

BOB DYLAN

'DYLAN' FROM PAGE 14
a stronger voice than anyone expected. The repertoire drew from all periods of Dylan's career, but there were also many songs from recent albums, including his current single, 'When the Night Comes Falling', which received an inspiring treatment, due largely to the presence of four black backup vocalists who were particularly prominent on the gospel-oriented songs.

By the time Dylan and his 47-person circus reached Sydney, the shows should have been sizzling, but the first shows were painful to listen to because of an appalling sound mix. As the week progressed the sound improved, Mark Knopfler got up and played a few solos, and a night later Stevie Nicks joined Dylan and Petty for 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door', later describing the five minutes as "one of the greatest experiences of my life."

But one thing that the current version of Bob Dylan isn't is the angry, politically astute figure who wrote songs that became anthems for any number of organisations and movements espousing a variety of causes. When I asked Dylan about his politics he stared back at me from behind his dark sunglasses.

"Well I never had any politics, I'm still searching for some," he said. "Maybe one of these days I'll run into

some that make sense to me but at the moment I don't even know what politics are, to tell you the truth."

While thinking to myself that this is a load of garbage, I suggest that if nothing else Dylan's association with Live Aid and the Farm Aid benefit are a case of him taking a stance on certain political issues. "It might be," he said, with a wry smile. "I don't know what politics it would be other than everybody is affected by the farm crisis, so it transcends politics, I think."

"You see I'm not into politics. I'll tell you why I'm not into politics. Because you're voting for somebody you trust the guy you're voting for, that's why you vote for him. You trust the guy. Anything he wants to do, if you trust him it doesn't matter what he does because you're going to agree with what he does anyway."

"But the people who run in politics, they run on issues — what they would do on certain issues, so you don't ever have a chance to know the man, do you know what I mean? If you meet someone that you think is okay, you'll go all the way with that person, right or wrong you're going to go all the way, but if he's just talking about what he's going to do to keep the bar open till after two o'clock or whatever, that's just an issue. The guy could be a real dog and say he'll do all these things for you."

Dylan said that the problems currently facing farmers in America are the result of "the system, where corporations grow the food": "Farmers have gotten to be businessmen. You see,

they've turned farmers into businessmen. But when you're talking about food you're not talking about shoes or appliances or automobiles — you're talking about something that people need to survive. I don't really know if it's a real crisis yet. I know the supermarkets still got their shelves pretty much stocked. It's more a crisis of who's got the money to buy the food."

Returning to the 1974 tour with the Band, I reminded Dylan of something that critic Greil Marcus had written. He'd suggested that the concerts then showed that all Dylan wanted to be was like Elvis Presley, an ageing cabaret-styled performer crooning out predictable versions of his hits to adoring and unquestioning audiences. "Well that's kind of funny, because Greil ... what's his name, never asked me about that," said Dylan. "You know what happened to Elvis — he's dead and I don't want to be like that at all. No I never wanted to be like Elvis."

Dylan did admit to listening to a lot of Elvis when he was younger and at the press conference said that one of the highlights of his career was when Presley recorded one of his songs. What other versions of his songs had he found exciting or exceptional? "I thought Diana Ross did a nice version of 'Forever Young,'" he said. (But was he serious? Subsequent attempts to trace that version have failed!) "That group from Nashville, Jason and the Scorchers, did kind of an interesting version of a song of mine [Absolutely Sweet Marie] from one of

the albums back."

Most praise was for Jimi Hendrix's version of 'All Along the Watchtower', and Dylan claimed he hadn't heard the bootlegged version of Bruce Springsteen singing 'I Want You', and wasn't going to be into making observations about Springsteen. He was reluctant to talk about his other activities in Australia and wouldn't be drawn out on the recording he was doing in Sydney between concerts.

Soon after arriving, Dylan, Petty, the Heartbreakers, Stevie Nicks and Dylan's four backup singers went into Festival Records' studio and with Petty producing, recorded a new song of Dylan's (reportedly finished at his Sydney hotel), 'Band of the Hand', the theme song for an unspecified movie.

There's also a film being made of the tour. The fifth and sixth Sydney concerts are being recorded, and filmed by Gillian Armstrong of *My Brilliant Career* fame. "That'll be for a film for national television in the States, and probably other parts of the world," said Dylan, less than enthusiastically. "I picked Gillian because she was really excited about the project and she's such a competent film maker."

