



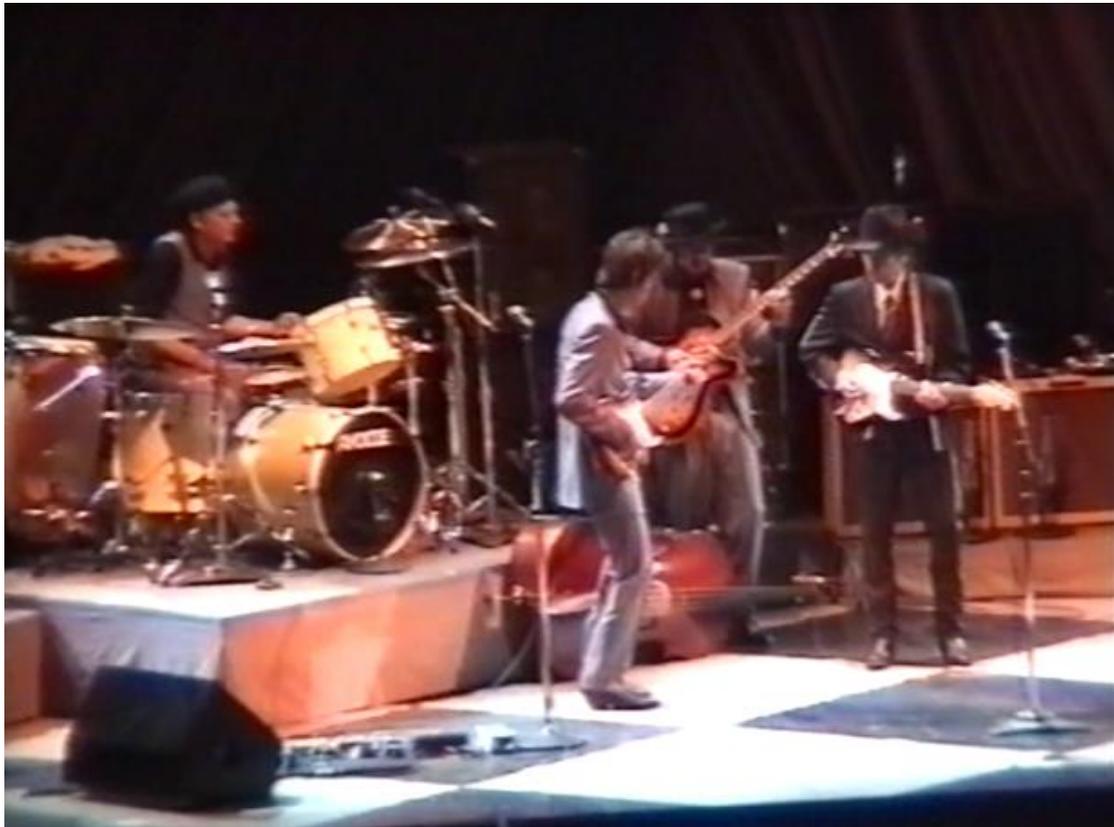
AUDIO An outstanding upgrade track - clean, clear, crisp and beautifully separated such that you can hear exactly what each performer is playing. You'll have to go a long way to find better audio than this.

VIDEO Tonight's camera occupies an ideal unobstructed left of centre balcony spot (see pic #1 below). With the minor exception of one 40 second bloop in Maggie's, handling throughout is exemplary, with plenty of assured, controlled movement maintaining interest. No footage is closer than head-to-toe - more of a band than a Bob film, then, but none the worse for that. Picture quality is typical of the vintage i.e. less definition than more modern digital return, but warmer colours and an overall result that hits the spot right *there*. An excellent night's work indeed.



RUNNING TIME Disc One 68:05, Disc Two 62:30, complete show

COMMENT We're at the opening concert of the 29 date, 38 day, twelve country 2002 European Tour - the NET's nineteenth pass through Europe in fifteen years. Tonight's fans will be the first on this side of the Atlantic to hear some live *Love And Theft*, also the first to take the measure of David Kemper's successor George Receli, occupant of the drum-stool since the start of the year (catch his tasty Sunrise - well named - second gig on D178.su).



