

Live

Bob Dylan with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers Mt Smart, Feb 7

The thrill has gone and I'm wondering who is responsible. Partly, of course, I am. The days when Dylan formed an essential part of my life, when each new album helped shape the way I viewed the world, are long since past. Moreover I haven't been too excited by one of his records since *Blood On The Tracks* and that was ten years ago. Nonetheless I remain in awe of the man and his extraordinary influence. I was looking forward to the concert.

So I think those guys up on stage must take some of the blame too. As recent interviews have shown, Dylan is becoming more and more the aging cynic. (The most admired person in his life is apparently his accountant!) Where he once came on like some hoarse foreman of the apocalypse, now there's an easy flippancy that showed up in his performance. It wasn't simply that he barely spoke half-a-dozen sentences to us in 2½ hours. It was there in his singing. Notes were tossed away rather than held, the high ones often barely attempted. (After all why bother when you've got four full-throated back-up singers to reach and carry properly?)

The major exception came in his two numbers alone. With no-one else to rely on Dylan found a measure of his old commitment to 'It's Alright Ma' and 'The Times They Are A Changin''. His ensuing acoustic duet with Petty was virtually as strong.

But the lacklustre performances returned with the band. A half-hearted attempt was made to get us to sing on 'Just Like A Woman' and then abandoned. Obviously the whole show was under-rehearsed. Faltering tempos in some early numbers were evidence of that. Surely his hitching up with the Heartbreakers afforded Dylan plenty of scope to rearrange some material. After all he's done it before — on the 1978 tour or instance. However the nearest we got was an, admittedly majestic, 'Positively Fourth Street' and a raging 'To Serve

Somebody' that was undermined by a poor sound mix. Otherwise it was an unexceptional plod through the well and the little known.

Dylan's choice of stage repertoire is famed for its quirkiness (as he again showed by covering such standards as 'That Lucky Old Sun' and 'Lonesome Town'). But not to perform his biggest single in years, 'Tight Connection To My Heart', especially with four fine back-up singers in attendance, almost smacks of contempt for his audience. As it was the evening's loudest applause went to none of his songs but 'Refugee', one of only four numbers allotted to Tom Petty with his own band.

Which brings me to another culprit. Surely the concert promoters are guilty of misrepresentation. They must have known that the concert wasn't to be shared equally. (Petty even said as much in last month's *Rip It Up* interview.) Yet they deliberately advertised to catch Petty's following as much as Dylan's. No wonder so many people lost interest two thirds of the way through the show.

Unfortunately there is one more factor that accounts for my disenchantment: some of the audience itself. When I recall Dylan's 1978 show at Western Springs it's obvious how much things have deteriorated.

There's always been violence and animal behaviour of course but at that earlier concert there was also a large, compensating commitment to the music. It was as if more people cared about it then. They listened. For large sections of the crowd at Mt Smart all that seemed to matter was the big rock noise. Dylan's acoustic solo numbers were an excuse to barge forward, or back to the food vans, or start a fight, or fall over from excessive indulgence. When, during 'It's Alright Ma' we got to the line about "Even the president of the United States / Sometimes must have to stand naked" I would have thought we nuclear-free New Zealanders, bullied and beleaguered by our Anzus partners, would all cheer heartily. Not a murmur. There was a fight going on near me though, Dylan's failed singalong on 'Just Like A Woman' was undoubtedly not all his fault.

Perhaps big stadium concerts have become like dinosaurs trun-

dling toward their own extinction. Returning to the car afterwards, picking my way over smashed bottles, comatose bodies and the odd pool of vomit, I pitied those who had come to work in these streets next day. I also reflected that it would take a helluva lot to draw me to another stadium concert in Auckland.

Peter Thomson

Violent Femmes, Otis Mace & the Psychic Pet Healers His Majesty's Theatre, Feb 5

Otis Mace and the Psychic Pet Healers opened — and nearly stole — the show. Otis's humour is

neatly balanced by the serious abilities of the band and his own underrated ability as a guitarist is backed up by a rhythm section second to (nearly) none; the last bass-guitar-drums set-up I enjoyed as much belonged to someone called the Swingers. "Don't shoot down the only woman who ever loved you," sang Otis and co-vocalist Sarah Franks; if they'd continued their set beyond its all-too-short 30 minutes, they could well have shown up the Femmes' song about pushing "your lovely daughter down the well" as being a tad silly.

But no-one's going to out-foul

the Femmes, right? Country boys with a big city sarcasm, one can't help but feel that the crowd got away on them. Gordon Gano thought it was great; Brian Ritchie got a little uptight. "Don't you think we know what we're doing?" he snaps. "Don't you think we know how to entertain?" But the audience knew all too well; at 10.45, Gano stands laughing as the audience carry on singing the next couple of verses to his songs.

Like Tom Waits in 1981 and Elvis Costello last year, the Femmes were treated to an audience that was loud and autonomous. Fast and old songs went down the best

('Jesus Walking on the Water', 'Gone Daddy Gone'); many booed the fabulous jazz/R&B numbers which introduced the two guest band members, on sax and keyboards, as dazzling musicians. The possibilities of jazz and R&B seem to suit the Femmes and they won't, apparently, be lured by the ease of old favourites.

The energy and atmosphere drowned out a lot of other small things; Victor De Lorenzo's brush drumming, Gano's occasional fret-hopping, his little finger so carefully crooked as he drank his tea. But this is a concert, and the

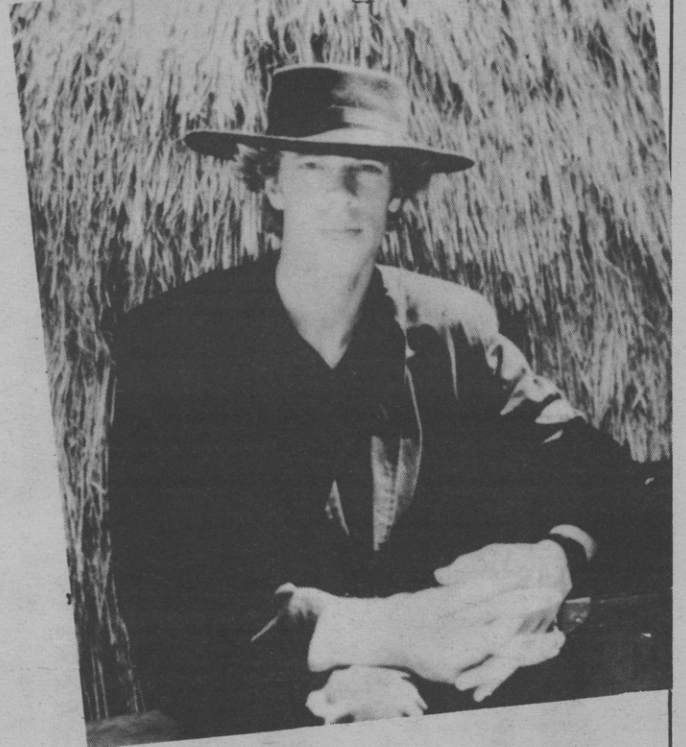
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With all this recording of African music I couldn't help but add some drums of my own and a little electric guitar even.

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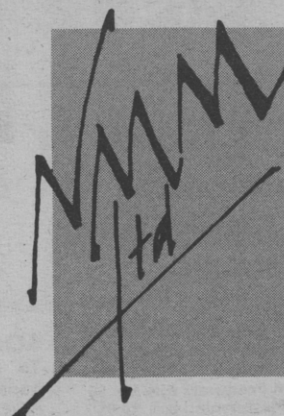
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