UC Santa Barbara

Title

The Ever-Changin' Times and Myth of Bob Dylan

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/88h0r2fn

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 14(2)

Authors

Sato, Yoshiaki
Knighton (translator), Mary A.

Publication Date

2023

DOI

10.5070/T814261891

Copyright Information

Copyright 2023 by the author(s).This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

The Ever-Changin' Times and Myth of Bob Dylan

YOSHIAKI SATO
Translated by MARY KNIGHTON

Some things cannot be known by way of the usual scientific method, by inductive analysis, or by simply looking closely at an object and accumulating detailed information about it. Bob Dylan is one such case. He has remained popular for more than half a century, his praises sung and much ink spilled in discussion about him, all culminating in the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature. And yet, there seems to be little consensus about just what makes him so great or why exactly he matters. In this essay, I would like to adopt a deductive approach to Dylan and paint a picture of him to fit the larger context of our times. The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard once famously denounced all grand metanarratives as no longer relevant in our postmodern society, but I will proceed to violate this rule: my goal here is to tell the creation myth of our times with Dylan as its trickster hero.[1]

Rock and Folk: A Sibling Rivalry

By the mid-1950s in America, various historical events were coming to a head. Ten years had passed since World War II, and the Korean War and McCarthyism were sputtering to a close as a very real prosperity began to overtake the country around 1955. By turns, TV, Disneyland, fast cars with tail fins, and rock 'n' roll swept over the country to give birth to contemporary pop culture. In 1956 Elvis Presley took the spotlight on the historical and musical stage. He was a catalyst for youthful consumers with their own prodigious economic power who up until then had not been recognized in the marketplace as anything other than young people "with an attitude." The heyday of rock 'n' roll and rockabilly was nothing more than this. Many perceived rock as just a "savage" form of rhythm and blues, fundamentally inseparable from "Black music," and as a deliberate provocation by delinquents shamelessly dancing, shaking, and swiveling their hips like never before. People believed that it was all just a fad, something that would soon blow over like the hula hoop on the verge of being all the rage. But then along came the second wave.

When we talk about rock's "second wave," we usually mean the British Invasion, but perhaps we should expand what we mean when we talk about this period. Around 1965, bands like the Beatles certainly made people think twice about all those corrupted youth who were excited by rock 'n' roll, and for the first time notice just how many respectable young men and women too made up the mix of those so-called "delinquents." This is where Dylan enters the scene. As the story goes, he showed up on stage at the Newport Folk Festival with an electric guitar only to find himself showered with terrific boos from the audience. Our ritual repetition of this episode continues to make it into a founding moment in the contemporary origin story of Bob Dylan. Simultaneously, it is an episode that sheds light on our changing times, when commodities are not only products but also extend to images, attitudes, and even people as personalities.

We should not forget, though, that Dylan had "emerged" even before this episode. In 1961 he was already singing in New York City's Greenwich Village cafes, and from 1963 his name became widely recognized with "Blowin' in the Wind." Progress had been made in the realm of politics and culture in America but serious social and systemic rifts remained, including a belief in the elite as the standard bearers of the culture and an easy dismissal of mere entertainers. Dylan himself merely played his role as part of the times in which he lived. "The Times They Are A-Changin'" (1964) was Dylan's first hit that he himself sang, but it was in the United Kingdom that it first sold so well – it was not even released as a single in the US. Still, it was an engaged protest song that touched a profound chord. It appeared to directly address young people in university towns and elsewhere, asking them to be the ones to lead the changes needed in the world. This era's Dylan was certainly significant but he was not yet the revolutionary he would become.

Dylan as a global phenomenon in world history debuted as part of an electric blues band on the stage of a folk music festival. Here we certainly see the clash of rock and folk in an iconic episode but we also see how a new heightened ethos of resistance first associated with Presley and Little Richard in the 1950s clashes with what had long passed as traditional common sense. For earlier generations, their era had been marked by the growth of capitalism out of the industrial revolution, and the lingering effects of socialist movements that arose in an attempt to correct systemic contradictions. Capital was on one side and labor on the other, with unattached university students caught in the middle and free to choose sides. These idealistic students could then rebel against the "evils" of capital, aligning themselves with the masses in a romantic fashion. University students may have fallen in with the arts and socialist political movements of the time but they kept pop culture at arm's length. Pop culture reeked of the commercial sphere of money-making and bred the contempt of the new youth culture. We might say that the Bob Dylan of 1965 trampled all over such purity claims, not to mention the ideological posturing on all sides.