Before I tell you what I think of this DVD, how well do you trust my judgment? More to the point, what about your own? In everyday matters, you probably consider yourself a sound enough judge - sound, anyway, as the next man. But when it comes to Bob, most of the people reading this will not be impartial, or disinterested, or think him "everyday matter" like Justin Timberlake, KT Tunstall or The Black Eyed Peas. So, given the closeness of our virtual embrace of him, the unrelenting intensity of our collective scrutiny (necessarily inherent in all that a lack of perspective) do you ever doubt what your possibly deluded senses are telling you? Okay, so I enjoyed this DVD thoroughly, but here's the thing: there are three other members of my household who haven't seen it, don't want to see it, would pay good money for the opportunity not to see it and, if forced to watch, would volubly declare it bad medicine before it began, while it played and, in two cases and probably all three, after it was done - and it's a safe bet that I won't be the only DVDylaner in *that* boat. So, on the democratic principle we all hold so dear, must they not be right and I wrong? The reason I ask these things is because leading Dylan authority Michael Gray not only attended this concert but, soon after, wrote about his experience in *The Daily Telegraph*. His article, well worth reading, is appended in full below*, but here are his thoughts on D 2002 as performer:

Dylan and his band strike up with one of their singalong old-timey warm-ups. Then he starts into Times and buggers up the lyric immediately ... Most of the time ... the real Bob Dylan is largely missing and he's busier faking it than trying his best. Where once he was so alive, communicating so much quick creative intelligence so alertly and uniquely, now he snatches at showbiz clichés from which he once recoiled, like repeating half a line en route to the end of it - Gave her my heart, gave her my heart but she wanted my soul - a device so crudely portentous it's always been the preserve of the world's Vic Damones.



Until recently, if you were close enough to see, Dylan's face was ceaselessly expressive of subtle emotion and savvy. Now it seems reduced to a handful of clumsy, self-parodic grimaces. Where his concerts were events, in which an artist of genius lived in the dangerous moment, now he plays safe and seems to have no reason to be there. Where he didn't care what the audience thought because he had his own vision and was ahead of us, now he doesn't care ... because he thinks it's a gullible rabble.

... A shrivelling cynicism ... is, depressingly, becoming the norm. It surely has nothing to do with age and everything to do with sourness, an exhaustion of his resources. No wonder he's given interviews in which he's said that he dislikes ... long-time fans almost as much as ... critics. He wants fresh meat: young people who don't remember how incomparably better he once was.

I thought it would be different after Love And Theft ... I thought he'd be out there revelling in it, re-galvanised and full of unpredictability and purpose. Not so. He's so held in, a little wooden figure not so much

going through the motions as being conveyed along them like an object on an assembly line ... The Dylan of the Globe Arena in Stockholm was painfully poor. Poor by the very standards of imaginative integrity that Dylan himself threw out into the world ... We expect much less now, and we get it. But ... go anyway.



Of course, hindsight is a wonderful thing and to the expansive vista open to Gray in 2002 have now been added eight years more, a period characterised by upsinging, the keyboard retreat, the wolfman, a reined-in band and pap-rap (you know, that repellent DES-O-LAY-SH'N slice 'n' dice) - aspects that all reflect favourably on D 2002. But, then or now, in the jostling panoply of Bobs, surely Post-Millennium D was and is, if not up at the very top, at least scrapping for recognition as one of the select few? This was a man, after all, who in the previous decade had worked his way back to pre-eminence in his chosen field to the point where, late in 2001, touring with his best band - a crack unit that, after more than two years on the road together, gelled like a jar of Coarse Cut - was putting in shows his long-suffering mid-eighties fans could only dream of. Disagree? Well, I'd be the first to admit that my judgment in these matters is suspect as a Roy Keane tackle. But Michael thought D's 1984 *Letterman* turn with the Plugz (see [D017](#)) "transcendent", so I wouldn't rely on his too much either. Besides, judging anyone against history is inevitably unfair. No creative artist - time is a jet plane and all that - should be answerable for anything other the here-and-now minute they're in. Back in 2002, ER poster Johnny Borgan expressed this notion well:

Dylan has been quoted as saying that the critics shouldn't compare Love And Theft to his old albums but ... to other albums released nowadays. Maybe the shows should be treated the same way? Where else can you go to get this energetic multi-dose of blues, gospel, country, bluegrass,

jump-swing, ballads and rock 'n' roll combined with classic poetry? Of course there are great artists on the road today, but still, even accepting the limitations of Bob, few are even in the same league.

