

D036 FARM AID: REHEARSALS AND RAW FOOTAGE

On 13 July 1985, at the end of a ropery Wood / Richards-backed acoustic Hollis Brown (see [D013](#), fifth chapter) performed at the climax of a unique global event staged to highlight the desperate plight of Ethiopian famine victims and before a worldwide audience of countless millions, Bob Dylan spoke the following controversial and now notorious words:

I hope that some of the money that's raised for the people in Africa ... maybe they could just take a little bit of it ... maybe one or two million, maybe ... and use it, say, to pay the, ah ... the mortgages on some of the farms and, ehm ... that the farmers here owe to the banks.

Many heard them with disquiet and others (Geldof for one) outright disgust. But some, too, took note such that, a little over two months later, on 22 September in Champaign, Illinois, the first Farm Aid benefit was staged. Organised by prime mover Willie Nelson, with Neil Young and John Mellencamp pitching in, its stated aims were to raise two things: awareness of hard times in the country (to quote a phrase) and funds to help keep farming families on their land. (Soon after, by sponsoring farmers prepared to testify before Congress, Nelson and Mellencamp helped in a different and more specifically targeted way - an initiative that resulted ultimately in the 1987 Agricultural Credit Act aimed at reducing the rate of land and property foreclosures.)



Still supported by all three founder-member musos (plus Dave Matthews who came on board in 2001) Farm Aid remains an active care organisation to this day, having in the 22 years of its existence raised more than \$30 million (far beyond Bob's fanciful "little bit ... one or two million") to promote its core cause. Since 1985, at least one benefit concert has been staged almost every year (1987 and 1991 the only exceptions) with Young's speech on environmental issues said to be an annual highlight. After appearing at the inaugural Champaign event inspired by his Live Aid comments (with Roy soon-to-be-Lefty Orbison another on the bill), Bob contributed three songs via satellite-feed (see [D007](#)) the year after, but has not been personally involved since.

With Live Aid's acoustic anguish* still fresh in his mind, D decided to play the September date - just his third public performance of the year, and his last - in front of a full band (all personnel this time from Planet Earth) thus Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, who'd done well at Philadelphia, were duly invited to step up. (Thank the Lord he didn't just draft in the rest of the Stones!) On [D036](#) we see the combo rehearse for their first gig together - 39 rough

footage minutes including complete or near-complete versions of three of the six songs they would eventually play - then a ragbag of stage-shot snippets (thirteen minutes in all - toggle blue link below DVDylan set-list for more detail) from the performance itself. Sandwiched between those two slices of pie come six minutes of bits and pieces filmed back-stage before D's slot, in which we see him sitting chatting with Lou Reed (about *EB* producer Arthur Baker), autographing the hood of a Chevy truck (I wonder who has *that* now?) then making his way with the Queens from trailer to stage. And is all this worth the trouble of acquiring? In a word, no. [D036](#) offers some nice pro-shot rehearsal room pics (two above, one below) but the performances (from the same day as his Bob Brown interview - see [D468](#)) are mostly less than fully realised (though I'll Remember You is almost there, Then He Kissed Me is fun anyway and closer Lucky Old Sun - most pleasing thing here - is *good*). The concert footage (second pic below) is likewise disappointing - choppy, video incomplete and with just average and not always synced sound. For a much more satisfying look back, try [D013](#) (last chapter) which, if you're interested in this gig, is really where you need to be.

THANKS Black Cat

STARS One and a half



* After the shambles that was Live Aid, Farm Aid was an important event for Bob and he came to it fully focused, well prepared, 100% on his game - determined, it seems, to do his level best to make things right again with his public - not an attitude he espouses very often, perhaps, but a tacit acknowledgement that, just that one time, he mis-stepped very badly. In view of such determination, it would have been very easy for him to play it safe with a conservative set-list of back-catalogue standards - Blowin' / H61 / T Man / LARS / Times / Maggie's or something similar. All the more credit to him, then, for kicking off with five songs on the spin, including two covers, *never previously performed in concert*. Is there any precedent for such boldness on his part? Yes, the first Fox Warfield show of November '79 and the *Saturday Night Live* TV spot just before it (see [D012](#) etc) both boasted set-lists ripe with the new. What's more, his instinct was to try something similar with *MTV Unplugged* in late '93, but sadly on that occasion he let the suits talk him out of it - thus, instead of Weeping Willow, Jim Jones and Jack-A-Roe, *another* tired Rolling Stone, *another* dreary Watchtower, *another* creaky Heaven's Door. Sound decision making? If you want somebody you can trust, Bob ...