Bohemian Sensibility Meets Rock 'n' Roll Clamor

Let's look more closely at just how it was that the "Dylan Rebellion" could come about. Broadly speaking, there were two kinds of students at more progressive university campuses at the start of the 1960s: those who followed jazz, and those who went for folk music. Incidentally, folk music actually had much in common with that era's pop music. Consider how a nineteenth-century ballad became a big hit when The Kingston Trio released "Tom Dooley" (1958). You get a better sense of what American music was doing in 1958 simply by looking at how this "beautiful," rather traditional, song pushed noisy rock 'n' roll out of the way to become the number one hit on the charts. Similarly, in 1959 at the Newport Folk Festival, Joan Baez took the stage and sang with her angelic voice to become a huge sensation. This daughter of an MIT physics professor bridged a new generation born to the earlier, more elite classes, moving them with her clear high soprano. And yet, record companies and local places hiring acts to play in the university cafes still made distinctions between commercial pop music and folk music. We might say that this operated as the conscience, a kind of spiritual flip side, to the spectacle of consumer culture.

Don't forget, Dylan was born in 1941. In other words, he was in the generation of musicians born between 1940 and 1943 who formed the mainstream of the 1960s rock movement to come. In this same group, we can add almost all the members of the Rolling Stones and the Beatles, as well as Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, musicians who were in their mid-teens around 1955-56. In short, they made up the impressionable adolescent generation who took to heart the raw energies and rhythms of Presley and Chuck Berry and Little Richard in the earliest stages of rock 'n' roll. In America at that time of their youth, jukeboxes and Top 40 radio were the backbone of teenage culture. Residential areas were divided by class and by race in America but the radio frequencies reached everyone equally. So long as you were young, you could be baptized in the air waves of rock music.

The popular rise of such genre music as "folk" is hard to gauge but perhaps it arose from the meeting of modern romanticism and pop music. Somehow there lurked a desire and nostalgia for various distant folk ancestors—for instance, the Irish farmers of two hundred years ago. Old folk instruments impressed contemporary listeners as authentic. And then there was the folk blues of the lowest classes, and of Southern Blacks whose songs and music were even more distant to many in America. They were "distant" as blues imagined and sentimentalized as music sung by Black farmhands picking cotton in the Southern fields in an enslaved past, and not the exciting rhythm and blues ripped out on electrified instruments that targeted Black working-class folks in postwar urban areas like Chicago.

Starting in 1962, the "American Folk Blues Festival" was held annually in Europe, and "rediscovered" blues giants toured the major cities of Germany, England, and France. This led to a real explosion in the popularity of folk and blues in England. The young Brits forming the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds attempted to learn from, and develop, their own expression of that Black vernacular culture. As this wave rose, where was Bob Dylan? As is evident from his inclusion of previously little known Delta blues artists on his 1962 debut album, Dylan was himself a source of this trend.

For those who were born and raised with rock music as part and parcel of their everyday lives, it was hard to grasp just how much of that rock music came from elsewhere, from the rhythm and blues of Black music. For white middle-class people all over the world to respond as they did to the rhythms of a music stemming from Black working-class lives was in itself a global and musical phenomenon of some significance. Of course, the gyrating body possessed by rock 'n' roll music doesn't care much about such things, but it is pretty clear that what 1960s youth did understand and feel in their bones from the rebellious rock music of their time was a means of powerful resistance toward traditional culture, and that resistance itself would spawn a wider, deeper desire for liberation (both in the positive sense of social change, but also the more cynical sense of neoliberal cooptation of liberal rhetoric from 1960s nostalgia).

Folk music is music that strives to make connections to others. While this is generally true for a lot of music, listening to folk songs played on records or in concert halls fell squarely in the middle-class music culture of the times. Just listen to Pete Seeger. Listen to Peter, Paul and Mary. The harmonies and dynamics are deep and accord properly with musical conventions such that their middle-class audience is reassured by their clean and traditional Americana qualities. Combine proper "music" with a higher brow version of "popular folk" song, and what do you get? A folk song like "Goodnight, Irene." The long traditions behind this song help us to see convergences in movements happening simultaneously and regionally. For example, "hillbilly music" had been collected since the 1920s and was commercially developed until it could, with the broadcasting on radio and later TV of Nashville's Grand Ol' Opry, set the stage for what we now call "country music."

