



# A&E

## A meeting of great movie minds

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**PG 4**



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# Like a prickly stone

Bob Dylan is a legend. When he comes to UMBC expect his performance to be divisive.

By CHRIS KALTENBACH

How does it feel?

Going to a Bob Dylan concert, that is. For sure, few are going to argue the man's bona-fides: rock legend, the voice of a generation, one of the three or four most influential musicians of the 20th century, a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a Nobel laureate. The man's a legend, deservedly so. And at 78, he's still going strong — as part of his current tour, which started Oct. 11 in Irvine, California, he'll be performing at the UMBC Event Center on Nov. 12.

But if there's no denying Dylan's music, there's plenty of dissension when it comes to his live per-

formances. For every fan who adores seeing him live — this, after all, is the man responsible for “Like a Rolling Stone,” “Subterranean Homesick Blues” and “Hurricane,” not to mention “Blowin’ in the Wind” — there seems to be another willing to let the opportunity pass. He doesn't interact with his audience, the complaint goes, he's constantly re-imagining his songs, he won't let the crowd take pictures with their cell phones. Frequently, he won't even let his performance be broadcast onto the venue's overhead TV screens.

“I'm not a huge fan of Dylan anymore,” says Doug Potash, an Annapolis-based wealth adviser who started the Rolling Stones fan page, Shidoobee, on

Facebook. “His voice is gone. For a couple of tours, he wouldn't even play the guitar. And it takes five minutes to realize what song he's doing...People have asked me to go see him, and I'm really not interested anymore.”

Laureen Claggett, 61, who lives in Tacoma, Washington, and works in alternative health care, agrees...to a point. She's seen him in concert four times, most recently three years ago, and probably would forego the chance to see him again. But that, she stresses, doesn't mean she regrets going, or that she wouldn't urge others to.

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# Dylan

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"He's a poet, you know? He's a genius," says Claggett. "People go to concerts for different reasons. Bob Dylan is who he is. He's not gonna be engaging and going 'Rah rah rah!' with the audience. I think that's what a lot of people expected...I appreciate him for what he is. There will never be another."

Even Dylan devotees might admit people like Potash have a point. Dylan's voice, never the most melodic of instruments, is rough. And he does rarely sing one of his songs the same way twice. Want evidence? Listen to this clip of Dylan performing "The Times They Are a-Changin'" at the White House in 2010. His phrasing is different from the song he recorded in 1964, the beat is different, a bassline has been added. His voice is hoarse, cracking at times.

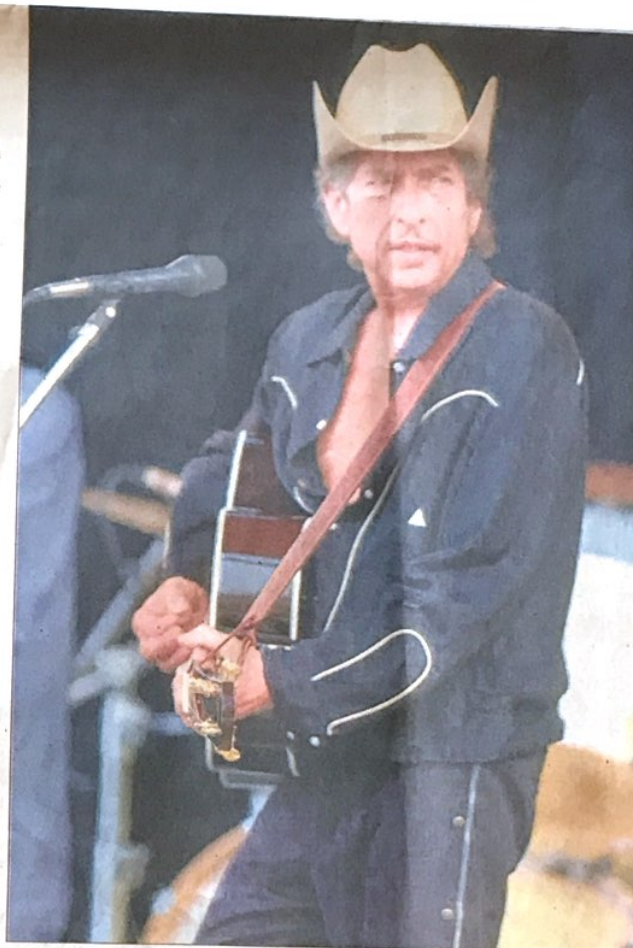
But as President Barack Obama suggested in a later interview with Rolling Stone, the Dylan seen and heard here is the same Dylan who's been a giant on the American cultural scene since his debut record in 1962. "A beautiful rendition," Obama said of the performance. "The guy is so steeped in this stuff that he can just come up with some new arrangement, and the song sounds completely different. Finishes the song, steps off the stage... comes up, shakes my hand, sort of tips his head, gives me just a little grin, and then leaves... That was our only interaction with him. And I thought: That's how you want Bob Dylan, right? You don't want him to be all cheesin' and grinnin' with you. You want him to be a little skeptical about the whole enterprise."

