

## [D521.su2](#) PHILADELPHIA, 17 NOVEMBER 2001



In a compelling series of posts headed *You Gotta Hear This Show!*, ER's John B. Stetson recently identified twenty recommended NET concerts, as follows:

- (01) Berkeley, CA, 26 May 1995 ([D418.su](#))
- (02) Ithaca, NY, 15 November 1999 ([D834](#), [D834.2](#))
- (03) San José, CA, 9 May 1992
- (04) Dublin, 27 November 2005
- (05) Dortmund, 15 September 1987 ([D423.su](#))
- (06) George, WA, 18 June 2000
- (07) Brussels, 17 June 1998 ([D364.su](#))
- (08) Warsaw, 19 July 1994
- (09) London, 24 November 2003 ([D280.sse](#), [D318.su](#), [D325](#))
- (10) Fairfax, VA, 22 November 2002
- (11) Philadelphia, 17 November 2001** ([D188.su](#) / [su2](#) / [su3](#))
- (12) Berkeley, CA, 10 June 1988 ([D065.su](#) / [suu](#) / [su3](#))
- (13) NYC Supper Club, 17 November 1993, second show
- (14) Springfield, MA, 28 October 1992
- (15) Poughkeepsie, NY, 4 August 2004
- (16) Berlin, 17 June 1996 ([D776.su](#))
- (17) Madison, WI, 5 November 1991
- (18) Philadelphia, 20 August 1997 ([D521.su](#) / [su2](#))
- (19) West Point, NY, 13 October 1990 ([D543.psu](#))
- (20) Toronto, 20 March 2004

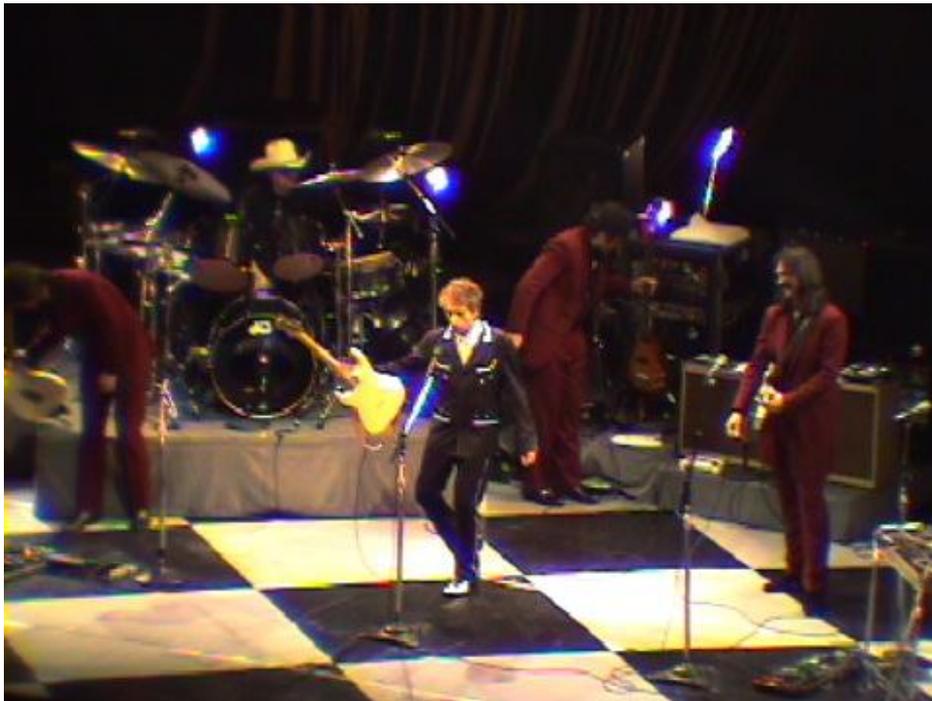
Half, as noted, currently circulate on DVD. Here (used with permission) is what he has to say about Philadelphia, 17 November 2001:

*I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely, to steer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practice in all things a certain sprezzatura, which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless. I am sure that grace springs especially from this, since everyone knows how difficult it is to accomplish some unusual feat perfectly.*

Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, 1528

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Once a year there's an ER "When was Bob coolest?" poll. 1965-6 usually takes it, of course. 1975-6 is deservedly right there with it. But the fall of 2001 is actually what occurs to me first. In my World Literature course in college, when we read *The Book of the Courtier*, a sort of manual for gentlemanly, courtly, Renaissance behavior, and I stumbled upon this idea of *sprezzatura*, I immediately thought of Bob Dylan. *Sprezzatura* is a contradictory concept, as the ability to show that one is not showing effort takes, of course, a certain kind of skill and effort. The nature of *sprezzatura* is one of deception. It's artful dishevelment.



When people talk about Dylan's skill with phrasing, this is the show I think of. On perhaps a *Love & Theft* high, this little tour reflects back the zeitgeist of the times with skill and technique hidden behind what Castiglione called a *mask of apparent reticence*. A few highlights:

Wait For The Light To Shine: opened most of the fall 2001 shows and here it's powerful and moving, even outside the context of the times, and right from the start I am right there with it.

It Aint Me Babe: dynamic, thrilling, yet totally effortless phrasing.

John Brown: there's that monumental version from Bremen in 1998 and this one. A quiet, focused narrative about patriotism, pride and 'the other'. It's placed in the middle of many of these fall 2001 shows.

Things Have Changed: he's Cary Grant here, oozing *sprezzatura* and cool.

Sugar Baby: Jesus, it's pinpoint control that appears uncontrolled. I listen to this more often than I do the one on *Love & Theft*.

Don't Think Twice: more seemingly casual, light, fluent vocals. Sounds like he's singing two notes at the same time sometimes. Larry Campbell contributes some spiffy guitar, sending the whole thing into the stratosphere.



Each of the rest of the songs is a dynamite stick of ease and grace. The third slot on this tour is reserved exclusively for either Desolation Row, It's Alright Ma or Hard Rain - a post 9/11 landscape - and this Hard Rain is facile and builds momentum until it closes emphatically. Lonesome Day Blues smokes some duck soup. High Water is not the fast, powered, thunderous intended show-stopper it would become beginning in 2002. It is measured, restrained and all velvet. Some of my least favorite songs to hear live - Tweedle Dee, Rainy Day Women - are fun listens to get a load of those kinetic vocals. Except for maybe Forever Young, which suffers from some tedious up-singing, it's James Bond from beginning to end.

Two nights later in NYC's Madison Square Garden (D190.su) is terrific. But this one's just a little better because it appears to my ears as if he's not trying quite as hard. I enjoy all the masks Dylan has used to reveal himself over the years, but this facade of nonchalance is one of my favorites.

**THANKS JBS**

**STARS** Five

(For John B's take on the other shows on his list, see file Reference (3), pages 78-101.)