a "free-form anthology of drama, documentary and music" featuring a range of artistic genres. 1964 would prove to be its final year.

For Bob's appearance, the producers proposed no talking or interviews - his brief, rather, was to sing and play while ranging about a rooming-house / work-camp style set populated by a *tableau vivant* of actors quietly reading, writing, smoking, darning, playing cards, tending the stove as he performs. Though a refreshingly novel presentation of his art, his companions' lack of response as each tune folds - no applause, no word, no reaction of any kind - adds a surreal note (the idea, presumably, that singer and song are somehow "a dream"). D's barely suppressed smirks as he gives this Hard Rain might reflect this conceit. It colours his performance, too, for he sings the song well enough, but strangely blank-eyed, like a demo, as though well aware that this time it's not really *to* anyone. Perhaps, if only for that reason, the most overtly poetical rendering here (and for another, though delivered in different circumstances - see pic below - try the splendid [D480.su](#)).

Filmed in Toronto on 1 February and broadcast on 10 March, elements of the production now look hokey and dated - only natural, of course, and of little consequence, for *Quest* is an archival treasure we're very lucky to have.

(2) Where Souls Are Forgotten ~ Bangladesh 1971 (5:10)

The 1971 birth of The People's Republic of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) was traumatic indeed, with bitter civil war, famine, floods and disease combining to visit on its hapless population a humanitarian disaster of Biblical proportions. Bengali sitar guru Ravi Shankar expressed his concern to friend and pupil George Harrison, who set about organising two star-studded benefit concerts (afternoon and evening, on the same day) at New York's Madison Square Garden. The shows, with film and record releases to follow, made a heap of money (\$12 million by 1985, more since) and though Harrison's inspired and inspirational response might seem unremarkable now, it needs to be remembered that this event was the first of its kind, paving the way for Geldof's *Live Aid*, Nelson & Co's *Farm Aid* and more in years to come and for that alone he deserves great credit.

Trading on friendships, calling in favours and twisting arms, Harrison assembled as strong a line-up as he could muster. Though aware that his own cachet as an ex-Beatle counted for a great deal (his recent success around the world with My Sweet Lord didn't hurt any either), he knew too that Bob's participation was crucial to the fruition of his plans. But D hadn't played live in two years (in fact since the Isle of Wight - see [D673](#) - in August 1969) and had deep-seated reservations about a return to the concert arena. "Right up until the moment he stepped on stage," Harrison later confirmed, "it wasn't sure he was coming."

But come he did and, from George's fondly-remembered intro (apposite now as then) to Bob's relieved, hands-high farewell, his MSG turn is warm and winning. If he really was bedeviled by pre-performance nerves, he'd clearly turned their potentially destructive stimulus to his advantage. And, in form or not, Band-encumbered or solo, people were, very simply, glad to see him. Between the last (*Quest*) cut and this one he'd been into the Doom Machine and out the other side, different for sure (*Nashville Skyline*, *Self Portrait*), but - *There he is! Seeing's believing!* - alive and well. I remember reading somewhere that D rode from his MacDougal

Street home to the afternoon gig on his bike. No limo, no precious-me rock star shtick. And if this '71 Hard Rain's sprightly, uncomplicated, country-tinged good cheer flies in the face of the austere, darkly faceted imagery of most of its lines (remembering too the cause in which it was being sung), still it's great to see him back, up and at 'em, full of sass, with the future his again to win.



Bangladesh



Montreal

(3) Sound Of A Thunder ~ Montreal 1975 (4:40)

And whiteface, flowered hat, cooking band, glory be, by 1975 won it he had. Ginsberg called this incandescent D "an emperor of sound" and this swaggering, rollicking, irresistible Hard Rain *is* that mighty sound. When, about 40 minutes into *R&C*, preacher Willy White stands beside George Washington in front of New York's Federal Hall and proclaims:

Whatever you say to a man of God you say direct to God!

you know to sit back in your chair, hold tight and get ready to be blown away. In Scorsese's *No Direction Home, Highway 61 to New Morning* producer Bob (*Is it rolling, Bob?*) Johnston said of D:

I think God, instead of touching him on the shoulder ... kicked him in the ass ... He can't help what he's doing. I mean, he's got the Holy Spirit about him. You can look at him and tell that.

Just so, but which of the many Ds* do those words call most readily to mind? Thin Man '66? Born Again '79/80? Post-millennium D For Dignity? I don't know about you but, with me, it's RTR #1 every time.