Surely she was picked for better reasons than that, there being dozens of "competent" film makers in the world. "I wouldn't exactly say there's dozens," Dylan muttered.

According to Dylan the film may or may not be shot in black and white, and it may or may not include footage shot at locations other than the Sydney

Entertainment Centre. For someone who traditionally likes to maintain such control over what is released under his name, Dylan was remarkably unconcerned about the format of the film: "We're playing the live shows and we're on a tour and it's too much to be travelling around and be involved in making a film," he said.

In a great interview with *Spin* magazine recently, Dylan gave a list of people from history he'd most like to have interviewed. They included Hank Williams, Apollinaire, Joseph from the Bible, Marilyn Monroe, John F Kennedy, Mohammed, and Paul, the Apostle. I told Dylan about seeing a forum in New York where Lou Reed stood up and said he'd just gotten chills down his spine because he'd just shook the hand of someone he admired — James Brown. Dylan's response to being asked if there was anyone who would have that effect on him was both flippant and revealing of his concerns these days:

"Well, there's a guy sitting over at the table over there who I'd really like to meet," he said. "His name's Marty Feldman, he's my accountant. Yeah, I think I'd find it pretty exciting shakin' his hand."

A surprise inclusion in the live concerts has been Dylan's song about Lenny Bruce. As the song suggests, they did catch a cab together once: "Yeah, I saw him perform in the early 60s, around 1963, before he got caught up in all that legal stuff. He's someone who's never really been attributed the respect that they deserve for what they did and the influence they had on so many people."

Guys like Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy, they owe such a huge debt to him but no one makes the same fuss about him as they do about all those other guys that died before they shoulda."

The Dylan who carried a suitcase full of books with him on his 1978 Australasian tour now says he doesn't read much. He did however enjoy Pete Townshend's new book. "I don't read a whole lot. I go through periods when I may read. I may read some kind of stuff more than other stuff."

There are no plans for any further writing other than songs, and there will be no follow-up to his 1966 novel *Tarantula*. "That was just a chapter in my life and there's only one chapter," he said.

The day of the interview I'd bought a copy of the Irish writer Brendan Behan's reminiscences of New York. The preface was: "To America, My new-found land. The man that hates you, hates the human race." I asked Dylan if he agreed with the sentiments. "That's kinda putting it a bit strongly," he said. "It's the kind of country where if you don't like where you're living or what you're doing, then you can always move on someplace else."

At this point Mr Roberts tells me that time's up, and that he and Bob are going to have a drink. I stay seated at the table, figuring they'll go to the bar.

"And we're staying here," said Roberts.

"Does that mean you're telling me to get lost?" I ask.

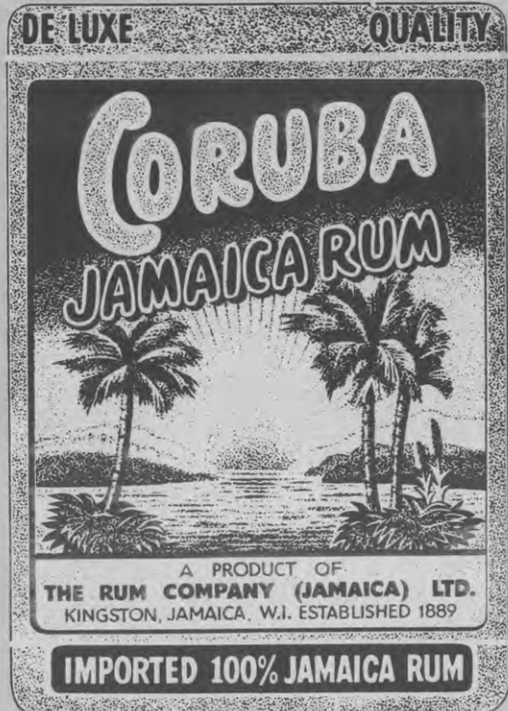
"I wasn't going to put it quite like that," he replied.

I think maybe I'll go climb Mt Everest.

Stuart Coupe

Do da Coruba.

One taste is all it takes.



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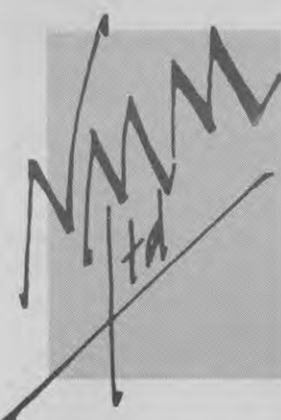
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