Now we are ready to trace Bob Dylan's evolution, which we must begin by going back to his high school years banging away on the piano and admiring Little Richard. Scattered among the traces of influence from this era are the many and diverse folk songs Dylan sang. He began by mimicking the Oklahoma farmer-songwriter Woody Guthrie but went on to sing old Delta blues songs and learn from quasi-Black musical arrangements until he developed that wonderfully bluesy, gravelly voice we hear on his first album, *Bob Dylan* (1962). Dylan straddled rock and folk. It was in performing folk that his aggressive and rough edges came out. The Beatles were clad in leather jeans and performing highly physical gigs in Liverpool and Hamburg before their record debut, while Mick and Keith were just then drawn to the American R&B scene and trying to copy it. Meanwhile Dylan was learning his chops by playing in cafes and clubs in Greenwich Village. He was right in the middle of folk music culture there. Intellectually, it was a vital experience for Dylan, but it was rock and blues that caught his attention aesthetically.

The modern music of this time remained in thrall to middlebrow parlor and chamber music unchanged from the nineteenth century with its aesthetics of proper harmony and vocals such as were heard in the tunes developed in Tin Pan Alley and crooned for theater- and moviegoers in the twentieth century. But Dylan's music sidestepped this trend from the start. Dylan could free himself of all this baggage because he surrounded himself with recordings from the past and the sounds of regional country music. Just check out those chords he uses in his first tunes. Dylan's own version of "Blowin' in the Wind" is deliberately free of a more easy-listening, three-chord progression. A whole different aesthetic is evident there.

Dylan's contemporaries were starting to bring rock sounds and rhythms into their folksinging style, and this was happening in England too. A blues-loving Eric Burdon of The Animals took up the song "The House of the Rising Sun" from Dylan's first album and made it a No. 1 hit both in the US and the UK. By this time Dylan had left behind protest songs in support of the Civil Rights movement, and was instead challenging himself with the quasi-hallucinatory, carnivalesque lyrics and melodies of songs like "Mr. Tambourine Man."

Dylan Reigns

Up to this point I have narrated for you a mythical origin story of our times with Dylan as a sort of trickster hero. Well, going forward it won't be quite that same old "Out of Egypt" tale, even if at times it sounds like I'm genuflecting before the savior figures who led the way to a more authentic, vibrant homeland for youth fleeing the stifling, uptight world of their parents. It is 1965, after all. Colorful fashions bloom in London. It is the year that the Rolling Stones hit number one in the US with "Satisfaction," and when the Beatles, already starting to evolve after *Help*, begin work on *Rubber Soul*, influenced by soul music and the ethnic richness of world music. Dylan hit the ground running from the start of this year, and led the pack in this regard. We can see these trends in the songs collected on such Dylan albums as *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited*, and then in the recordings for *Blonde on Blonde* from October of 1965.

The baby boomer generation of university students born after World War II made up a majority in 1965 just as Dylan reached his peak. The charts remained full of the Beatles, popular beat music aimed at teenagers, and Motown groups such as the Four Tops and The Supremes. Suddenly, amidst all this, Dylan released "Like a Rolling Stone." Sales went through the roof. We should keep in mind just how much of a trendsetter Dylan was—The Birds performing "Mr. Tambourine Man," for example. With Sonny and Cher singing "I Got You, Babe" as if in response to Dylan's earlier "It Ain't Me Babe," and more controversial, overtly political songs like Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction" taking off as war in the Middle East flared, the zeitgeist was clear that summer into fall of 1965: Dylan's acolytes led on the billboard charts.

Let's pause simply to reflect on what kind of song "Like a Rolling Stone" was at the time. Its lyrics take caustic aim at a certain woman now walking the streets, fallen from the heights of her once high-class lifestyle. But the lyrical speaker is himself on the street, neither romantic nor unsympathetic in telling this woman's story in a rough, gravelly voice with a rock musical arrangement. It is at this point that the value system of pop music gets turned on its head. It is nothing less than the triumph of the counterculture that we see in these lyrics.