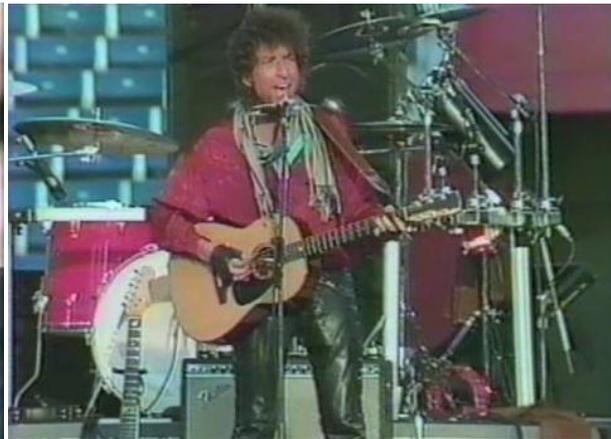
(4) So All Souls Can See It ~ Fort Collins 1976 (8:03)

In April 1976 Bob shot a TV special in Clearwater, Florida but, having seen the result, thought he could do better - and did. Opening cut of the resultant *Hard Rain* was the title song - an uncompromising, in-your-face exposition by a wraggle-taggle band that come on like RTR #1's wizards and sorcerers gone over to the dark side. That difference between the

'75 and '76 tours - the first a barnstorming, magical minstrel show and the second a challenge to accept on its own muscular merits a more edgy, less orthodox *other* way - is encapsulated in D021's equally effective but starkly contrasting back-to-back Rolling Thunder Hard Rains. Watch McGuinn, in a daze next to Baez, not singing even the *hard ... hard ...* refrains that *everyone* knows, or catch those two flamboyant but dubious characters up-stage and to the left of D, whose presence appears to suggest that a high old time (to quote a phrase) was being had by (almost?) all. Sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, maybe, but great theatre, great TV, and crucially, D still in the mood to *soar*.



Fort Collins



Buffalo

(5) Until I Start Sinking ~ Buffalo 1986 (5:50)

Ten years on and, least impressive by some distance of D021's seven Rains, this unfeeling one-note cold coyote call puts words to music while managing to make the result sound relevant as singing the grocery list. Here's how in *Chronicles* D describes himself at the time of his mid-eighties tours with Petty and the Heartbreakers:

Tom was at the top of his game and I was at the bottom of mine ... My own songs had become strangers to me ... I was what they called over the hill

and this Buffalo Hard Rain is as good a place as any (see also D007) to discover what he means. We find him stranded, leather-trousered, fingerless-gloved, in the balmy breeze of an 80,000 capacity NFL football stadium. He can't carry a tune, struggles through each verse then loses his way in each refrain. He bawls out the lyric with commendably few fluffed lines but no sense of inhabiting the vision he proffers to ten thousand witterin' and nobody listenin' (well, it *is* the US, and party-time to boot). Soulless and sad.

Note: D421.su's bonus material includes an NYC Hard Rain rendered just eight days after this Buffalo Fourth of July knock-off. Here's an excerpt from that DVD's review:

During the eighties, when singing Me Babe, for Bob to lean back and allow the crowd to sing the no-no-nos of the refrain was not uncommon. He'd do it sometimes once or twice and occasionally, as here, three for three - fun for all and, on a good night (check out Real Live) quite effective. But when it comes to Hard Rain, a more "serious" song - indeed, one of his "great" songs, I can't recall any other instance of the same thing happening - so, for me, at least, this fast-clip NYC '86 rendition came as both a first and a surprise. In the event,

the buy-in power of the proletariat proves shallow and weak and the idea doesn't really work. A shame for them, but, taking the long view, probably just as well.

Compare those earnest '62 *Gaslight* voices sharing the song's refrains with this '86 wheeze (involving, quite possibly, some of the very same voices). So what's the difference? It's the difference between *coffee-house* and *concert hall*, between *intimate* and *corporate*. Let's move on to something better.

(6) One Hundred Drummers ~ Nara 1994 (7:33)

And how! A unique performance and a momentous one - D in front and a full symphony orchestra (the Tokyo New Philharmonic) behind, Michael Kamen conducting. Exquisitely played, thrillingly sung, D launching his lines like Nimrods into the Nara night, from where they fly around the world to sow their seeds of wonder. (For more gig detail see [D906.i](#) review). Not to be missed.