Michael Gray is wrong: generalising from the Stockholm show - from any show - ain't right. It's not lack of either knowledge or musicality that makes American audiences vote Bob to best live act (of 2001, or his) Norwegian audience leave the arena with happy smiles. They're not victims of a fake - they're witness to something really real in a world of fake. Dylan 2002 may not be comparable to whatever he has done before, but he's still comparable to whatever's going on in concert halls these days. Bob's still on top of his game and we are lucky to be alive at the same time!



Larry amid his arsenal. Here on D201.su he adds restrained table steel to Maggie's and RDW. For a more incendiary contribution, try, rather, D292.su.

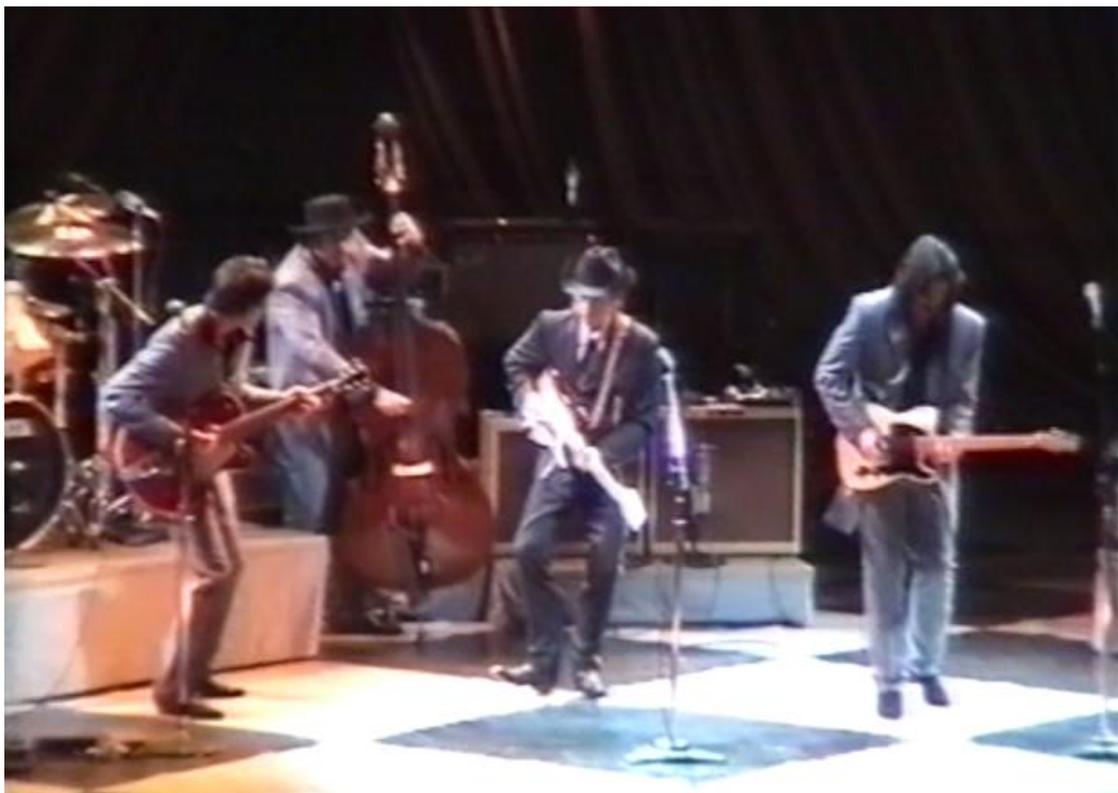
So to the show and immediately Humming Bird (arguably D's most appealing train song, though dismissed by Gray as a *singalong old-timey warm-up*) starts proceedings in warm, seductive, upbeat style. But D then falters badly through the first verse of Times and kicks off its second in similar disarray. Yet, while boding ill and surely enough for Gray to draw his caustic conclusions there and then, it proves a low point beyond which, shucking off the jet-lag (and, yes, he does look and sound bone-tired) Bob does the bizz (odd lyric lapse excepted) once again.

So enjoy a Don't Think Twice with Larry's sweet guitar high in the mix (through both Times and It's Alright Ma, admire his felicitous cittern work too). Not Mr Gray.

If you thought acoustic opener Humming Bird good, you'll find electric #1 Man Of Constant Sorrow (the first since 1990 - [D157](#) has another from this tour) a groove-grunge delight, with D's raw, raddled bray ideally suited to its world-weary pitch (unlike, for instance, Lady Lay - on this of all nights, Lothario he ain't). Seems Mr Gray did not.