Pop music comes about with consumer power—that means, simply enough, that when consumers do not want or buy such music, it is not "popular." But what starts to sell at this time that had never been recognized as pop music, or had not sold quite so well before, was a lustful beat and thrilling electric energy, lyrics that slyly poked fun at people or were sarcastic. Here we see culture, as reflected in the music, changing before our eyes. Dylan led that trend, and what had just a short while before been dismissed as just delinquent rock 'n' roll was now the avant-garde scene hotly pursued by university students as hip. In Japan, our relationship with our music radically changed as we faced up to a new global society.

Granted, such massive cultural shifts were perhaps less the product of geniuses than merely the rocky passage of "time" marching on. It may have been teenagers in Dylan's generation of 1955 around which all this first germinated but we have to say that the real, substantial changes did not bear fruit until 1965. In Japan, it was pretty much the same except for a ten-year time lag. It is no exaggeration to claim rock 'n' roll was here to stay from this year. I mean, look: Young people were rushing out to buy electric guitars when The Ventures peaked in 1965. Then, a few years later, the groundbreaking Japanese folk rock band Happy End could lead its own movement, combining a rock beat with syncopated singing in Japanese instead of the English fashionable at the time.

The main reason why Dylan could lead rock 'n' roll music to freedom across the desert and out of bondage to the adolescent marketplace was, without question, the power of his lyrics. The literary influences in Dylan's songs range from nineteenth-century French Symbolist poets such as Arthur Rimbaud to the New York and San Francisco Beats, which included writers Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. Of course, we shouldn't overlook the impact of T. S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas either. Bob Dylan was able to combine a rock beat with the earthy, carnal pleasures of the Beats's poetry and the heady literary intoxication of high modernist writers. Perhaps most important to Dylan's revolutionary impact on his own times, more important even than his music and lyrics, was his hip style of self-presentation. What is the right attitude and pose for a poet–rock star if he wants to distinguish himself from mere pop idols? The unique pose that Bob Dylan adopted came directly from his own lifestyle.

That cool performance style was something that Dylan continuously refined from his debut as a folk singer onwards. Even when it came to old ballads and folksongs, he would approach them in fresh ways, singing them like people born and bred in the Appalachian mountains might do it. Despite ongoing barriers of race and class whereby some would idealize the blues only when sung by Blacks or dismiss poor whites and their mountain music out of hand, Dylan just ignored all that as if such boundaries did not exist. Some Dylan scholars might take issue with my claims here but I have to insist that while Dylan's lyrics are certainly complex and dense, they are also not complete in themselves as we usually expect products of high art to be. His mid-sixties releases "Subterranean Homesick Blues," "It's All Right, Ma," and "Johanna's Vision" blind his listeners with the flurry of dense and disconnected images overlapping and cascading one after the other in each line of his lyrics. It is less any clear genre or story that comes through in his lyrics than Dylan's embrace of the random, and perhaps chance itself, as its own form of art. Who would not agree that flying random images suit perfectly the rock aesthetic in general? But with Dylan whatever flaws his rough voice and incomplete lyrics had were made whole with his perfectly cool performance style in what can only be called a Dylanesque kind of alchemy.

The Trickster Hero Goes Underground

A common refrain in the story I am trying to tell here is that this era was aware of its own revolutionary changes as changes in world history. That pop music emerged, opportunistically took advantage of a fashion for folk music, then finally transforms to become rock music is not the only point I want to make, though; rather, global technological breakthroughs in communications and sound media caused local revolutionary changes to occur all over, changes that were part of an ongoing industrial revolution that continued to disrupt and break down existing cultural forms, and arguably the very foundations that "civilization" claimed to hold dear. This is what we mean when we talk about "counterculture."

Distinctions of caste and race were reinforced by the hierarchies that proceeded under the ideologies of colonialism and factory capitalism in the wake of the industrial revolution. Side by side with the culture of the upper classes dressed in all their finery going to hear violin quartets at the concert hall was the culture of the working classes at cheap taverns tapping their feet and whirling on the dance floor to a fiddle: same instrument, different music, divergent audiences. Thanks to a generation of university students in the 1960s, these class barriers began to break down. The new generation turned their backs on refined string music when they discovered the power of the banjo whose African origins had long since been lost in translation and embraced the pleasures of the guitar crying the blues with each rough and ready stroke across its strings. Before we knew it, this "counter" sensibility to the standard "culture" was rapidly underway in the marketplace. Both economic and social phenomena proceeded apace, and the "hip" marketplace arose in defiance of "square" society to become "the counterculture." Young people freed from the value system and rules of convention yearned for the ideal of streets where people were getting together and things were happening, so they hitched a ride out of their affluent suburbs and arrived in droves to new gathering places like Haight-Ashbury.

