

D112.su OWINGS MILLS, MD, 22 FEB 1991

AUDIO Clean audience tape in which voice and drums are more prominent than guitars - thus the playing of JJ and Diaz sounds rather more anaemic than it probably did on the night. Acoustic interludes better. Considering the vintage, good.

VIDEO Good again - a solid, very steady, mostly head-free taping job from the left-centre raised seats. Pictures (see below) are just slightly age-jaded but consistently watchable. Active lens brings us all the band, individually and collectively. Minimal author patching required.



Left-centre raised camera view, with ... and without zoom

RUNNING TIME Disc One: 44:22, Disc Two: 40:16, complete.

COMMENT 17th show of the year and second in the US (not counting the Grammy cameo - see [D017](#) etc - of two nights before) and already conflicting expectations. At both Glasgow shows Bob was allegedly drunk on stage, Andrew Muir described the ten-day, eight-gig Hammersmith Odeon residency ([D227-D232](#)) as *bad ... by any measure* while the band, with new guitarist and drummer aboard, are reportedly not so much under-rehearsed as *strangers to each other and Dylan's music specifically ... hapless ... terrible ... (like) a death squad in some banana republic*. The Grammys found D in bad shape, walking the thorny wilderness*, due in part to the cold still dogging him here this night, but also, plainly, to something more fundamental, more *spiritual* besides. Yet check out [D235.su](#) from Brussels 30 Jan to find a show that, while well short of perfect, mostly hits the spot still. So, which D at Owings Mills? Bobby Dazzler or Bobby Davro? Golden eagle or Eddie the Eagle? Alkie or alchemist? Let's see.

When [D112.su](#)'s author announced the availability of his work for download, he described its content as "an incredible performance!" (Though that, of course, could mean *incredibly good, incredibly bad, incredibly erratic* or most anything else, the excited exclamation mark surely infers the positive.) But does he overstate his case? The Brussels gig referred to above was fun of a kind, but that, unfortunately, a one-note, derivative, very *basic* kind - the kind you might experience at any half-decent gig in any town on any night, and we all know that, at his best, D can eclipse such modest expectations without breaking sweat. So there's good news here and bad. Yes, [D112.su](#) has its moments (though all too few), but no, none of it is great, or incredible, or, seen

once, even worth a second look, while the worst of it - Watchtower, Wiggle Wiggle, North Country Girl - is a salutary reminder that this D, for all his vim, remains an artist groping sadly in vain for the handle of the door that will lead him finally back to a longed-for reunion with his muse.

We start, like infamous Stuttgart ([D623.su](#)), with another keyboard calamity, this time a *sotto voce* foreign language You Go Your Way that unerringly signals (so soon!) where the evening is headed: Lay Lady Lay, though at least in English, failing to persuade; Watchtower, for all the rock star posturing, an empty vessel. After a laboured plod through The Man In Me comes Stuck Inside Of Owings Mills With The Extentionalist Blues Again before Wiggle Wiggle's slapstick schlock brings to a close an opening electric set in which D - even this D - has sold himself seriously short.



(1) New boy JJ



(2) Guitar tech and sometime band member Cesar Diaz

With an acoustic BD's Dream due, memories of other dreadful '91 takes ([D623.su](#), [D494.su](#)) crowd in such that hope flickers dim. What a pleasant surprise, then, to be served a quasi-competent stab, abridged as usual but 90% lucid and alive. Indeed, it seems to surprise even the singer, who, briefly inspired, blows it home with spirited harp, a fleeting glimpse of the kind of musicianship - the kind of musician - otherwise so resolutely absent this night. Even Ace acknowledges the glimmering soulful spark, sampling the song's coda for his Disc One menu page. And, yes, this is indeed as close as [D112.su](#) ever comes (i.e. not very) to "incredible".

It was just a month after this show that D told interviewer Elliot Mintz:

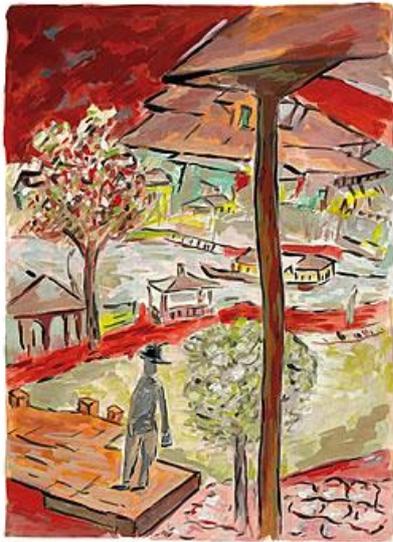
None of my songs are that good. It's the way they're performed, that's what it is. Hoagie Carmichael songs are much better than mine, so are George Gershwin's and Irving Berlin too ... Hank Williams' songs are all better than mine

and with the durable threesome of Love Minus Zero, Mr Tambourine Man and North Country Girl, he proceeds to prove his point - *it's the way they're performed*. LMZ is bright-shining gem enough that even this wayward D would need to go some to dull its fulgent radiance, yet, knocking out a ragged, dog-eared paean that silently screams for mercy, he surely does his level best. Next up T Man has the stale sniff of a tired, tossed-off demo while North Country Girl ... Bad first verse, no tune, no feeling, no engagement, no point.