So relish a *blitzkrieg* Solid Rock, last played in 1981 (but fourteen more this tour - [D103](#), [D175.su](#) have two - and nineteen, all told, in the year). Amid the maelstrom summoned by his cooking band, D just about hangs on by his fingertips, struggling gamely to match their commitment with his own. Apparently MG did not.

So savour a 4th Street that, from its first notes replete with trademark harp, announces itself a winner, and is. Not Michael.



Feel My Love too is graced with harp intro and outro - perhaps to help tone back its cloying Perry Como schmaltz factor, D's guitar remains high in the mix throughout. Maggie's closes with a novel, apparently extemporised last verse. Summer Days, while solid, is not quite yet the show-stopper ([D037.sse](#), [D044.su](#), [D260.sse](#)) that familiarity will make it. And if the gig peaks with a sublime, near eight minute Sugar Baby, that's not to suggest that what follows is substandard, but merely that it, on its Euro debut, is near perfect. In contrast to its latter-day good-time self, this RDW is a relatively lazy low-key work-through (though eventually rocks out just the same). Staid Things Have Changed could have done with a bit more snap. And for those with long memories (or [D570](#) / [D593.su](#) / [D636.su](#)) this Forever Young's harp break is a wan feeble peeping thing sad worlds away from more deep-diving, soul-searing turns of yesteryear.

Lord, I'm starting to sound like Michael. I wonder what he thinks now? But, even if he sees it just the same, so what? The beauty of all this is that what he thinks or what I

think is entirely irrelevant. It's not even a case of *he is right from his side and I am right from mine* because, finally, only one view matters here and that's yours. My guess is that you'll like D201.su quite a lot, but even if you don't, as Scarlett reminded herself after Rhett had blown her off, tomorrow is another day.

THANKS Author zebop3, viner massimo

STARS The only thing wrong with D201.su is a bit too much dead wood - Lady Lay, Maggie's, Drifter's, RDW - in the set-list. But the plums - Humming Bird, Constant Sorrow, Sugar Baby - more than make up for that and, in view of so pristine an audio track, anything other than another five would be wrong.



* From *The Daily Telegraph* of 13 April 2002

On the trail of the Bobcat

How does it feel to follow Bob Dylan on tour? While new fans rave, long-term critic Michael Gray is in despair

THE omens are bad from the start. Take the Stockholm subway to Globen, the stop for the arena, and you alight in a post-modern estate, its housing towers and plazas apparently built yesterday on some otherwise useless swamp. It is a first for me to seek solace inside a shopping mall, yet here is comparative release, in an atrium of metal walkways with vacuous pop extruding from tinny speakers.

Soon, bizarrely, Bob Dylan will come on stage just one windswept plaza's walk away. Oh Bob, what are you doing here? What am I?

Among the customers for trainers and cosmetics I begin to see blokes with moustaches, wounded eyes and unclean skin, sporting bellies and grubby jackets, walking in twos and threes. If these men look like poachers, their women look like game old birds. It takes little clairvoyance to know that these are the faithful beginning to assemble. As a Sixties survivor of abdominal portliness and no special sartorial finesse myself, these people depress me.

They also depress Bob Dylan. This opening night of his latest European tour last week saw the continuation of the Never-Ending Tour he's been engaged upon for the past 13 years and 11 months. How does it feel for him, night after blurred night, seeing these defeated faces staring up at him in glazed agitation?



This year he's done something about it. When tickets went on sale in Britain for next month's UK shows, the promoter allocated priority seats to readers of the *Dignity* fanzine - but Dylan demanded that the front few rows not be occupied by the same people every night.

His fans are not all these bedraggled victim types, eating fast food all over Europe as they follow him around. There are at least three other kinds, starting with the wonderfully mad. Famously, there used to be Lambchop (see [D056](#) etc), a man who would always somehow manage not merely to be in the front row, but to be in the seat most precisely aligned with Dylan's microphone. Only Bob himself mattered to Lambchop: others might prefer some backing bands to others, but Larry scorned this as a symptom of dilettantism: "Like going to a great restaurant and caring about the lighting fixtures." In the Nineties he became so prominent that more than once Dylan addressed him by name from the stage. No more: for health and financial reasons, Lambchop has emigrated to India.

