

D086.su ... BUT WHO HAS NOT?



Where is Aosta? Though Italians will answer easily, I doubt that too many others could find it quickly on a map. But Bob knows, because the singular 22 year odyssey we call the NET (though he doesn't - he claims the NET ended when GE Smith left the band) dropped in there in 1992 during a short summer tour that ran from Luleå, Sweden (another head-scratcher) to Juan-Les-Pins on the Côte d'Azur (see [D591](#) / [D084](#) respectively). I live in a part of northern England that's hardly cosmopolitan - all the same, the NET has pitched up within twenty miles of my doorstep on five occasions and counting. If you wait long enough, it seems, then like Christmas (in my case) or Halley's Comet (Luleåns, Aostans), the NET will eventually come by. But was Aostan patience finally rewarded in 1992 with a show worth their collective while? Let's spin [D086.su](#), trip lightly back eighteen years and find out.



A remarkable ten of this tour's eleven dates are preserved in the DVDylan catalogue (the only absentee Leysin 10 July, a show most notable for the debut performance of Chuck Berry cover Around and Around, a song Bob would revisit just once, in August

2003 at Joliet, Illinois while sitting in on piano with the Dead). As for mid '92 D, the first thing to say is that - erratic, unpredictable - he's well shy of great, as other DVDs ([D416](#), [D084](#)) clearly prove. Yet he's also *on his way*. Olof Björner considers some of the late 1992 shows the NET's "best ever" - high praise indeed - so he must be doing something right. And here in Aosta, that's him: troubled, drawn, oppressed, often one-note and dour, but hinting now and then, too, that, buried within, a vibrant artist lives still, just waiting his moment, eagle from egg, to emerge.

Almost all the night's action is assiduously filmed by a determined left of centre stage-front trouper who blags much up-close D (see above) interspersed with occasional glimpses of others (below) in rocky, sometimes head-blighted but never less than watchable pics that [D086.su](#) reproduces in (considering the vintage) pleasingly wholesome shape. The upgrade audio track - a clean, ambient audience recording (goes light in one channel a couple of times but no harm done) - ticks all the important boxes too. [D086.su](#), then, sympathetically authored, looks and sounds like it should.



[JJ \(front\) plus Ian Wallace](#)



[Bucky in his first year with the band](#)

And D sets his stall out early with a song (2 x 2) rooted in nursery rhyme followed by a second (Pretty Peggy O) descended and adapted (after transatlantic passage) from the old Scots ballad *Bonnie Lass o' Fyvie* - from the off, in other words, he declares his Steeped In Folklore credentials. This poor 2 x 2 (here incomplete) is the third of just four live outings, with one other (its Correggio debut, on various DVDs) in the database. Peggy O, impressively shot, both intrigues, because he sings it well enough, but foreshadows, too, courtesy of his busked, brittle, constrained, slightly hesitant performance, what lies in store once he tackles material (yes, though his own) less dear to his heart. The first verse of Silvio, for instance, he sings with no trace of conviction; Broken is abject; Long Black Coat he seems not to connect with and no empathy, no complicity results in a rendition that struggles to transcend empty posturing. Even Love Minus Zero, shorn of any suggestion of wonder or reverence, becomes mere knockabout concert fare. Even Hattie Carroll lacks the sobriety needed for singer or song to be taken seriously. It also is one of several numbers (Times another) to suffer a tortured extended ending. Salt in wound.

Earlier this same year D told Robert Hilburn:

It was important to me to come to the bottom of this legend thing, which has no reality at all. What's important isn't the legend, but the

art. The work. A person has to do whatever they're called on to do. If you try to act a legend, it's nothing but hype

- on the evidence of Aosta, a work then still very much in progress. But there's better news too, for the band - augmented now by Bucky and a second drummer - punch their collective weight and, given the chance, as in Mobile, H61 and Watchtower, make their presence felt to persuasive effect (Baxter's added dimension particularly notable). D too steps up to deliver Me Babe, his e'er unheeded song of disavowal, just so, right down to its tender harp sign-off. After the carefree Carroll mentioned above, I feared for the Des Row to follow, but it too - a spirited, six verse, eleven minute romp, stands up well, with good work again from Bucky. Bob also commits himself gamely to Shelter. Indeed, though from way back when as may be, you can't help but feel as you hear the lines

*I was burned out from exhaustion, I was buried in the hail
Poisoned in the bushes and blown out on the trail
Hunted like a crocodile, ravaged in the corn
"Come in," she said ...*

that they fit this singer, eighteen years after he wrote them, like a skin.



