

TODO

Austin

*"You've been with
the professors
And they've all
liked your looks"*

Living
in the Age
of Dylan

Living In the Age of Bob Dylan

By Gavin Lance Garcia

In this golden age when American popular culture is a worldwide culture, Bob Dylan is in many ways its *fons et origo* (its spring and source). "It's an immense privilege to live at the same time as this genius," states British literary critic and former Oxford Professor of Poetry, Christopher Ricks.

On the eve of his August 16th concert date in Austin—a community which has adopted Dylan as one of its own—TODO Austin has invited three American scholars to reflect on Dylan's wide cultural impact.

One sure sign of Dylan's influence is that all three scholars, a noted University of Texas at Austin English professor and poet, a UT MacArthur fellow who studies ancient Greek culture and the human response, including song, to war and violence, and a Harvard professor who is the world's foremost authority on the Roman poet Virgil and the later influence of classical literature and culture, include Dylanology among their prime areas of interest.

Into Exile with Bob Dylan: Rome to the Black Sea

By Richard Thomas

Back on December 5, 2004, "60 Minutes" Ed Bradley asked Bob Dylan where a song like the 1965 masterpiece "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" came from. Dylan came across as genuinely puzzled as the rest of us. "I don't know how I got to write those songs," he replied, seemingly at peace with the mystery of it all. "I did it once," he added, "and I can do other things now. But, I can't do that."

"Bringing It All Back Home," "Highway 61 Revisited" and "Blonde On Blonde" came out in the fourteen electrically charged, "thin wild mercury" musical months right before Dylan's 25th birthday, between March 1965 and May 1966. Once we heard them, nothing was the same; everything else retreated to the shadows. Dylan changed too, but as he said, he went on to do "other things."

Flashing forward past many of those things to three days before the September 11, 2001 release of "Love and Theft," we find Dylan talking to the Italian paper *La Repubblica* in Rome—the place matters. "My songs are all singable," he says at one point. "They're current. Something doesn't have to just drop out of the air yesterday to be current." How further back than yesterday becomes clear in another part of the exchange: "You've got the Golden Age, which I guess would be the Age of Homer." He then runs through the Silver, Bronze and present Iron Age, the Greco-Roman equivalents of Eden and the Fall, found in the Greek poet Hesiod, and in the Roman poet Virgil. The interviewer gets none of what is going on.

"Lonesome Day Blues" turned out to have a few lines from Virgil's epic on empire, the "Aeneid," the singer, like Aeneas, sparing the defeated, teaching peace to the people, taming the proud. Huck Finn is also there, along with the Japanese gangster novel, "Confessions of a Yakuza." The whole album, its very title stolen, is now seen to be full of literary allusions and intertexts.

From Osaka, Japan to Oslo, Norway, from Rio de Janeiro to the Rubber Bowl in Akron, Ohio, from Istanbul to the Isle of Wight, Dylan has performed his unique distillation of American musical traditions. His music transcends time and place and crosses cultural boundaries. Around the world and up and down Highway 35, Dylan remains the most important artist alive today, "anywhere and in any field," to quote England's Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion.

I had the honor of presenting the key to the City of Austin to Dylan on February 24, 2002, Bob Dylan Day. In our short visit, Dylan expressed then to the mayor pro-tem and me how happy he was to have been made an honorary Texan by the previous Governor.

Welcome, home, Bob. **T**

And so it emerged that one of the other things Dylan can do, good Jack of Hearts that he is, is steal. "Immature poets imitate," wrote T. S. Eliot in 1920, thinking mostly of himself; "mature poets steal . . . The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it is torn . . . A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest."

The sort of theft on "Lonesome Day Blues" makes the song timeless, universal, and literary, though Dylan's cowboy band and his menacing "I'm gonna tame the proud" keep it out of the library stacks and on the streets. What might have seemed a Vietnam era song — "My brother got killed in the war" — becomes through its intertexts a song for all time and for all wars: Virgil's and Twain's civil wars, and the Chinese-Japanese War of "Confessions" — not unlike how the absence of time and place helps make "Masters Of War" the greatest and most undying of all anti-war songs.

This creative and allusive writing is not really new. One of Dylan's very first original songs, "Bob Dylan's Dream" did the same with "Lord Franklin" (aka "Lady Franklin's Lament") mixing in other traditional songs, maybe picked up at Izzy Young's Folklore Center soon after Dylan arrived in the Village. But "Love and Theft" is different; it looks outside its own genre, to "authors remote in time, or alien in language."

