

Trouble No More at 14 Pews: Michael's Rock and Roll Posse

One of my favorite, funky movie theaters is 14 Pews, in North Houston, a de-consecrated church with pillows in the pews, owned by an entrepreneurial and transplanted director, Cressandra Thibodeaux. She curates interesting films, leads discussions before and after the showings, handles the house (along with her mother, who hands out free cookies and handles drink and candy sales), and deftly runs the many moving parts. I have no such entrepreneurial zest, but having your own movie theater is a great gig, I have to say. We have seen several other interesting films there, since discovering 14 Pews late in life, after living in Houston since 1982. We saw ***Bombshell***, the movie about zaftig movie siren Hedy Lamarr, who in addition to being touted as the most beautiful and sexiest woman in films, was a skilled tinkerer who invented Spread Spectrum Technology, a means of encrypting wireless transmissions, used for clandestine war battle communications (such as from planes to submarines), among others.

This week, we were in an audience of six watching the hour-long ***Trouble No More***, the Jennifer Lebeau documentary about Bob Dylan's Christian gospel period that produced three albums from 1979-1981: *Slow Train Coming*, *Saved*, and *Shot of Love*. "Gotta Serve Somebody" is one of his greatest songs, one of several that grew from this brief flirtation with Christianity:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CwHby-YTNo> . Trying to pigeonhole his extraordinary and effusive 50+ years career is a fool's errand, so I will simply say that this phase, like his original folk phase, electric phase, Jewish phase, and so on, appears to have been sincere, more for musical provenance than for its religious profundity. After all, rock and roll arose from a fusion of country/gospel/honkytonk/blues, and other influences—apotheosized in Elvis—and many other white rockers have used Black backup singers, as Dylan did here. (Lyle Lovett comes to mind.)

This show was one of many smaller venues he played during this period, and the film was apparently part of a SONY sales production that never was released commercially, although the music appeared in the 2017 Bootleg Tapes series (#13), and now it is making arthouse rounds and will be re-re-released in a Deluxe Edition (not sure of the way to cite this). Perhaps his greatest bandmates (outside The Band) were accompanying him: Jim Keltner, Fred Tackett, Tim Drummond,

and “Spooner” Oldham, the keyboardist who was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a Muscle Shoals sideman.

The only jarring note is the intermittent appearance of actor Michael Shannon as a white fire and brimstone preacher, re-creating old Black sermons, in between the songs. Shannon is a fine actor, having been nominated twice for Academy Awards for Best Supporting Actor (in *Revolutionary Road* and *Nocturnal Animals*), but the sermons seem odd and misplaced in the concert footage, and I assumed it was a caricature until it becomes clear it is being played straight. If I get the Deluxe Edition, I will flash forward during this superfluous part. I would have preferred mumbled interview language by Dylan as to his religious explorations to this framing device, or even a smarmy televangelist. Speaking of which, see the Houston Rapper Slim Thug and megachurch Pastor Joel Osteen project:

https://www.chron.com/entertainment/music/article/Rapper-Slim-Thug-and-Pastor-Joel-Osteen-6386191.php?utm_campaign=email-desktop&utm_source=CMS%20Sharing%20Button&utm_medium=social

There are a number of wonderful if small documentaries coming, notably ones about funk artist Betty

Davis <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/arts/music/betty-davis-they-say-im-different-documentary.html> and

Long Strange Trip, a four hour dip into The Grateful Dead. I guess at 4 hours, it will not be “small,” but I hope to see it at 14 Pews, CCA Cinematheque, or another small movie venue.

Next up: Paul Simon, Toyota Center, June 2.