Tony G



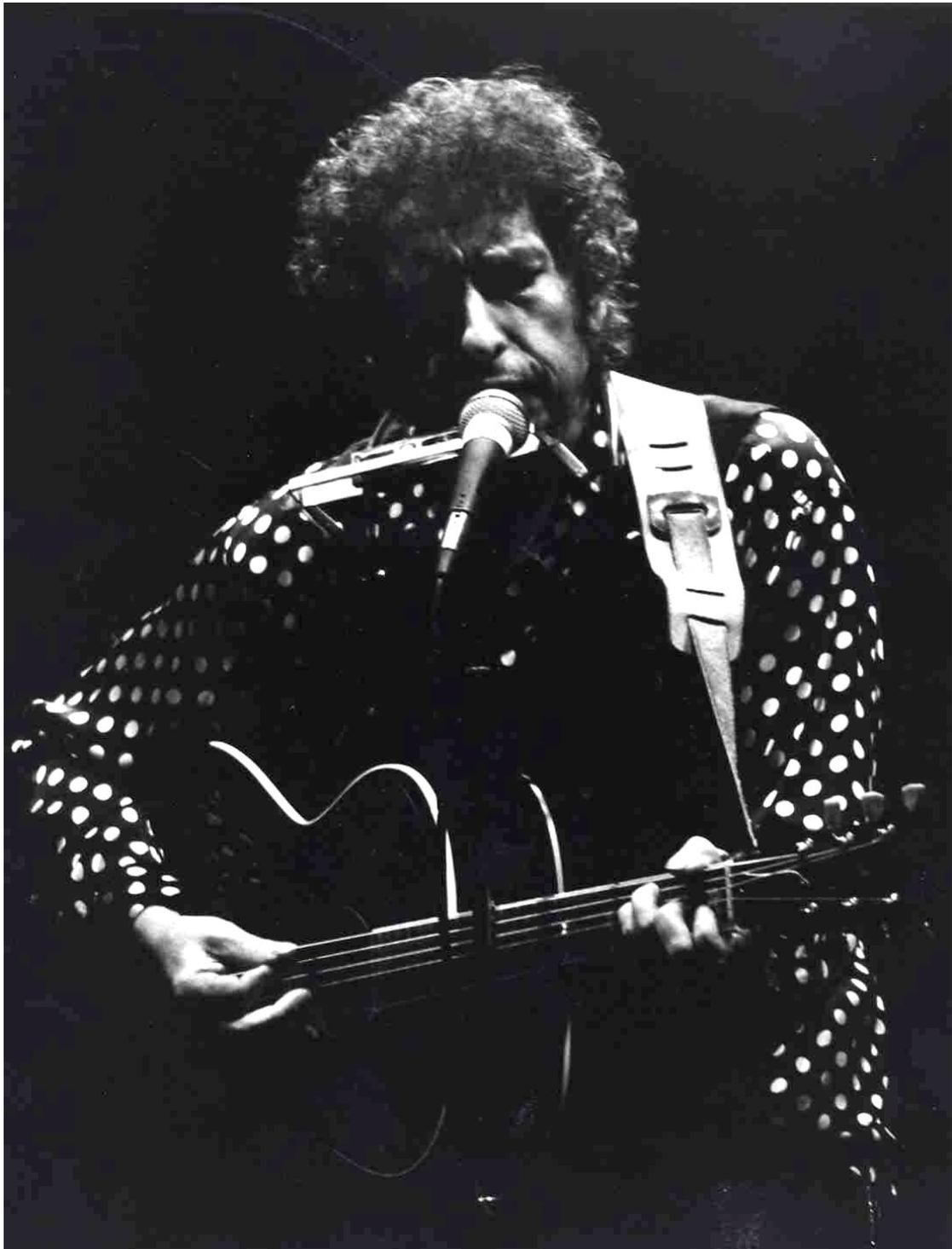
Drummer #2 Charlie Quintana

In marked contrast to nearly all that has gone before, the easy, wholly convincing Wind he closes with - seeing the real D at last - suggests powerfully that in these days he didn't like performing one bit and had to force himself to do it at all, never mind very well. (The same glad-it's-done transfiguration is apparent elsewhere - notably Bobfest (D487) - see also D734.su review. *I'm mortified to be on the stage, but then again it's the only place ... I'm happy* - BD to John Pareles, Sept 1997.) All the more reason, then, to give him the benefit of every doubt, enjoy what we can of these precious memories - not to mention reacquaintance with his Seville Guitar Legends (D499) shirt - and pass over the rest in favour of something (and there's so *much*, isn't there?) more inspired.

RUNNING TIME Disc One: 61:20, Disc Two: 50:47. The start (probably between one and two minutes) of 2 x 2 is missing, the last few seconds of Shelter and the first two lines of Times are cut and the first few words of Wind are also gone. All else complete.

GRAZIE Gatto Nero, HW

STARS If you want a show from this tour, your best bet is probably Merano ([D394.su](#)). Having said that, [D086.su](#) has its moments too, so you decide. Four stars.



[Aosta 1992 \(photographer unknown\)](#)

(Oh, and Aosta is in northern (Alpine) Italy, close to the southern entrance of the Mont Blanc Tunnel.)