



# Hard Rain: A Dylan Commentary

By Tim Riley

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Examining over thirty years of Dylan's recordings, films, and live concerts to deliver fresh, and sometimes heretical, judgements of his work, Tim Riley persuasively demonstrates that Bob Dylan is the most important American rock 'n' roller since Elvis. He charts the mercurial shifts of the Dylan persona, from acoustic to electric, and assesses the singer's debt to earlier musicians as well as his influence on such performers as the Byrds, Bruce Springsteen, and Elvis Costello.

Includes a new epilogue that examines Dylan's 30th anniversary celebration and his 1998 Grammy Award comeback.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Riley eloquently but incompletely examines rock legend Bob Dylan's three decades of inconsistent work, bootleg recordings and continuous concerts.

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From Library Journal

Unlike most Dylan books--which are either biographies like Clinton Heylin's *Bob Dylan: Behind the Shades* ( LJ 6/1/91) or lists of some sort--Riley ( *Tell Me Why: A Beatles Commentary* , Knopf, 1988) here provides a critical examination of this thorniest of modern musicians. Riley goes beyond the obvious; for example, Woody Guthrie's influence on Dylan is well documented, but Riley examines not only how Guthrie inspired Dylan but what Dylan does differently from Guthrie and who else falls into his inspirational canon (Robert Johnson, Leadbelly, Hank Williams). Riley knows music, and his descriptions are marvelous, especially of the 1966-75 era ( *Blonde on Blonde* , *The Basement Tapes* , *Planet Waves* , *Blood on the Tracks* , and the 1966 and 1974 tours). He also is thankfully unafraid to be disparaging; unlike Heylin, he has very little that is nice to say about Dylan's post-1975 work. Riley's flaws are mainly stylistic; he tends to repeat himself and has an unfortunate fondness for the word bromide. Still, this is an incisive work. Essential for most music collections.

- *Keith R.A. DeCandido, "Library Journal"*

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From Kirkus Reviews

Riley, author of the best study by far of the Beatles' song catalogue (*Tell Me Why*, 1988), turns now to Bob Dylan--``the most important American rock 'n' roller since Presley"--with impressive, but less consistently persuasive, results. As before, Riley steers clear of biography and simply goes chronologically, album-by-album, song-by-song, through the Dylan oeuvre--including unreleased tracks, bootleg recordings, live concert tapes, and concert films. In fact, unlike most Dylan critics, Riley declines to link the songs to the life, contending (not always convincingly) that Dylan turns his ``intimate trials" into ``public metaphors"--in contrast to ``self-serving," Me- decade types like James Taylor. Throughout, Riley stresses Dylan's humor, the satire implicit in his ``bad" singing, his manipulations of his persona, and his eclectic roots. There's sharp criticism as well as enthusiasm here: *The Times They Are A-Changin'* succumbs to ``folkie social preening and black-and-white moralism"; *Blonde on Blonde* is a ``tour de force of obscurantist rock poetics"; ``I Shall Be Released" is an ``overpraised and overplayed potboiler." Riley applauds Dylan's return to ``roots" in his work with The Band and his country-ish albums but is pretty much appalled by the ``stringent and pious" born-again albums. And, in contrast to many hard-core Dylan-ites, Riley finds little evidence of a revitalized Dylan once his ``slide" begins circa 1978. Not everyone will buy Riley's attempt to view Dylan's weaknesses--the clich,s, the slurred diction, etc.--as ``postmodernist." His dense, imagistic evocations of the songs occasionally become precious or strained. (`` `Idiot Wind' is an emotional soapbox as fearsome and cutting as any of the cutlery that flies in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*") But, with full attention given to Dylan as performer and writer, to cover versions and disciples (Springsteen, Neil Young), and even to other Dylan-commentators, this is an essential book for Dylanologists: comprehensive, knowing, challenging. -- *Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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