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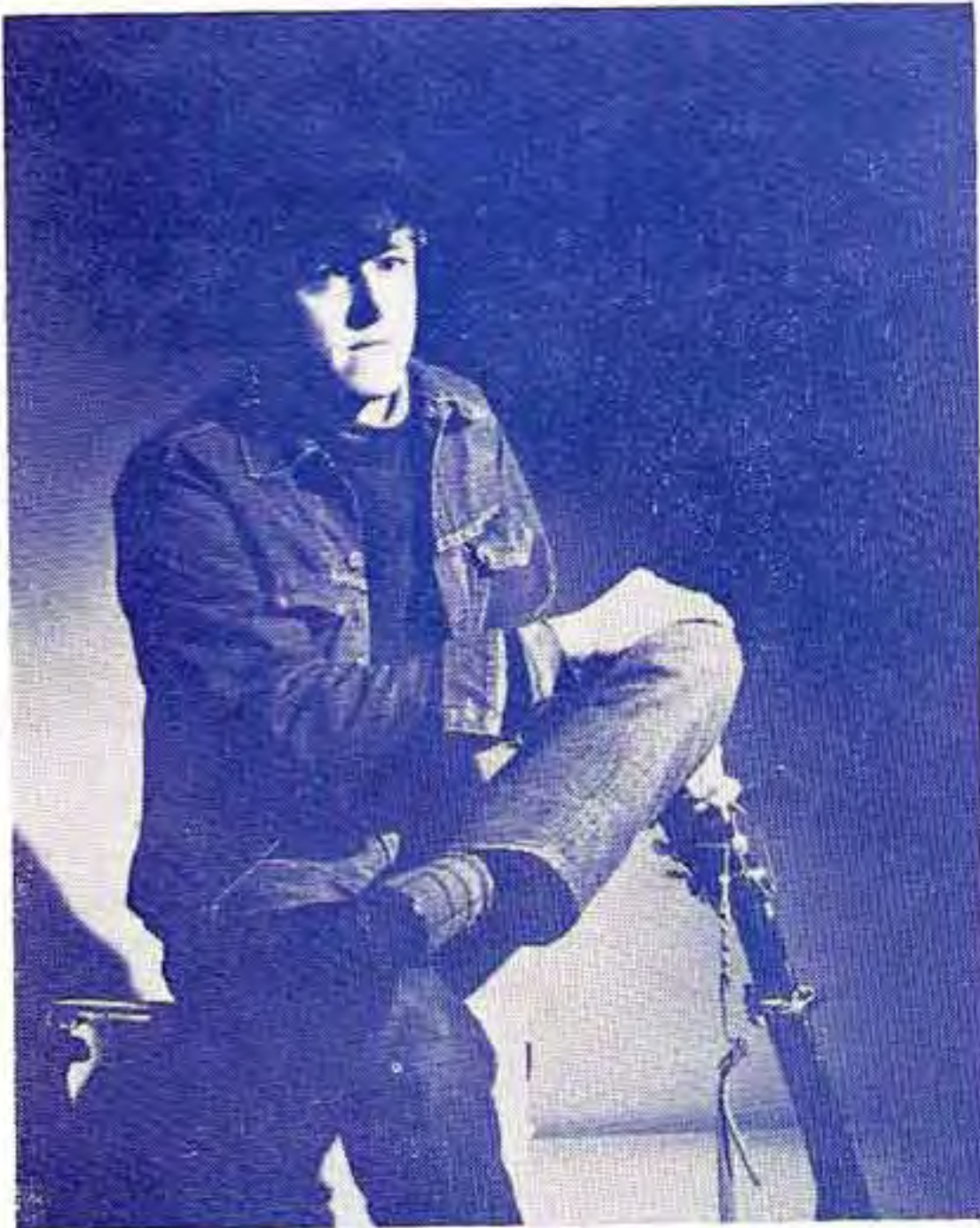
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COMMENT

In retrospect, the year 1965 has provided some exciting controversies. The Newport Festival showcased the "new" Dylan, who, notwithstanding the rationalizations of Peter Yarrow, electrified both his art and his audience. What hath the great BD wrought? Hippies are happy; teenagers are teary-eyed; folklorists are astounded; and the press is as cynical as ever. The question as to whether this was an expansion of genius or a surrender to rank commercialism will be argued but probably will remain unanswered.

Newport also swung with Richard Farina's fast-flowing poetry, which, contrasted with raucous twang of his dulcimer, struck yet another contemporary influence. With his wife Mimi, Dick induced the sky to cry on a Sunday afternoon, incited an on-stage frug orgy starring a barefoot Baez, and sent everyone home packing up their sorrows.

Old-time music has beat its way back into popularity, and Jim Kweskin's Jug Band has inspired treasure hunts for washtubs and kazoos. Small amateur groups, springing up everywhere, are blowing funky old hayseed with a solid back-home rhythm, and even the tired professionals dig them.

Philadelphia's festival was programmed more towards the topical, almost apologetically balanced by the works of John Hurt and Skip James. Tom Paxton escalated from ramblers to napalm, while the Mitchell Trio tried too hard to crucify everyone and everything. The paradox as to whether or not a white man should sing Negro blues remains unresolved; and the challenge still stands to write stinging protest songs in a pretty style.

A welcome respite at Philadelphia was a contestant in the banjo contest picking "The Great Gate of Kiev" taken from Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition." He didn't even make the semi-finals. The sacred sounds of Mel Lyman's harp started the rain again, so back we went to Toronto.

