

King Bob Approximately--Michael's Rock and Roll Posse

I have seen Dylan now for 6 shows, ranging from among the best concerts ever (with Van Morrison in 1998) to this week at the scrumptious Bayou Music Center, which I confess was among the most disappointing concerts I have attended, relative to my (unfair) expectations. I appreciate that these extraordinarily gifted musicians we love have such deep playbooks that they could play for years without ever repeating a song. And he plays over 100 shows a year, and Van plays even more. It must get old being so prolific and still playing “Yesterday,” “Pinball Wizard,” “Sounds of Silence,” “Masterblaster,” “Respect,” “Satisfaction,” “Gloria,” “Down by the River” night after night, city after city, tour after tour. And some performers are very idiosyncratic and can show disdain for their audience—most notably Miles David and sometimes Van Morrison—but others as well. And it no doubt reveals my low-brow sensibilities to complain, but I would have ranked only “Tangled Up in Blue” as among his great songs of the 18 in his show. (He performed an encore with “Blowin' in the Wind” and a cover of the Sinatra “Stay With Me.”) And I love Sinatra, even as rasped by Dylan—the oddest juxtaposition of styles and singing diction I can imagine.

But face facts: by 1970, he had written “Don't Think Twice, It's Alright,” “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” “Maggie's Farm,” “Like A Rolling Stone,” “Positively 4th Street,” “Queen Jane Approximately,” “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35,” “I Want You,” “Just Like A Woman,” “All Along The Watchtower,” “Lay Lady Lay,” and dozens more of the best songs ever written and performed. He did not play one of them last night. He did play “Tangled Up in Blue,” a true gem, and I was even happy he had reconceptualized it and sang it in a completely different style and cadence. (As he did for the encore “Blowin' in the Wind.”) But Tangled Up and other great later songs (including “Pay In Blood” and “Simple Twist of Fate”) do not reveal the unparalleled glory of his first decade or constitute a fair bargain with his audience. He could do half and half with rarities and classics, or old and new, but this was not even the mix from the last two times we saw him, in San Antonio where he stole “All Along the Watchtower” back from Hendrix, and in Albuquerque with Willie Nelson and John Mellencamp, where about a third of the songs were his best. (I think of how many joints I would have had to confiscate if it had been in Vet's Memorial.) And, perhaps most memorably, I saw him in The Traveling Wilburys, which allowed me to see George Harrison, so I saw three of the Beatles, even if serially.

I am hardly a novice at these (I have attended over 300 shows in my day), and can tell you almost every one in detail, and the best 25-30 are replaying in my mind regularly. I confess, however, that this was probably my last Dylan concert, and it did not end on a high note—either figuratively or literally.

I also know these guys are in their 70's, or will be soon. But contrast his practice and choices with those of Pete Townsend, who says in this week's *Rolling Stone*: "But with respect to the Who, there's no question that when I do this, it makes a lot of people happy, and that's where I look for my fulfillment. Doing a job that I find easy, that I seem to do very well, despite my age, comes back to me. I occasionally catch fire, and people like it." I end by conceding that these shows certainly have made me happy, notwithstanding. Off to grade papers and read galley sheets.

Michael
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The interesting Townsend interview is at:

<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/whos-done-pete-townshends-ambivalent-farewell-20150507#ixzz3ZUb7JMLA>

Here is the unofficial Dylan setlist, from the incredibly useful website Setlist.com:

<http://www.setlist.fm/setlist/bob-dylan/2015/bayou-music-center-houston-tx-23c82cbf.html>