Like a Rolling Stone: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan
WSP 09

Instructor: Ken Berman
Dates: April 22 and April 29 10:00am – 4:00pm

PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

Day 1, Part I:

a) Folk Beginnings and the Flowering of Genius

From humble middle-class origins in Duluth and Hibbing, MN we trace the unlikely evolution of one of the greatest songwriters of our time.

b) Apotheosis

The rise of a folk hero: Dylan’s songwriting virtuosity and appearances as a protest singer propels him to the top of the resurging folk movement. At the same time, his ever-changing artistry defies such strict classification.

c) Blues, Rock, Folk and the Development of Dylan’s Poetic Imagination

By the mid-60s Dylan becomes a phenomenon and pop icon: his writing undergoes tremendous growth and transformation as he moves beyond the folk idiom. A distinct (often caustic) and inimitable voice emerges while he disenchants his folk audience by “going electric” at Newport in 1965 and embraces a larger popular audience.

Day 1, Part II:

d) Blues, Rock, Folk and the Development of Dylan’s Poetic Imagination (continued)

e) Retreat and Reemergence 1966-74

Hasty retreat to Woodstock – out of the limelight, into family matters while the brilliant songwriting continues. His work with The Band: The Basement Tapes and the lesser-known period of brilliance through the early 1970s, capped off with his chart-topping arena tours (the first of their kind)

Day 2, Part I:

a) Tangled Up In Blues

A close look into and behind what many consider to be the bard’s finest and most autobiographical work, the seminal album Blood on The Tracks.

b) The Circus Comes To Town

The Rolling Thunder Revue along with his inspired collaboration with playwright Jacques Levy resulting in the album Desire. Dylan’s filmaic ambitions flower as he becomes a rock star of epic proportions.
Day 2, Part II:

a) Born Again, Reborn Again, and The Never-Ending Tour

The controversial though arguably excellent “born-again” period, followed by the uneven 1980s and ending with the master’s phoenix-like rebirth beginning in 1989 with Oh Mercy

b) Love and Theft and The Nobel Laureate

Dylan’s late period culminates in a number of dazzling records, including the Grammy-winning Time Out of Mind and Love and Theft. An examination of his recent output with attention to the repeated chorus of allegations that much of his new work is ultimately stolen goods.

Course Requirements for Credit and Letter Grade

Most students will opt to take the course for NGR (no grade requested): No work is required, just show up for class!

For those students choosing to take the course for Credit and/or Letter Grade, the following strict requirements apply:

- Attendance and participation is mandatory: there must be no missed classes to qualify for credit or grade.

- Listening, readings & response: You are required to thoroughly listen to all the material on the listening list, and write a response (6 pages minimum) detailing your reaction to the music in relation to the texts as well as any insights or understandings you have developed in the process. Single out and analyze specific pieces, which you feel are representative. (credit and letter)

- Research Project and Analysis: Using the required texts, music, and relevant outside materials, write an 8-10 page scholarly paper focusing on material we have covered in class, and demonstrate a more detailed understanding and analysis of Bob Dylan’s life and music including relevant historical / biographical information. Be sure to cite clearly all of your sources. (Some examples of paper topics include: 1) Describe and detail how Dylan appropriates traditional folk song melodies for much of his early work. 2) Analyze Dylan’s use of topical material in his work throughout his career. 3) Professor Christopher Ricks has described Dylan as the greatest American poet since Allen Ginsberg: using several songs as examples, prove or disprove the veracity of this claim.) Please clear your idea with me by email before April 25th, and then send me a short 2 – 3 paragraph summary of your project by April 29th. Final due date for papers – May 20th. Papers must be in double-spaced, using Times font size 12 (letter only)

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.