It is very hard to separate this kind of sociocultural phenomenon from the psychedelic rock stage that would develop after 1966. The counterculture roundly rejected capitalism, even if often superficially, but all we have to do is take a step back and we clearly see that both the counterculture and its subsequent psychedelic mode acted as the launchpad for the next generation's full-scale capitalist rebound. Human fantasy makes up the marketplace of desires, after all, and the next generation flooded the marketplace with demands for 1960s counterculture cool.

So, you might well ask, what is the connection between the counterculture movements and Bob Dylan? Songs like "Mr. Tambourine Man" or "Rainy Day Woman #12 & 35" showcase Dylan in the vanguard of a counterculture already on its hallucinatory and celebratory parade down the streets of the world. And yet, from the summer of 1966, Dylan went into what would become a long seclusion after a motorcycle accident. Meanwhile, that same year, the Beatles put out *Revolver*, their own foray into psychedelic music. Lyrics taken from *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964), an LSD trip advisory written by Timothy Leary and two other psychologists, made their way into songs such as "Tomorrow Never Knows." The top bands of this time casually threw out popular lyrics about love and peace, and all things psychedelic, but a reclusive Bob Dylan was as absent in this trend as he was absent in person on the Woodstock stage. His reclusiveness allowed him to escape the more destructive aspects of his fans' endless desires and the music industry's ceaseless demands. We all know the story of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll: One can rise to unprecedented highs and then plunge straight into a death spiral. Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin burned white hot then flamed out fast within two to three years' time.

The music that Dylan was working on during this period of seclusion in sessions with The Band in the late 1960s would later be released as *The Basement Tapes* (1975). As Greil Marcus contends in *The Old, Weird America* (1997), with this album Dylan reveals his search for the origins of the American vernacular in music. We can gauge the shifts in the rock music scene by looking at how just when everyone else was glorifying the "Summer of Love," Dylan himself had already turned away to learn more about the roots of rockabilly and country. Distancing himself from the commercial world of music at this time, Dylan did just as he had arguably always done: he went his own way, and was only incidentally a hit maker. Peter, Paul and Mary and The Birds covered Dylan songs in ways that made his music more accessible to a wider audience, and in this quite incidental way Dylan steadily rose to the pinnacle of pop music.

On the BBC's 1967 program "Our World," the Beatles were heard all around the world in a recording of "All You Need Is Love," thanks to live broadcasting by satellite to three hundred million people in forty countries. Dylan's strategy amidst such rapid changes in markets and technology would have to be tricky. Of course it would, for when wasn't Dylan a trickster through and through? He somehow slipped the yoke of having to sell himself and his music in the popular marketplace, and instead went toe to toe with the music industry, his music cropping up here and there across all genres and platforms. Adopting a stance of defiant refusal to sell out to anyone, Dylan was able to paradoxically transcend and navigate the popular ways and trends of his times.

Straddling Oppositions, Embracing Multitudes

Despite myself, I have told a salvation story to explain Dylan's leading role in our journey through these times. But the story is not over yet. Who is this "we," after all, that I have repeated time and again? In answering that, perhaps I can come to terms with what links the 1960s to our times, and why it matters.

Generally speaking, whenever the 1960s are evoked, its trendsetters and history are portrayed in the same genealogical line with the liberal establishment to come. We say folk music and the Civil Rights Movement, rock and the counterculture in the same breath, without including any elements of conservative society in our meaning, even though in the 1968 presidential election, conservative candidate Richard Nixon received votes from a broad base of support that he cleverly designated "the silent majority." Just as the festival events at Woodstock were reverberating in America and via broadcasts around the world, Merle Haggard sang "Okie from Muskogee" with the pride of a humble country man, touching many hearts across a different sector of American society. While the radicalism of the 1960s was fused with a growing global popular culture, there was a deep, wide gulf developing between urban cultural centers and "country America." In my conclusion, I will touch on Dylan's position vis-à-vis this problematic rift in American politics and culture.

In the 1960s, everyday life was changing fundamentally right before our eyes, so of course music was changing too—but it was also more than that. The very heart of the system of capitalism in factory machine industries had started crumbling, and a new world of greater and multiple pleasures was being brought to the people via the even more massive and powerful media industry. Dylan was there for this changing of the guard from old-style manufacturing capitalism to finance and media-driven capitalism, and he would exert his own particular brand of influence on it.

