

Mind Out of Time

The Seven Ages of Bob

By Mark Zepezauer

On the occasion of *Love and Theft*, Bob Dylan's 30th studio album in 40 years (not counting *Dylan*, the unauthorized outtake collection) it seems an appropriate time to reflect on Bob's life and his effect on American culture—and vice versa. Suffice it to say that the new album will give you much to chew on. The arrangements continue to reflect Bob's estrangement from contemporary life, with nods to the '30s, '40s and '50s, while the words show a mixture of disillusionment and wisdom earned in 60 years on the planet. Bob's voice now sounds like he's about 100 years old, but that seems only fair, since he sounded like he was 60 when he was 20.

Folkie Bob, 1961-1965

American Life: America emerges from the Eisenhower years and McCarthyism. Many embrace the idealism of the Kennedys; nascent anti-war and civil rights movements appear. The newfound exuberance is then shattered by the assassination of JFK.

Bob's Life: Young Robert Zimmerman, who trained for rock stardom by emulating Little Richard, emerges from the sticks and reinvents himself as Bob Dylan, tapping in to the hip folk music scene in Greenwich Village, telling audacious tall tales about his life on the road as an orphaned hobo child. He arrives at the hospital bed of his stricken idol Woody Guthrie, then astonishes everyone, including himself, with his preternatural songwriting skills.

Masterpieces: "Blowin' in the Wind," "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall," "Chimes of Freedom."

Embarrassments: *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, album cover and title.

Electric Bob, 1965-1968

American Life: LBJ unleashes the dogs of hell on Southeast Asia. Riots erupt in the inner cities, protests over Vietnam and other issues proliferate. Baby Boom generation turns on to marijuana and LSD, flirts with rejection of consumer culture.



Bob's Life: Bob blows everybody away again by reinventing rock music, combining its emotional power with the lyrical maturity of classic folk and blues. Swept up into superstardom, Bob indulges his wicked sense of humor as well as a mean streak. He turns the Beatles on to pot and is turned on by their music at the same time. In the space of 16 months, he delivers perhaps the finest three albums in a row of any comparable artist. Then Bob crashes his motorcycle and nearly kills himself.

Masterpieces: "Like a Rolling Stone," "Subterranean Homesick Blues," "Visions of Johanna."

Embarrassments: Various snotty and arrogant comments.

Country Bob, 1968-1974

American Life: More assassinations and more widespread rioting. The right-wing backlash puts Nixon in the White House and FBI infiltrators into the anti-war and civil rights movements. The national weirdness then escalates to a crescendo with the end of the Vietnam War and the fall of Nixon.

Bob's Life: Bob recuperates in upstate New York, begins writing quieter and more soft-spoken music, anticipating new strains

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