Where was Dylan on June 1 of this year? Maybe between Istanbul (5/31) and Bucharest (6/2) he went to Constanta, Romania, to see a statue of the Roman poet Ovid, exiled there by the emperor Augustus in 8 CE, perhaps for seeing or hearing something he shouldn't have. Here Ovid spent the rest of his days, "in the last outback, at the world's end," as he put it in Peter Green's translation of "Black Sea Letters."

That of course is also Dylan in the final line of "Ain't Talkin'," the final song of "Modern (get it?) Times," what sounded at the time like a final album. This turns out to be one of more than 20 of the Roman poet's lines, spread across "Spirit On The Water," "Workingman's Blues #2," "The Levee's Gonna Break" and "Ain't Talkin'" (see <http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/22i/Thomas.pdf>). There are none on "Thunder On The Mountain," though there Dylan does give us a tell-tale sign: "I've been sittin' down studyin' the art of love" (Ovid also wrote the *Ars Amatoria* "Art of Love"). If Dylan can visit the childhood home of Neil Young, why not a statue in Ovid's place of exile?

With Ovid, Dylan steals successfully, his settings much changed as Eliot wanted. Ovid is talking to the emperor: "My cause is better: no-one can claim that I ever took up arms against you"; the singer of *Workingman's Blues #2* is talking to a lover, mysterious and vague though she be: "No-one can ever claim / That I took up arms against you." Ovid also addressed his wife, back in Rome: "May the gods grant ... / that I'm wrong in thinking you've forgotten me!" Dylan's lover is back in time: "Tell me now, am I wrong in thinking / That you have forgotten me?"

And hanging over it all is Ovid in exile, a backdrop that works for Dylan, off into northern exile himself in "Highlands" and "Thunder On The Mountain," and in inner exile from the very beginning of it all. He has shared that inner exile with those who have sailed into it with him over the years, giving us words and songs that matter across space and time, that remain "current." In the famous December 3, 1965 San Francisco press conference the poet is asked about his role. The response, "my role is to stay here as long as I can," is deadly serious. That he has done that now for half a century has been a gift beyond belief. I wish I was in Dixie, in The Backyard, come August 4! **T**

David Gahr SONY/BMG MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT



A Classical Bard Brings It All Back Home

By Tom Palaima

"Everybody movin' if they ain't already there / Everybody got to move somewhere" -Bob Dylan, "Mississippi," Love and Theft (2001) © 1997 by Special Rider Music

"I was young when I left home / But I been out a-ramblin' 'round And I never wrote a letter to my home" -Bob Dylan, "I Was Young When I Left Home," performed in Bonnie Beecher's Minneapolis apartment (December 1961) © 2005 by Special Rider Music

"I pity the poor immigrant / Who wishes he would've stayed home" -Bob Dylan, "I Pity the Poor Immigrant," John Wesley Harding (1967) © 1968 by Dwarf Music; renewed 1996 Dwarf Music

"There's a lonesome freight at 6.08 coming through the town, / And I feel like I just want to travel on" -Bob Dylan, "Gotta Travel On," Self Portrait (1970) performed in Karen Wallace's St. Paul, MN apartment May, 1960, copyright by folksinger Paul Clayton

"As I travel on life's pathway / Know not what the years may hold As I ponder, hope grows fonder / precious mem'ries flood my soul" -Bob Dylan, "Precious Memories," Knocked Out Loaded

(1986) composed ca. 1935 Aunt Molly Jackson

"But me, I'm still on the road / Headin' for another joint" -Bob Dylan, "Tangled Up in Blue," Blood on the Tracks (1975) © 1974 by Ram's Horn Music; renewed 2002 by Ram's Horn Music

"I wouldn't change it, even if I could / You know what they say man, it's all good" -Bob Dylan, "It's All Good," Together Through Life (2009) © 2009 by Special Rider Music and Ice-Nine Publishing

The cover on Bob Dylan's latest CD, aptly titled, for longtime Dylan fans, "Together Through Life" (2009), uses the magic of a black-and-white photograph from Bruce Davidson's 1959 Brooklyn Gang series to take us back fifty years to the starting point of Dylan's career. Davidson's camera has us in the front seat of a big old sedan. We crane our necks to look at a young couple making out in the back seat as the car moves down a divided four-lane highway.