The same reclusive Bob Dylan who had turned his back on the "Summer of Love" at Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco had, by late 1967, broken his silence to release the album *John Wesley Harding*. This secretly recorded album featured lyrics sprinkled with Biblical and medieval figures such as St. Augustine and Judas Priest, not to mention rural folk myths, Wild West outlaws, hoboes, and immigrants, all backed by minimal instrumental accompaniment. As the sixties came to a close, Dylan continued even further in the lo-fi recording direction with *Nashville Skyline* (1969) and *Self Portrait* (1970). Here we see his voice become a bit smoother, trying out whatever songs he liked, be they in a country or American pop music vein. This experiment disappointed some fans, though, who wanted to see Dylan at the cutting edge of the culture. In betraying his liberal fans and singing side by side with Johnny Cash, we begin to see a new kind of Dylan taking shape.

Starting in Plymouth, Massachusetts, Bob Dylan's *Rolling Thunder Revue* (1975–76) made its way around America. It is clear what Dylan was trying to do: he was taking the music directly to the people in the form of an old-fashioned traveling medicine show, simply bypassing the big business venues of convention centers, concert halls, and baseball stadiums. He wanted to play authentic shows here and there in bit locations and small towns, and thereby bring back to life in his own era some Americana along the way. And if that was too much to ask of his times, he would fake it if he had to; after all, a medicine show may be pure Americana but it was always traditionally rife with charlatans and tricksters.

Faking it, or performing, was nothing new to Dylan's act: when he was twenty years old, he would try singing in the balladeer's voice of an old man. Born and raised in a middle-class Minnesota family, such a voice was nothing if not a performance. Considering the trickster and performer character of Dylan, how do we understand the "protest folk" tunes that also characterize his mythic persona? Is the Dylan that wrote and sang "The Death of Emmett Till" on an earlier album the real Dylan, or Dylan the master performer? Is the Dylan who belted out "Hurricane" during the Rolling Thunder Revue and told the story of the wrongfully imprisoned boxer Rubin Carter the same Dylan who had a penchant for the ancient Egyptian goddess "Isis"?

As the 1970s eased into the next decade, Dylan released three albums that at their core expressed his love for Christ: *Slow Train Coming* (1979), *Saved* (1980), and *Shot of Love* (1981). This hardly endeared him to fans in love with Dylan as countercultural rebel. But, in fact, if the heartland of America is where the people's music really comes from, then it is also a contentious arena for gospel music. Gospel finds its roots in the Black Church where devotees pour their heart and soul into their music. For those of us living in the twenty-first century, too, our popular imagination cannot help but call forth images of Pentecostal believers overtaken and possessed by the spirit of Christ moving in them and through the music. Moviegoers taking in Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis* (2022) biopic would probably agree that the heightened tension in that church revival tent was just what kicked a young Elvis into the future musician he would become, opening the door to contemporary music in America. So, in short, I do not think that Dylan ever had a "conversion" per se that led to songs focused on his love for Christ and deepening the gospel sound in his work. Dylan was always a devoted trailblazer, and every genre he has explored has taken him back to the power of music and its roots in the people. We can see that in the way he puts his whole body and soul into performing—thoroughly performing, we might say—"Saved."

Bob Dylan's recently authored book, *Philosophy of Modern Songs* (2022), allows us to grasp ever more clearly just what he has always aimed to do in his work. He draws a line of influence directly back through Chuck Berry and Uncle Dave Macon. He talks about heavy metal music performances alongside the bluegrass music of the Osborne Brothers. Never focusing solely on one endpoint or allowing himself to erect fixed hierarchies or categories, Dylan talks freely about folk music, gospel, country music, and boogie woogie. Dylan's tendency to look to the past and for the roots of music traditions may be conservative, but it is also strikingly progressive. To quote the words of the nineteenth-century poet Walt Whitman, whom Dylan himself quotes, "I contain multitudes." This expansive sense of the American self, that "I" as "we," is part of a long tradition in music and literature. In this way, Dylan adopts a stance rarely seen in today's bitterly divided America, one that bridges rifts and fuses oppositions. Ever a dynamic presence in American culture, Dylan continues to transcend his own myth while sustaining belief in the unifying power of *our* song.