Then there are the supposedly normal ones: the thirtysomething to sixtyish investment bankers and lawyers, academics and accountants, social workers and teachers. Many of these fly business-class to see Dylan in concert. Many more arrange their annual holidays to fit in with what they guess the year's touring schedule will be.

And then there are their children. And by now, even their grandchildren.

Sometimes these groups blur together. I fall into conversation with a family of three. The man, bearded and leather-jacketed, looks after the Stockholm subway's carriages and engineers. His wife, crop-haired and faded blonde, is a costumier for the Royal Theatre Company. Their son, 16-year-old John, sports a Blind Faith T-shirt and aims to become a carpenter.



These children have the heavy weight upon them of sharing their parents' musical taste, and they know that in some wider psychic space they are going to have to account for themselves. John, born alongside *Empire Burlesque* in 1985, is coming to see 60-year-old Bob Dylan. It's as if I'd begged my parents to take me to hear Vera Lynn.

As we file into the stadium, the well-dressed, sun-tanned and healthy vastly outnumber the tallow-faced - and the proportion of teenagers Dylan is pulling in is no longer the eight per cent it has been for many years. Now, I see that something not far off 40 per cent of this audience is in its teens or early twenties.

Inside the giant red womb of the hall, those behind me include an 18-year-old whose last concert experience was seeing UB40; his 17-year-old companion confesses she has never been to a concert before. Another young woman has been listening to his

records for five years, but doesn't expect much tonight. "I think he just comes here and goes away again: I think that's his attitude. But we'll see." They promise to let me have their verdicts at the end, and go back to the compulsive text-messaging of youth.

A thin 44-year-old comes along the row to see me, on the hunch that I am, as he puts it himself, "a Bobcat". He whispers that the first time he made love to a woman was to a Dylan track. This is more information than I need.

Dylan and his band strike up with one of their singalong old-timey warm-ups. Then he starts into *The Times They Are A-Changin'* and buggers up the lyric immediately. Some of the delivery is compelling, but he can never get through the title line without failing to disguise the failings that have come upon him recently.



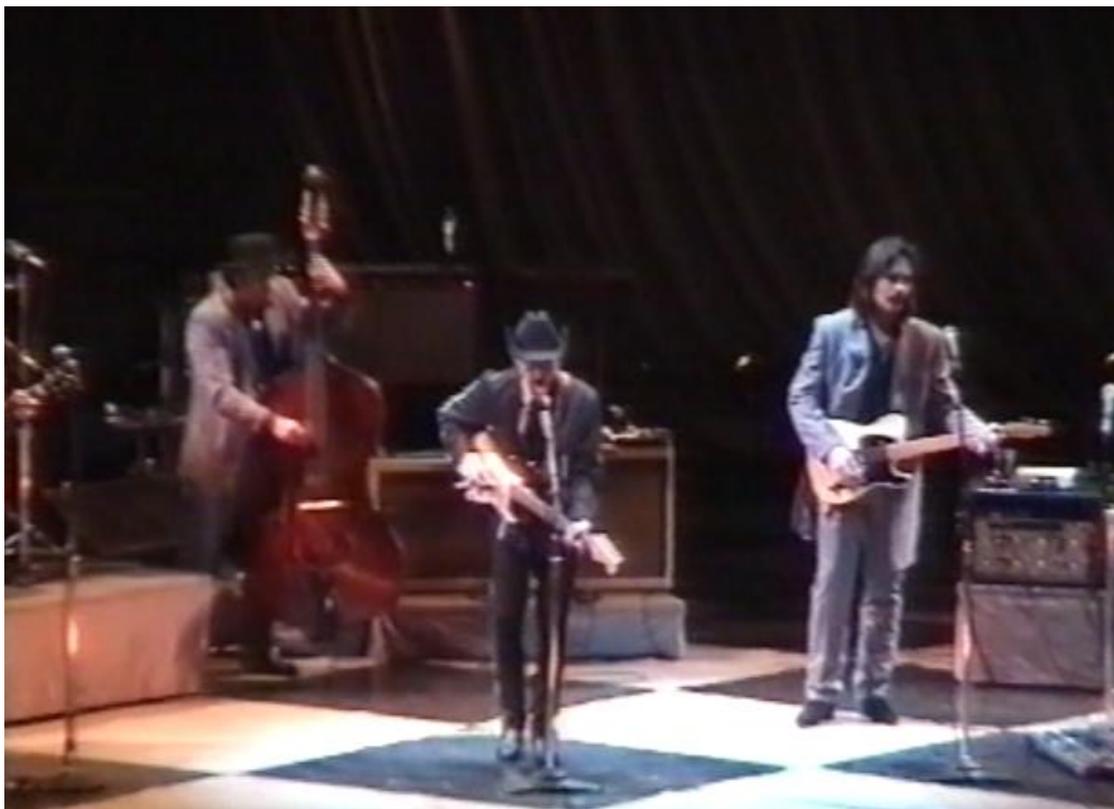
Most of the time it seems to me that the real Bob Dylan is largely missing and he's busier faking it than trying his best. Where once he was so alive, communicating so much quick creative intelligence so alertly and uniquely, now he snatches at showbiz clichés from which he once recoiled: like repeating half a line en route to the end of it - *Gave her my heart, gave her my heart but she wanted my soul* - a device so crudely portentous it's always been the preserve of the world's Vic Damones.

