

**D039.su BEACON THEATER, NYC, 17 OCTOBER 1990**

In mid-October 1990, Bob played a five night residency at New York's Beacon Theatre. This run of shows would be GE's last with the band - after more than two years on the road, playing 241 gigs in seventeen countries, he decided that, though a dollar may be a dollar, enough is also enough, and all would soon be missing him perhaps more than anyone thought. D marked the occasion of his final show by giving him H61's Mack The Finger verse to sing all by himself - not so much, you might think, but a rare band-member privilege just the same. In his *World Gone Wrong* notes, D also paid his ex-guitarist this left-handed tribute:

*the NET ended in '91 with the departure of ... GE Smith.*

Doh! Wrong year, Bob - and we're not buying it anyway.

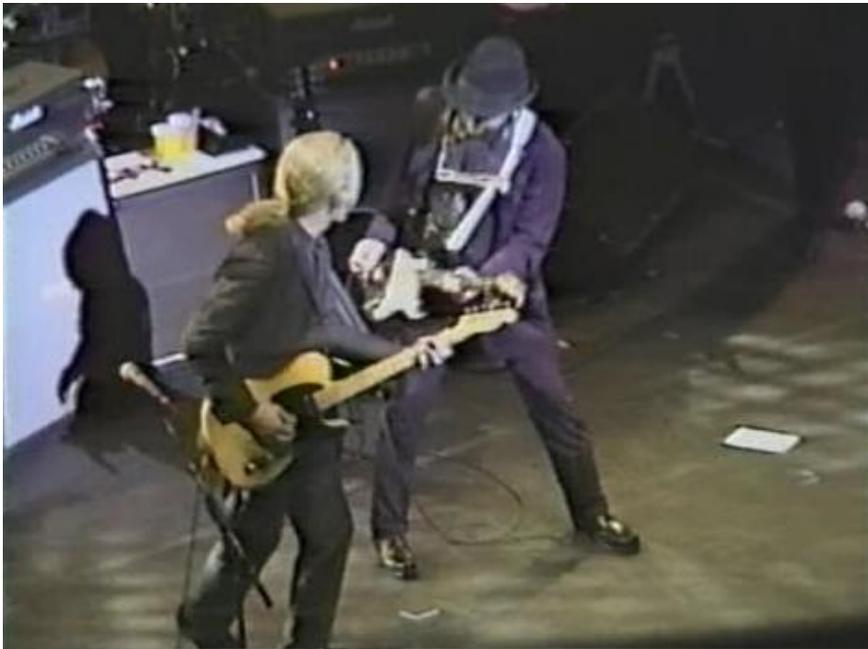
That's one reason why these Beacon shows were a little special. Another more straightforward one is that NYC is D's spiritual home - indeed is where Bob Dylan (as opposed to Bob Zimmerman) was born and partly raised. New York seems to bring out the best in him and from Gaslight days on has seen many memorable D performances - Town Hall, Carnegie Hall, All Hallows Eve, Guthrie Tribute, Bangladesh, Carter Benefit, Beacon '89s, Bobfest, Supper Clubs, MSG '02s, Hammerstein '03s. So was this gig, Beacon 17.10.90, another to add to the list?



Yes and no - but let me say this: as I come increasingly to appreciate just how much time, effort and dedication goes into making and circulating these DVDs, and finally how lucky we are to have them, I find myself ever more reluctant to pick them to bits. So, positives first - this DVD gives a consistently clean and mostly steady video image, unobstructed and well-filmed, but with one proviso: since it's shot from a high balcony, we have to peer down onto D's mostly-hatted head, making it hard (see screenshots) to get a good look at his face. Audio is also much improved from the previous soundtrack (a little of which remains at the very start of the disc). All that hamstrings D039.su's potential to please is the patchy form of the artist. Though nowhere near as snakebelly low as in the wretched D623.su (Stuttgart '91), it's possible to sense here one foot already on the slippery slope that leads there. The band, though tight, play (drummer especially) without finesse, which mars songs such as Simple Twist and Joey, both better for a touch of melancholic restraint, a bit of feeling. D's vocals, likewise, lack expressive range. At the time of this show, *Under The Red Sky* had been out just five weeks and from it D elects to play two cuts - Wiggle Wiggle and TV Talkin' Song.

Both are sung exceedingly badly, with lyrics - sound upgrade or not - impenetrably dense. Few if any audience members can have concluded: "Okay, better rush out and buy *that!*"

After struggling unsuccessfully to nail the tune of Sorrow, the first song of the night to rise above the mundane is Baby Blue, with D and GE riffing face to face to fine effect. Better yet, this song is especially well-filmed. (Sadly, the poorest - plenty of views of the ceiling - is the set's other cover, Willing. Still, though receiving here its sixth and last tour and career outing, it remains unconvincing, so no matter.) Hattie Carroll begins with a horribly discordant first line but rapidly improves. One of the nice things about this song is that, for obvious reasons, it's never abridged. Seldom, too, is it sung other than with particular care and attention, and so too tonight. Incidentally, Baby Blue is introduced this way: *Anybody here wake up drunk today? Anybody know the feeling? This one's specially for you!* Stranger yet, before What Good, and just after assuring the audience that Joey Gallo was one of his childhood heroes, he turns for no obvious reason to Cesar Diaz and snaps: *Is that guitar too heavy? How much that guitar weigh?* Couldn't hear the answer. Probably just as well.



In Tangled, just as he starts to sing, his G string breaks. He finishes the verse on five then swaps acoustic for Strat while GE covers with an instrumental verse and, from this point on, and whether co-incidentally or not, the tenor of both song and gig change for the better. After Joey and What Good, both played better than sung, comes Train To Cry, a gorgeous deep blue belter, which draws best crowd response of the night, as well it might. A fetching Garden segues straight into LARS, very fast and very fine, then GE sees everyone home happy with some searing H61 slide work so good that a suddenly playful D removes his hat to pantomime-fan his sideman's sizzling axe.

Though [D039.su](http://D039.su) isn't A1 vintage Bob, if you're looking to collect something from each tour or year, you could do worse *iro* Fall 1990 than hunt this one down. Show runs 90 minutes; DVD has a nice audio menu surprise.

**THANKS DRF**

**STARS** A solid four