The photo puts us out on the road, right where most of us, as descendants of immigrants or immigrants ourselves, want or

need to be. Our American heroes, old and new, have to move, have to go, have to explore the unknown, face new realities, dream new dreams, confront new and old problems, meet strange faces, try to discover who and what and why they, and we, are. They are loners, by choice or by necessity, and they come to terms with their aloneness each and every day. Just close your eyes and listen in your mind to Dylan's early hero Hank Williams sing of the lonesome whippoorwill, time crawling by through too long a night, a tearfully disconsolate moon, a weeping robin, and a lone falling star in a purple sky. In four magical stanzas, Williams gives voice to how it feels when "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry."

Songsters in the big and heterogeneous American popular musical tradition, of which Dylan is arguably the greatest active student and practitioner these last fifty years, also know that we can journey without putting the key in the ignition or taking a single step. Songs and thoughts and memories take us on trips. When "there is no place (we're) goin' to," we can be "disappearin' through the smoke rings of (our) mind(s)," as Dylan puts it in "Mr. Tambourine Man." We can move by talking, as Dylan sings on

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Dylan's Turkish Delights

By Kurt Heinzelman

To some, that Monday, the 31st of May, was a day of infamy. Israeli commandos had raided a flotilla, taking humanitarian aid to the blockaded Gaza Strip. To others, the evening's performance at Istanbul's Cemil Topuzlu Open Air Theatre could not come soon enough. It was Bob Dylan's second live performance in Istanbul, the first in nearly 21 years. Tickets were expensive by Turkish standards. Still, the concert sold out almost instantly.

By the next day, Turkey, the strongest supporter of Israel in the region and the benefactor of so much Israeli investment that parts of modern Istanbul in its northern hills, far from the remnants of Constantinople, resemble high-rise Houston, had withdrawn its ambassador and asked the UN Security Council to follow with its own censure. A crowd tried to storm the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul. All the city's synagogues and temples were under police guard. A huge demonstration was planned for Taksim Square, the Turkish equivalent of Red Square, not far from where the Dylan concert had been in Harbiye.

The amphitheatre sky was crepuscular; the overflow audience, orderly, excited, of every age but largely Turkish, were almost seated when the concert began promptly at 9 P.M. with that fulsome, formulaic introduction that Dylan uses now—citing his rise out of folk roots to rock-and-roll mastery to the drugged-out, then busted, then born-again celebrity who has at last become, since the 90s, the best song writer in the American

canon. Then the "Listen up, y'all" drum crash of "Rainy Day Women #12 and 35," a precise translation of "Hwaet," the first word of "Beowulf," and the lights flared up but with no immediately visible Bob, only the slightly spot lit guitarist, Austinite Charlie Sexton, center-stage. At the keyboard, stage-left, Dylan emerged from the shadows, only slowly—coat of black, striped pants, bolero, and flat-brimmed Western hat. Although the play-list for the concert claimed that Dylan played guitar on several songs, if he did, it was for the sake of appearance only. Musically, he was most prevalent on the harp and keyboard, as in the decidedly melodic rendition of the second song, "Lay, Lady, Lay."

It was a very musical concert, one of the most timbred in recent years. Ezra Pound, one of Dylan's mentors, famously proclaimed, "make it new," a dictum that doesn't mean "innovate from scratch" but "take what's old and recharge it," the way Dylan does with Howlin' Wolf in "Cat's in the Well" or with Willie McTell in Bob's eponymous ballad, or with, of all people, Bing Crosby in "When the Deal Goes Down." But what Dylan does most brilliantly in concert is to make new his own songs, changing rhythms, key signatures, and words, sometimes leaving them almost unrecognizable from the album version. On this night, "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" came off as almost a waltz. Some nights, however, these changes can be quite grating.

But not on this Istanbul night. The highlight was when the 4-man band launched into "Just Like a Woman" with Dylan center stage. Dylan is notorious for not talking to the audience: he explains nothing; he engages in no chatter; he exits after the encore with a grandly thrown kiss, but with no word of thanks. He is also always the only singer. Suddenly, though, in this song, when the band got to the refrain line, "just like a woman," the audience, overwhelmingly Turkish, shouted it out. In English. To the immense credit of the band, who spent the whole evening with eyes glued to the Meister himself to see how he was going to riff a stanza, stopped playing each time thereafter that the refrain line came around, and we were all rewarded with an unexpected (in the Middle East, at least) Sixties-era singalong, cell phones engraving the dark arena as Bic lit the night like candles. Joan Baez (who has played Istanbul several times) would have been proud.

