

Unless they are to be very short, it's inevitable that these reviews have objective and subjective elements. The former should be factual and reliable - thus I can confirm to you what others have already said: that this film looks and sounds just fine, with clean well-shot video footage over a first-rate soundboard recording. (Only camera nit-pick is that it stays too much on D - for example, though all through Ramona then Tangled we can hear a busy mandolin, we never once get to see Bucky, its player.) Now for the subjective bit which, because personal preferences come into play, should necessarily be treated as possibly less reliable - for, of the many faces of Bobs young and old, you may like the same ones I do, or, of course, not. You may like them all. I don't. And, worse luck for me, the Bob who knocks out the first six hackneyed songs of this show, though watchable enough, it offends my ears to have to listen to. It's not so much Bob I'm talking about here as his songs: Maggie's Farm: dire. Tonight: so-so pub-band standard. CIB: dire. Big Girl: better but dragged down by D's less-than-blazing (indeed, less than smouldering) guitar work. Can't Wait: dire. Silvio: *puhLEASE!!* I assume that most of us have to sit through bits of concerts we're not keen on, but an opening salvo like this is enough to have you scrabbling round for a tourniquet and box of Gillettes.



The saving grace of such wastelands of song is that things can only get better, which, when he finally straps on his acoustic, they do. After what's gone before, just about anything is going to sound good, and Cocaine does. Ramona is pretty (pretty what?), Tangled over-played and unpersuasive. When D mumbles or mangles the lyrics of his own songs, you fill in the gaps so it hardly matters - but when he does it on unfamiliar ones such as White Dove, half the point of the song is lost in the wires, so that's another downer. Things ain't a-goin' too well. I And I, eleventh song in, is the first truly arresting turn of the night, but quickly followed by a third turgid filler (Till I Fell In Love ...) from his then-new album. After an enjoyable, driving H61, the band take

Don't Think Twice at a similar romping lick, but, though "fun" it may be, it's utterly divorced from the wistful / valedictory spirit of a song that deserves so much better. Would Bob sing Tears Of Rage this way? Tonight he probably would. Love Sick and RDW close proceedings, thank goodness, on a rising curve.

Bob has played some wonderful concerts in NYC, but this sure isn't one of them. No, I'm thinking back 34 years to his 1963 appearances at Town and Carnegie Halls. What if by some magic Bob and his '97 band could step back through a wrinkle in time to open for Dylan '63? I'll tell you what - presenting this set, they'd be booed off stage as the second-rate gang of chancers\* they are. They wouldn't make it through the first "song". Of course, D '63 needed to relate to and satisfy his audience (and did both with consummate ease) whereas by '97 such things, sadly, have long since become matters of indifference to him. Yes, he was ever perverse - but an entertainer who doesn't entertain: how perverse is that? It's all too easy to gloss over sorry debacles such as this Irving Plaza show (don't like '97? How about some '95, '84, '01? etc), but just consciously recall how great he's been - and not once but so often - in his illustrious past and the extent of his latter-day decline, as evidenced here, hits you like a freight. (Great Bob? Yes, try *BOTT*.)



**THANKS** Jam Tart

**STARS** Pretty pictures and clean sound by themselves don't cut it. With performance standard taken into account, this show scrapes three.

\* On Sunday 7 December 1997, i.e. the night before this Irving Plaza show, Bob had another engagement, also on DVD (see [D757](#)) - acceptance of a Performance Art Award bestowed by The Kennedy Center For The Performing Arts - so he must be doing *something* right ...