Disc Two, thankfully, is an improvement, if only because on its own enfeebled terms it succeeds, which is to say, while unremittingly average and mostly ditchwater dull, it's at least *staple*. It's *quota*. Responding to Joe Queenan's March '91 observation that he plays "an oldies show" D said:

You know, at a certain point, it doesn't really matter anymore

and once again tonight's performance validates this view: Broken is formulaic, generic blah, Black Coat, Real You and Shooting Star are sterile, emotionless constructs, mere exercises in noise. In The Garden is okay, as (after almost a minute's worth of opening riff to stoke up the crowd) is LARS, except that D skates over the surface of its lyric without ever once jumping in and *committing*. Times is Bob in self-parody mode and fun, though only for that reason. And rote renditions of God Knows and H61, because suited to this man in this mood, both come off comparatively well.



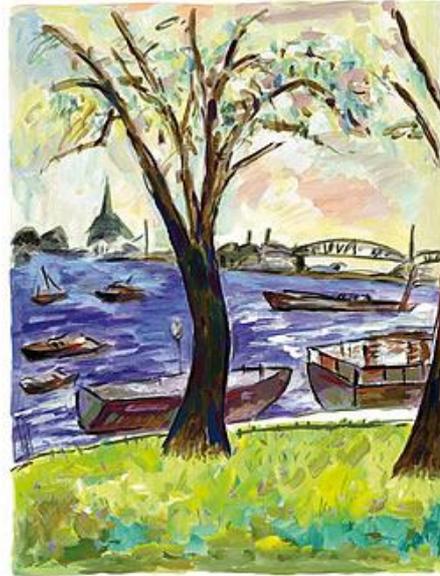
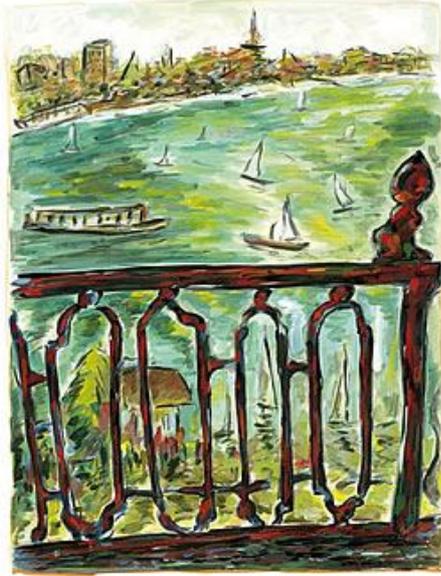
COMMENT #2 We're told that D made the original Drawn Blank sketches while on tour in the period 1989-1992 i.e. in and around the time we see him here on D112.su (and, of course, several other DVDs too). Maybe it's just my imagination (and I'm talking here as one who knows nothing about either music or art) but don't you sense a connection between the performer from those years we all watch so compulsively and the turbulent spirit crying for expression in these drawings? Are not both art-forms the writhings of a troubled soul, a bitter dance of loneliness incarnate?

My work fulfils me, but that's all it has to do, you know? That's not saying a lot ... Who says it's art, though? Who calls it art? Not me. (D to Elliot Mintz, March 1991)

*There is no concealing the essential melancholy that is written into almost every composition. (Andrew Graham-Dixon, Introduction, *Drawn Blank Series*)*

We've seen in years and tours since that, as a concert performer, he's changed - renewed himself - constantly and even the drawings have become paintings (*grounded*

... *uncompromised by sentimentality or ambition*) widely lauded. But just as I'd take D '95 or '99 or 2001 over D '91, knowing the latter to be but a work in progress, so too the drawings, coloured in or not, are, though of interest (because of who made them) finally just a side-show (though, given the prices asked and paid, a particularly *venal* one), another step along the way, another rung on that elusive ladder to the stars he managed, against all odds, to climb anew.



In 1965 D told interviewers Nora Ephron and Susan Edmiston:

Paintings should be on the walls of restaurants, in dime stores, in gas stations, in men's rooms ... You pay half a million and hang one in your house and one guest sees it. That's not art. That's a shame, a crime ... Just think how many people would really feel great if they could see a Picasso in their daily diner.

Or a Dylan, maybe? Though don't look for one anytime soon, for, like the man said, Things Have Changed.

TUSEN TAKK Kjell

STARS Regrettably, neither incredible nor great - *poor* probably comes closest. The truth is, if D had been replaced this night by Tom Petty, Billy Joel or George Thorogood the crowd would probably have had just as good a time as they managed in his company, which is no slight upon those others but bad cess to him. Seek if you want - just don't expect much in the way of aesthetic reward. Two stars.

** There is no short-cut ... to wisdom: after all the centuries of invention, the soul's path lies through the thorny wilderness which must be still trodden in solitude, with bleeding feet, with sobs for help, as it was trodden by them of old time. (George Eliot, The Lifted Veil, 1859)*

I been walkin' that lonesome valley ... (BD, Tryin' To Get To Heaven, 1997)