Nara



D480.su: Philadelphia 16 Dec '95

(7) Ten Thousand Miles ~ Bologna 1997 (8:13)

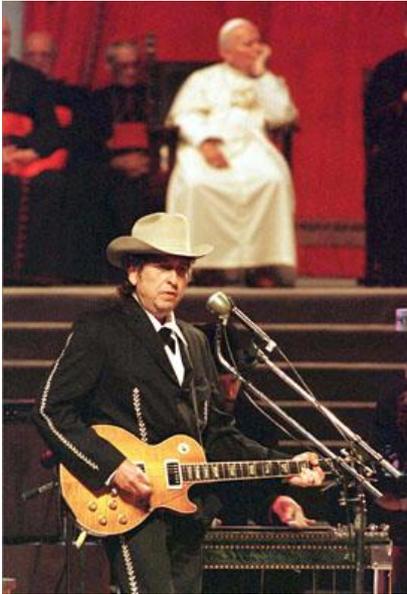
Where D, just over his heart-scare, meets a Pope with health concerns of his own. Though September 1997 puts us in the assured hands of the Larry / Bucky / Kemper Band (rare sight here of DK without a hat), still this reading fails to rise above the workmanlike, the song's intrinsic implacable force never quite harnessed into telling power. D labours through his lines while the pontiff looks miserably on. Passable, yes, and leagues better than Duffalo '86, but, set beside finer fare (see previous / next), turgid and tame.

(ii) I'll Know My Song Well ~ Portsmouth 2000 (9:30)

Source disc [D236.su](#). Not pro-shot like the rest, but good as - an intermittently superb stolen peek at D penetrating deep into the cavernous crypts of one of his most enduring works (*the first three-dimension song I wrote* - BD, 1965). From amid the crumbling skeletons, faded pictographs, whispering echoes and flickering shadows of St. Matthew and Revelation, Alexander and Hannibal, Confucius and Tao, Joan of Arc and Marco Polo, Bruegel and Bosch, Dante and Milton, Childe Roland and Barbara Allen, Poe and Rimbaud, Versailles and Yalta, Steinbeck and Hemingway, Stalin and Hitler, Alamogordo and Hiroshima, Hearst and McCarthy, Montgomery and Selma, Ginsberg and Guthrie, Bob Dillon* and probably not

even he knows what else, he delivers a memorable, hauntingly *felt* interpretation, more authentic, more *true* (see quote at top of page one) than any other here. An apotheosis and fitting way to end. (Except just think what we'd have missed had the video and audio tapers not been there to do their invaluable stuff - which begs the question how many similar such moments *are* missed, freely given then lost forever. Ah, Bob ...)

* See Robert Shelton's *No Direction Home* (NEL, 1986) pp 49-50



Bologna



D236.su: Portsmouth 25 Sept '00

DISC BONUS ~ R&C CLIPS COLLECTION (63:10)

Comprising Masterpiece* / Isis* / Hard Rain* (again) / I Want You / People Get Ready / What Will You Do When Jesus Comes? / Little Moses / It Ain't Me Babe* / Heaven's Door #1* / She Belongs To Me/Kaddish / Train To Cry* / Durango* / If You See Her / One Too Many Mornings / Rising Sun / Cup Of Coffee* / Sara* / Never Let Me Go* / Sad-Eyed Lady / Tangled* / Just Like A Woman* / Heaven's Door #2* in 22 marked and numbered chapters. Probably the first R&C montage to circulate and a bit kitchen sink (i.e. *let's chuck everything in*). Later [D361](#) and [D630](#) both present the same material more cohesively, though, if you've a yen to revisit it, why not just slot in [D003](#) and have done?

(* = concert footage)



THANKS Big T, SD, those Pompey tapers

STARS Nothing new and not for all tastes, but different. Three and a half.



... Reflect from the mountain

* **BOB by ER poster sunset**

(provoked by Joni Mitchell's comment, reported in the *LA Times* of 22 April 2010, that Bob is *not authentic ... he's a plagiarist and his name and voice are fake*; inspired by John Lennon's God; used by permission)

Bob is a concept
We discuss on
Expecting Rain
I'll say it again
Bob is a concept
We discuss on
Expecting Rain
I don't believe in hobo Bob
I don't believe in protest Bob
I don't believe in thin wild mercury Bob
I don't believe in motorcycle Bob
I don't believe in country Bob
I don't believe in stadium Bob
I don't believe in thunder Bob
I don't believe in Vegas Bob
I don't believe in Jesus Bob
I don't believe in earring Bob
I don't believe in Deadhead Bob
I don't believe in Wilbury Bob
I don't believe in Chabad Bob

I don't believe in Never Ending Bob
I don't believe in author Bob
I don't believe in painter Bob
I don't believe in Theme Time Bob
I don't believe in Xmas Bob
I just believe in songs
A danceman and me
And that's reality
The dream ain't over
What more can I say?
The dream ain't over
He's still here today
Bob is my dreammaker
Even if he's fake
Bob gives me more
Than I can take
Why discuss what's in vain?
Why say it on Expecting Rain?
The dream ain't over

And finally, find more notable Hard Rains here:



[D079.su](#) (1995)



[D167.su](#) (1989)



[D218.su2](#) (1998)



[D395.su](#) (1991)