

“Bob Dylan Goes Electric”

by: Greta Smith

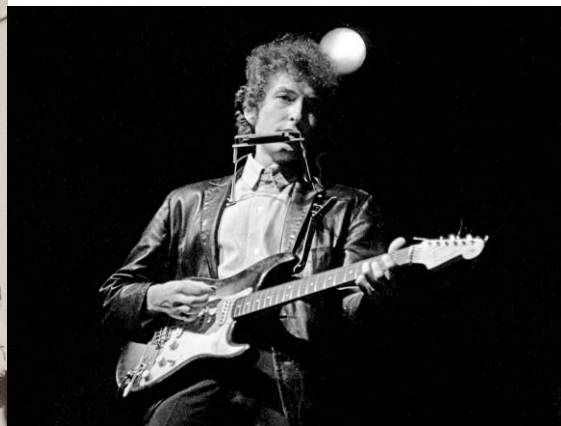
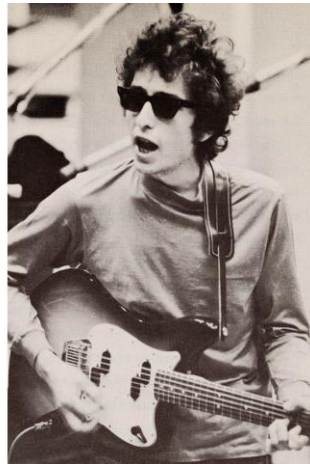
Bob Dylan Bringing It All Back Home



I think it's safe to say Bob Dylan is universally one of the best known artists of all time. Whether you've only heard of his name or have listened to his extensive music collection, the name Bob Dylan will most likely ring a bell. Now this popularity didn't come from his mediocre singing voice or looks, but his infamous way with words and poetry. His second album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, showcased this and turned him into the "Shakespeare of his generation," creating a following of folk fans that worshiped his every word. The clean and meaningful way he protested war and important political matters set the standard for lyric writing today, inspiring plenty of other artists including The Beatles.



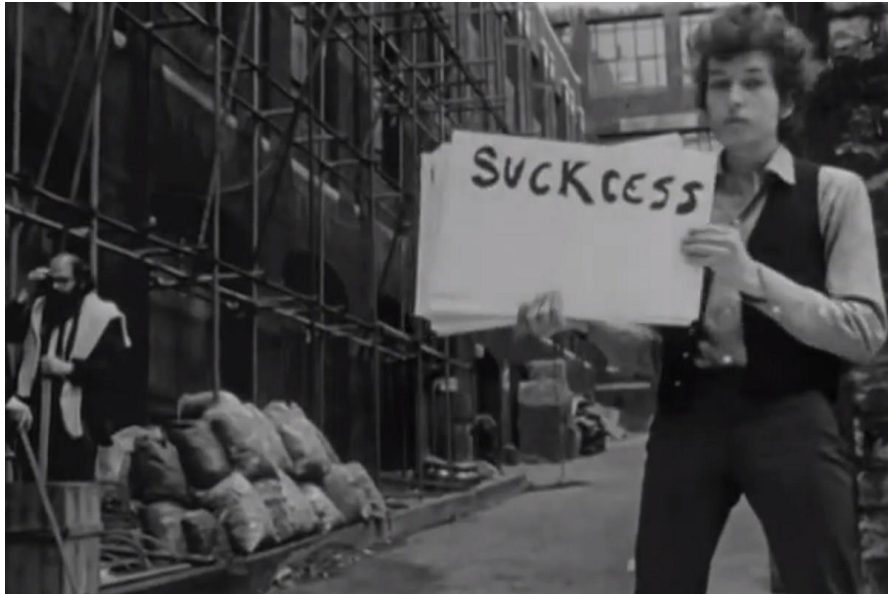
Now looking at the album that started a new wave of greatness, *Bringing It All Back Home*, Dylan violates his folk crowd completely by openly using electric instruments in his fifth album. This went against the folk community's dogma creating controversy. As well as dividing his fans by only including two protest songs as part of his up-and-coming era. Instead, he focuses on how he can incorporate more poetic, and personal lyrics into his songs. This album is considered to be influential in the birth of folk rock, which he only further develops in his following albums *Highway 61 Revisited*, and *Blonde on Blonde*. He introduces the possibility to incorporate poetic lyrics in rock and roll. This half acoustic half electric album increased Dylan's mainstream audience, rapidly setting him up for his long term success in his career and making him widely recognized today.



Review: These songs are not ranked in any specific way. It's simply the order they are on the album.

1. "Subterranean Homesick Blues"

This song is said to refer to the American Civil Rights movement with the lyric "Better stay away from those that carry a fire hose" since protesters were sprayed with high pressure hoses during that time. However I think the song is much more than just another protest song. This song has a fast and catchy fluidity to it that some say could be an early example of rap. As well as a 'music video' of Dylan holding up cue cards of words from the song. This was Dylan's first 'music video' and first song to go electric. He revolutionized the music world as we knew it.



2. "She Belongs to Me"

Dylan had a way of keeping his lyrics very vague leaving the meaning of the song up for interpretation. This song especially will make you think when listening to it. It's not your typical love song about a fragile, beautiful woman, that's the object of someone's desire. Instead the "she" he's referring to is portrayed as a strong, independent woman. Overall I think for the time, this song is a very unique take on how he views women. This showcases Bob Dylan acting far beyond his time once again.