Bob Dylan is Bob Dylan, his songs are his songs and his aura is his aura. For plenty of people, that's enough.

"He is just the way he is, you either accept him or you don't," says Mary M. Truitt, 61, a past life regressionist living in Annapolis who guesses she's seen Dylan around 20 times, and makes no apologies for him as a performer or for her unwavering fandom. "You're in the presence of one of the great geniuses of all time," she says. "Don't pick at him. Let him be who he is. I think it's amazing that he's still out there and people can see him live."

Dean Rosenthal, 62, a musician living in Edgewater who guesses he's seen Dylan perform 30 times or more, agrees. The man is a one-of-a-kind talent, whose songs shaped, chronicled and gave voice to a generation, he says. "You're going and you're seeing this artist create in front of you. I mean, his music is going to live forever. To go and witness that...to me, it's like being where some great painter is painting."

Early word on the current tour sounds promising. In reviewing his Oct. 19 show at Pinnacle Bank Arena in Lincoln, Nebraska, L. Kent Wolgamott in the Lincoln Journal Star called it "the best Dylan show I've seen



KENNETH K. LAM/BALTIMORE SUN 2002 PHOTO

Bob Dylan played the Harley Davidson 100th Anniversary Open Road Tour at Pimlico Race Course.

in a decade, maybe longer." On stage, he wrote, Dylan "was more animated than he's been in many recent local performances." And the set lists for the shows so far, while missing such classics as "Like a Rolling Stone," "Lay Lady Lay," "Mr. Tambourine Man," "Rainy Day Women #12 and 35" (with its "Everybody must get stoned" chorus) and "Tangled Up In Blue," contain plenty of familiar songs from the Dylan canon: "It Ain't Me, Babe," "Simple Twist of Fate," "When I Paint My Masterpiece" and "Ballad of a Thin Man," to name a handful.

Not that you'll necessarily recognize them right away. "Sometimes, you'll get a reggae version of 'Like a Rolling Stone,' or you'll get a rockabilly 'Rolling Stone,' or

you'll get a straightforward, maybe an acoustic one," says Truitt. "You just never know what is going to happen."

Truth to tell, maybe it's refreshing that Dylan doesn't treat his songs like untouchable, unalterable museum pieces, to be taken out occasionally and admired, but my goodness, not to be tinkered with. Maybe it's cool that he's constantly re-imagining his creations, playing with them, seeing if there are other ways of looking at them. Dylan is going to tinker with his songs, even the standards, and for those who aren't fine with that...well, there's always a CD player, turntable or MP3 player around to play the originals.

"He doesn't owe anybody a thing," says

contender, giving Netflix another chance at its first best picture winner.

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COURTESY ROYAL FARMS ARENA

A Baltimore Sun newspaper ad for Bob Dylan's October 1965 concert at the Civic Center, now Royal Farms Arena.

Claggett, and she doesn't mean it as a negative.

Of course, by going to see Bob Dylan in concert, you place yourself in a musical continuum that, around Baltimore at least, goes back well more than half-a-century. He's played the Civic Center, now Royal Farms Arena, multiple times, including October 1965 (when the best tickets were \$4), October 1978 (when the set included "Like a Rolling Stone" and "Blowin' In the Wind," plus a Muddy Waters cover, "I'm Ready") and November 1999. He's played at Pimlico Race Course, Merriweather Post Pavilion, the Towson Center, the old Painter's Music Fair in Owings Mills and Aberdeen's Ripken Stadium.

And after every show, it's a sure bet that people complained about how they didn't recognize "Masters of War" because he'd changed the tempo so dramatically, or that he never really talked to the audience, or that his voice sounded shot. And still, they keep on showing up.

Evelyn Schoenfeld, 56, a school secretary living in Jackson, N.J., will be taking her 20-year-old daughter to see Dylan in New York City later this month. "She said 'Mom, I am so excited to see Bob,'" Schoenfeld writes in an email. "I laughed and said, 'Don't be!' His voice isn't that great, he cannot play instruments as well, but he has a solid, fantastic band and he is legend. It is really exciting to see him. I love him. I love his shows. He really is a great musician and artist."

Allow lifelong fan Truitt the last word. "I just like his presence," she says, assuredly speaking for thousands of her fellow fans. "He's Bob Dylan. He's the greatest."

## If you go

Bob Dylan & his band will be playing the Event Center at UMBC, 1000 Hilltop Circle in Catonsville, at 8 p.m. Nov. 12. Tickets are \$52.50-\$89.50. [umbceventcenter.com](http://umbceventcenter.com).