By the end of the concert, Joan's diamonds-and-rust kid, now 69 years old, was in full grin, having obviously enjoyed himself. A crescent moon, like the one on the Turkish flag, had pierced the cypresses, and the echoes of the antepenultimate anthem, "Masters of Wars," were wringing justice from the stars as we exited to the next day's turmoil and its youth-driven demonstrations. **T**



30TH ANNUAL TEJANO MUSIC AWARDS: DO YOU WANNA TEJANO?

By Bowen Wilder

The red carpet was rolled out in the Alamo City on July 11 to celebrate the biggest names and talents in Tejano music. The 30th Annual Tejano Music Awards brought out fans who waited hours in the blistering hot sun through the afternoon in hopes of autographs, pictures, or to catch a glimpse of their favorite Tejano musicians and celebrities in attendance. Elida Reyna, Jay Perez, Michael Salgado, Veronica Sustaita and the entire Quintanilla family were just a few of the industry staples who excited the crowd at the sold-out event.

Local Austin favorites Ruben Ramos, AJ Castillo and Los Texas Wranglers were nominated for awards, with Castillo walking away with the prize for Best New Male Artist. Special tribute was paid to Selena featuring Girl in a Coma performing a punk rock version of “Si Una Vez,” complimented by David Archuleta of American Idol fame performing a personalized version of “Como La Flor.” Another highlight saw the Texas Talent Musicians Association (TTMA) bestow upon La Mafia a lifetime achievement award for 30 years of entertainment.

During a performance tribute of their signature songs, La Mafia was joined by none other than the “Garth Brooks of Tejano Music,” Emilio. After two years of rehabilitation from a life-threatening car crash, Emilio’s first public performance produced many a moist tissue, and received a standing ovation.

Even so, some fans were less interested in Tejano music and more interested in getting David Archuleta to sign a copy of his new book, “Chords of Strength.” The presence of renowned film director Robert Rodriguez (Predators) and Mexican-American actor Danny Trejo (Machete) sparked increased interest among the crowd. From the pre-show red carpet walk, a majority of artists milled about in relative anonymity. The question on many lips was whether Tejano music’s popularity is in a steady declining and what is next for the genre after a decade and a half of market issues.

“San Antonio is the epicenter of Tejano music,” declared Paul Rodriguez, acclaimed Latin American actor, comedian, and this year’s host of the Awards. The Alamo City is considered the Nashville of Tejano Music and has loyally hosted the event for 28 of the last 30 years. However, the future of Tejano music is contingent upon the fans that have been noticeably thinning over the recent years. “Seven years ago the Tejano Music Awards were selling out the Alamodome,” explains Tejano fan Maria Vasquez. “Now the venue is smaller and only a handful of people attend.”

Vasquez traveled from Austin with her husband, José, and spent \$60 per ticket to enjoy the show in as intimate a way as possible. Maria and José are die-hard fans, but their enthusiasm is lost on their children. They blame the growing popularity of new genres of popular music such as Spanish Rap and strong Mexican musical influences for stealing their children’s interest away from Tejano Music. Those who are a part of the industry have noticed changes too.

Jacinto Casas, a local guitar player in a conjunto band, explained that Tejano music is and always has been a male-dominated genre. The first and most prominent woman to break through this paradigm successfully was “The Queen of Tejano Music,” Selena Quintanilla Perez. After her untimely death, Selena’s fans’ unwavering appreciation and respect for her talent has resulted in an archetype, forcing aspiring female artists to wear shoes that they can never fill. Selena’s creative originality in some ways has stifled her fans desire for new female talent. Nonetheless, the industry has not stopped attempting to rekindle Tejano fans’ love for new and young talent.

The apparent dwindling fan base is disconcerting to many die-hard Tejano fans and musicians, but their unwavering optimism and desire to embrace the past while looking to the future will hopefully overcome this small blight in the genre’s history, and ensure another 30 years of Tejano music to celebrate.

lives: “I could tell he was very lonesome, very alone and very lost out in his time.”