3. "Maggie's Farm"

I believe this song is a message from Dylan expressing his issues with the folk scene and how he's moving forward with his career by putting out this half-and-half album. The subtle angst in his voice shows his frustration and lyrics subtly indicating how Maggie's farm could be a metaphor for his folk music career. "Well, I try my best to be just like I am, But everybody wants you to be just like them." This could relate to the strict standards the folk community has against any rock music and how Dylan wants to exceed those boundaries. The whole theme fits into oppression and conformity which is exactly what he must've felt under the folk rules of music. It

is obviously inspired by the blues genre with a fuller, almost upbeat sound. I'd say this is one of the strongest songs on the album and the very first song Dylan played electric live at the 1995 Newport Folk Festival.



4. “Love Minus Zero/No Limit”

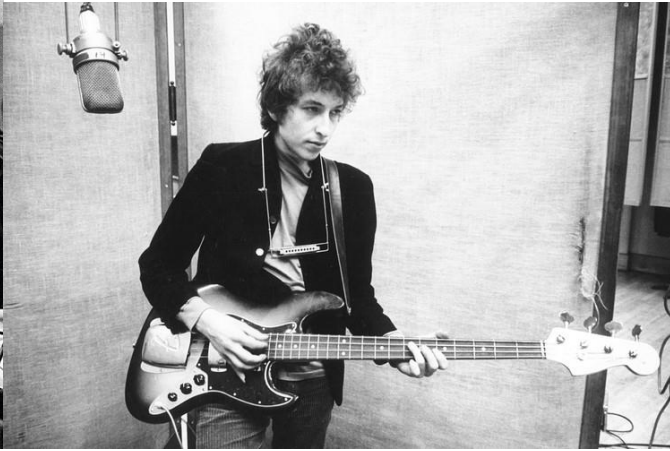
This song is simply poetic and strange. It's a love song about a woman who I think could be depicted in many ways and left up to interpretation of others. Yet in my opinion she's portrayed as a villain in the ways he uses contradicting words to describe “his love”. As well as negative observations on certain topics such as “My love she's like some raven, at my window with a broken wing.” The raven often represents dark subjects or figures leading me to believe that he's singing down on ‘his love’ as well as other examples made in the song. Although the lyrics are quite vague and could mean many things. The song is smooth, and peaceful to listen to, giving it a sort of sad tone.

5. “Outlaw Blues”

This blues song by Dylan is not my favourite on the album, nevertheless it is quite fun. I think this song is humorous and you can tell by his voice that he's having fun with it. The final verse doesn't quite resonate much with the rest of the song, singing “She's a brown-skin woman, but I love her just the same.” But it's a nice homage to the beauty of various skin tones.

6. “On the Road Again”

I believe this song could be another metaphor for the turning point in his career where he leaves his original folk music for something different or better. The lyrics don't ever actually say the title of the song but it's clear the message ties into the name he's given it. Musically this song has a simple rhythm and blues sound with a messy, interesting beat and harmonica breaks which are used in many of Dylan's songs.



7. Bob Dylan's "115th Dream"

The beginning of the track starts off with Dylan playing his guitar while singing the first few lines followed by him and his producer breaking into uncontrollable laughter. This song is humorous and filled with absurd, silly images meant to satirize modern American society. It was only ever performed live once in 1988. It's not my favourite song on the album however, it is still a decent tune.

8. "Mr. Tambourine Man"

This song has been performed and recorded by many artists such as The Byrds and Stevie Wonder, among others. The Byrds' version was influential in the popularization of folk rock inspiring others to experiment with this new and improved genre. This song is known for its surreal imagery and its bright and thorough melody. This song, although an overplayed pick for some, is one of my favorite Bob Dylan songs out of his entire discography. I think his performance in 1994 at Newport Folk Festival shows the ability Dylan has as a solo artist and how invoking he is even with only his vocals, harmonica, and guitar.



9. “Gates of Eden”

This song touches on deep and powerful topics surrounding peoples belief in the myth of the afterlife. The abstract poetry creates hideous images and meanings. Each verse ends with a grim sounding delivery followed by a bitter harmonica. Overall this song is a meaningful message about changing fate and living life without complacency.



10. “It’s Alright Ma, (I’m Only Bleeding)”

This song is unusual the way it begins in third person before switching into first. The track was recorded in a singular take although it was one of the longest songs on the album he took to make. This reflects the talent Bob Dylan possesses musically. Although this is another protest song, it strays from the format of his earlier works in the way that it does not speak on possible political solutions for the problems he is encapturing. This makes it a very grim piece with lyrics painting an almost apocalyptic image throughout the song.

11. “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue”

Being the last song on the album this song was also the last to be recorded for the album. The melody has a beautiful tone to it with folky guitar playing with the lyrics giving it more of a somber feeling. There has been much speculation about who this song could be saying goodbye to including his folk community. I find this song to be more emotional than others with the way he belts a little louder and sings a little higher. It feels very personal to him.

Overall, this is one of the most influential and important albums included in Bob Dylan’s discography. I don’t believe he would have been as successful as he has been without his ability to push boundaries others had set for him, such as going electric. I find this album had more of a sense of identity and realness that hadn’t been shown previously. As I look back on *Bringing It All Back Home* I realized this album was not only was his debut of going electric, but helped in

the development folk rock and most importantly redefined what could be said in a song. I give this album a 9/10.