Without comment on what is or is not Folk Music, the best result of the controversies of 1965 is that good Folk Music in general is on the upswing. The traditional artists are busier than ever. Talented local instrumentalists and contemporary composers like David Rea and Gordon Lightfoot are rising in popularity, and the self-destructive experimentalists are heading even farther out. The year 1965 was good; 1966 will be even better.

BC



THE ULTIMATE OPEN LETTER & A REVIEW OF DYLAN'S NOVEMBER CONCERT:

It used to be easy to imitate Dylan. Almost everyone could afford blue jeans, cowboy boots, and a beat-up Gibson. But, now you need a Fender electric guitar and custom-made suits. Then too, using Dylan as a model, it wasn't too hard to make up your own songs about that dusty old highway and the sound of your own name.

But just when everyone was getting into the groove, and epic songs like "Eve of Destruction" were high on the Hit Parade, a funny thing happened. Dylan stopped writing protest songs. (Actually, he stopped earlier, but hangers-on and John Q. Public are always a few months behind.)

This was the cue for the nay-sayers to come out in full force. Wounded folk-niks and self-styled critics, forming their own Greek chorus of protest, pointed the accusing finger and howled insults of "selling out" and "commercialism". Editors of folk magazines wrote pious open letters to Dylan, under the pretense of love of folk music. Other writers scrambled for the now vacant position of King of the Protest song writers. According to critics and according to Phil Ochs, Phil has inherited the throne.

Dylan was no longer the fair-haired boy of the folk world. Even at that grand revival meeting, The Newport Folk Festival, some of the audience are reported to have booed him. They said, in effect, "Now look here, Bob, what do you mean by this folk-rock stuff? We're just getting used to your protest songs. You've got no right to change your style because we dig the way you sing. You can't change now."

While the price of a ticket or a record may entitle the payer to voice disappointment or disapproval, does it also entitle him, piously and self-righteously, to presume to arrest artistic development and to make static one of the most creative and communicative minds of our times? I think not.

Protest songs, like newspapers, are fine. In some cases they are even better. The "Ballad of Hattie Carroll" was a classic as soon as it was written; likewise though in a more general vein, was Phil Ochs' "Here's to the State of Mississippi."

Some memories are indeed short. It was only a few years ago, that Dylan's protest songs were regarded by the public as the nonsensical babblings of a professional angry young man. By the time they had come to understand him, Dylan had moved on to another level. It was inevitable.

Events shape history, but behind every event there stands a man, and within every man a multitude of human, and sometimes not so human, ideas, feelings and emotions. Love, hate, joy, sorrow, greed, charity--these are the real architects of human relationships.

"Hattie Carroll" and "With God on Their Side" are great songs because of their powerful description of actions taken by man against his fellow man. But I consider "Hard Rain" to be greater because of the mood of black despair and human depravity that it evokes so unforgettably in the listener:

"I've been ten thousand miles in the mouth of a graveyard . . .
I met a young child beside a dead pony . . .
I heard the sound of a clown as he cried in the alley . . .
Where the home in the valley meets the damp dirty prison . . ."

BOB DYLAN

It is a fairly common conception that Bob Dylan has sold his soul, has gone commercial, since he began performing in a Rock style. Instead of focusing one's attention on the purity or non-purity of folk music and on the manner in which Dylan now relates or does not relate to its standards, why not focus on the new Dylan sound and see what it is in itself without placing it under any accessible musical nomenclature.

What has happened is, that Dylan, through the medium of the rock band, is disseminating his music to a larger public audience. Not only does he speak to the folk enthusiasts but also to the teenagers. In fact, now that he's on the Hit Parade, he can be heard by anyone. It isn't only the Rock sound which speaks; his poetry has a message for everyone. It has an imagery less linear, less narrative, more fragmented and multi-leveled that allows each listener to fill in and complete the picture of what he thinks Dylan is singing about.

The Rock band creates a polyphonic music, that is, several instruments each playing an improvised melodic line simultaneously. This allows hearing-in-depth for the listener. Something new on each hearing appears; a feeling of ego-loss in a sea of electric sound as occurred at a live performance in Toronto's Massey Hall on Nov. 14 and 15, 1965.

In the first half of the concert when Dylan performed alone, the cross-rhythms between the guitar and harmonica created a condensed, concentrated complexity of steady pulse and floating melodic lines. His harmonica was full of new patterns that were reminiscent of parabolic sound curves or sirens.

After intermission, the Rock band joined Dylan on stage and made Massey Hall reverberate as rarely before. Dylan's voice was drowned out except when he yelled into the mike.

Dylan did one of his early songs 'Baby Let Me Follow You Down' as a new arrangement with the group--a new experience for those who had ears to hear and a nightmare for those who left.

Besides clothing old songs in new colors, Dylan also changed the tempos. If, on a record, the song is in a slow tempo then at the concert it was done in a fast tempo and vice-versa. His flexibility of tempo demonstrated a much more total knowledge of time and its elasticity than many musicians who tend to put a piece of music in a temporal strait-jacket.

His singing style was a subtle mixture of song and speech fluctuating between one and the other, which gave his singing the character of a chant.

"Bringing It All Back Home" was the first album to show this new Dylan sound. The tracks that use the Rock band exhibit a light comic Country and Western quality both in words and music. There are also a sufficient number of solo Dylan tracks to please and woo the old Dylan fan.

"Highway 61 Revisited", was the second album to display this new Dylan sound. The Rock band tracks have a tougher quality and are especially highlighted by the electric guitar of Mike Bloomfield. The album as a whole is a new synthesis of various styles of pop and folk music, R & B, country and western, and Rock and Roll.

Whether one is for or against the new Dylan, the fact remains that he has grown both as a poet and as a musician, and will probably continue to develop in the future.

Art Charpentier