Until recently, if you were close enough to see, Dylan's face was ceaselessly expressive of subtle emotion and savvy. Now it seems reduced to a handful of clumsy, self-parodic grimaces. Where his concerts were events, in which an artist of genius lived in the dangerous moment, now he plays safe and seems to have no reason to be there. Where he didn't care what the audience thought because he had his own vision and was ahead of us, now he doesn't care what the audience thinks because he thinks it's a gullible rabble.

Most of the time. Some nights are thrillingly different - in the intimacy of Portsmouth Guildhall in 2000 (see [D176.su](#) / [D236.su](#)), for instance - but these are very rare now, and more usually the breakthrough of sunlight is confined to one song, or one phrase, before a shrivelling cynicism sets in again.

This is, depressingly, becoming the norm. It surely has nothing to do with age and everything to do with sourness, an exhaustion of his resources. No wonder he's given interviews in which he's said that he dislikes the long-time fans almost as much as he hates critics. He wants fresh meat: young people who don't remember how incomparably better he once was.

I thought it would be different after *Love And Theft*, his most recent album. This is a work of such excellence, a work so alive and such fun, that I thought he'd be out there revelling in it, re-galvanised and full of unpredictability and purpose.



Not so. He's so held in, a little wooden figure not so much going through the motions as being conveyed along them like an object on an assembly line.

At the end, everyone around me has loved it. The young woman who expected little says it was "great". So do the well-groomed, professional couples. Two 15-year-old girls outside tell me it was "lovely". First hooked by the live 1966 CDs, they didn't mind that his voice is different now, and adored *Love And Theft* for its "great variety of styles".

It's so weird. Dylan has been riding high (to quote a phrase) for quite a while now. Gone are the bad old days of the Eighties and early Nineties, when he was a laughable old croakhead pilloried as Mr Sixties Man while the Sixties, man, were being blamed

for every ill in the Western world. Ever since he suffered his temporary heart disease, released 1997's *Time Out Of Mind* and started being pelted with Grammys, Oscars and lifetime achievement awards, somehow he's been walking on Golden Pond. He's praised now for not trying to look eternally youthful. (Don't mention the airbrushed cover photos.) Somehow, too, Dylan's concerts are now marvellous for their rawness and their refusal to treat the songs as sacrosanct.

I've written and believed a fair amount of this stuff myself down the years. And what a sufficiency of years they've been. I first listened to a Dylan album in 1964, first saw him in concert in 1966. God knows how many I've attended since. I have long accepted that when you enter the Dylan world, you sign up for life.

Naturally, I insisted on Dylan's greatness as an artist all through the backlash decades, and spent most of the Nineties writing a 900-page critical study of his extraordinary, incomparable, massively influential body of work.



I'm not going to renounce all that now. But the Dylan of the Globe Arena in Stockholm was painfully poor. Poor by the very standards of imaginative integrity that Dylan himself threw out into the world.

After the concert I have to email a report to friends. All over Europe people are preparing to take in swathes of Bob nights. Many, like me, approach the prospect with heavy hearts, nowadays choosing their venues to allow some pleasant dining out on warm, agreeable nights. (Unlike me, in other words, they are going to see Dylan in Italy instead of Sweden.) We expect much less now, and we get it. But we go anyway. And so does a newer generation of converts.

[screenshots added]