Davidson’s Brooklyn Gang photos freeze the kinds of images that social-realism films, like “Blackboard Jungle” with Glenn Ford (1955) or “The Wild One” with Marlon Brando (1953), gave the young Bob Dylan, and still give us. Those films portray restless youths setting out, striking out, rebelling, defying the static status quo, as if by some kind of biological imperative inherited from their parents on shorter or taller immigrant family trees. As Brando’s motorcycle-gang character replies in “The Wild One,” when asked, “Hey, Johnny, What are you rebelling against?” “What’ve you got?”

The music on “Together Through Life” has the inventive and spontaneous quality of a Chess Records session, of blues or conjunto musicians out on their back-road and wrong-side-of-the tracks circuits playin’ with and for different locals every night. And Dylan in concert follows the ways of wandering troubadours in the Middle Ages, whose very name means they have to ‘find’ or ‘invent’ new ways of realizing their distinctive songs each and every night.

In 1959, Dylan, a high school senior himself, was heading out and confronting some of life’s hard realities and big questions. On January 31 of that year at the Duluth Armory, Dylan heard

ESCOVEDO SCORES WITH “STREET SONGS OF LOVE”

By Paul Anthony



photo by Marina Chavez

Hot as he is in the great Lone Star State, Alejandro Escovedo continues to prove to music fans across the world that he is an artist whose creativity increases with time. It’s no wonder then that he’s attracted an all-star lineup of collaborators on his newest release, “Street Songs of Love.” Tony Visconti and Bob Clearmountain produced the album and Chuck Prophet contributed to the compositions with no less than Bruce Springsteen joining in on “Faith,” with Ian Hunter adding vocals to “Down in the Bowery.” “Street Songs of Love” scored the highest chart debut of Escovedo’s career, placing at number one on Billboard’s

Heatseeker, and # 93 on their top 200 album chart. Discussing his relationship with “The Boss” and what it was like working with him on the song “Faith,” Escovedo remarked, “I love Bruce. It was wonderful working with him. I’ve known him for a couple of years. I know that he used to play my music on the tapes that he would play before shows, music by Rank & File, the True Believers and some of my solo stuff. He’s been so supportive. He’s a measure of greatness to try to live up to.” On July 23, the Boss in fact joined Escovedo and band onstage in Asbury Park, N.J. for three songs.

on Woody Guthrie” in 1963, four years before Woody’s death, Dylan pushed himself out on his own long and unique road of discovery, invention and re-invention.

As Dylan comes to town now he has been for more than twenty years on what his fans, full of hope, call The Never Ending Tour. He is now in the days of 69 as we reckon life in human years. He is playing again with Charlie Sexton, the latest in a series of Austin-based musicians, like Denny Freeman and Doug Sahm, with whom he chooses to play.

Dylan has, in the songs he sings and those he writes, dreamed of Columbus’s three ships a-sailin’ his way and of longing for old friends “while riding on a train going west.” He has been on horseback with Black Jack Davey, out on the trail of the buffalo, and with Pancho in the desert down in Mexico. He has been seen riding in a buggy in Baltimore with Miss Mary Jane. And he has used all eight carburetors despite being short on gas.

We are lucky to have been along through all these rides and luckier still that he is bringing it all back home to us right in our own Backyard.

(For Tom Palaima’s other writings on music and Bob Dylan go to: <http://www.utexas.edu/research/pasp/publications/dylan/dylana.html>)

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“Together Through Life,” to our own forgetful hearts, or trying to “remember the sound of (our) own name(s).” For as Willie Nelson reminds us, too, “still is still movin’.”

And we can be moved by our imagination. In Davidson’s photo, we could be in a car with Jack Kerouac in the early 50’s. Or it could be December, 1960. We could be riding with Bob Dylan in Fred Underhill’s car, heading east from Madison, Wisconsin to New York City, aiming to visit his idol and icon and biggest early role model, Woody Guthrie, at Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital in northeast New Jersey.

Until the inherited disorder of the nervous system known as Huntington’s chorea permanently institutionalized Guthrie during the last 13 years of his life, he was the quintessential hard traveler. During the Great Depression and into the 1940’s, Guthrie was out on the roads singing of and among the faceless and nameless people most of us are and certainly all of us, but a chosen few, eventually become.

Dylan paid homage to Guthrie’s wandering ways in his early-60’s “Song for Woody.” But, like Hank Williams, Guthrie and his music stirred Dylan to face the existential question we all face in our shallowly rooted and ever-changing American

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