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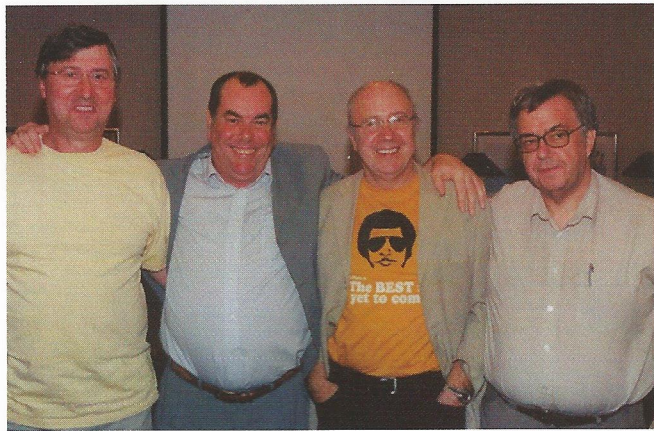
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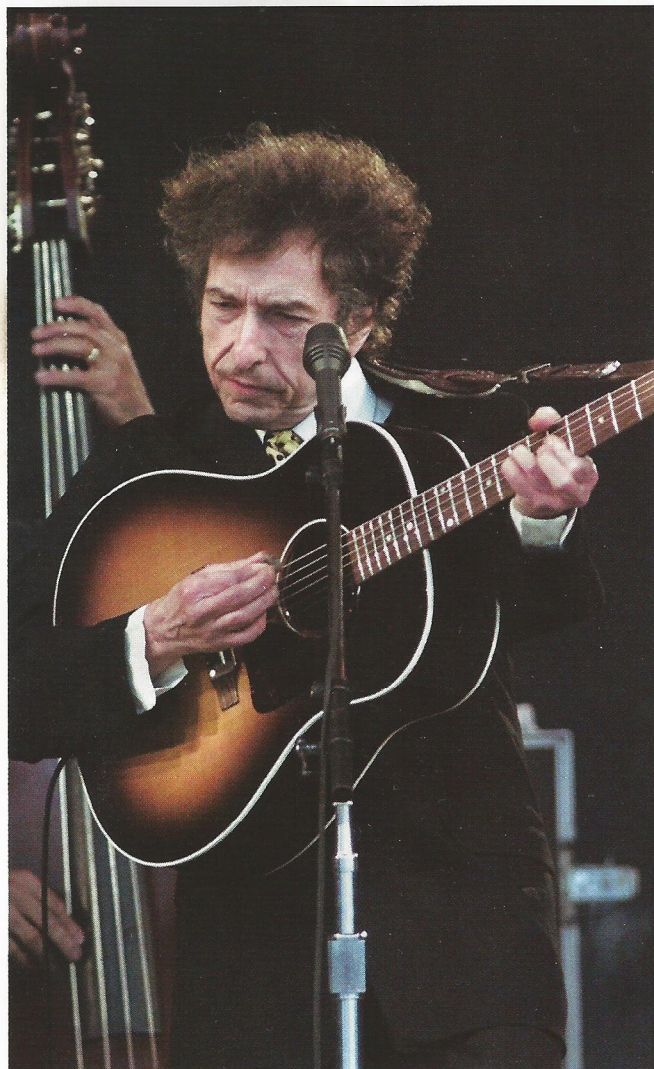
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ARCHANT LIFE

Dylan's local devotees



The Cambridge Bob Dylan Society is a place where his fans and aficionados can discuss the finer aspects of their hero's work, writes Chris Boland



ALTHOUGH it is over 40 years since Bob Dylan appeared on the world's music scene his continuing legacy is as strong as ever. This is especially true in Cambridge where every two months fans meet to discuss his life and work. The Cambridge Bob Dylan Society was founded 21 years ago and held its first meetings in rooms at Jesus College. As word of the society spread across the city and even further afield, the group moved out to private rooms in various Cambridge pubs.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the group established itself at the Royal Standard where it first introduced live music as part of its meetings. As circumstances and landlords changed over the years, fans relocated to The Portland Arms, The Golden Hind and most recently Sino Tap on Pound Lane.

My own introduction to the society was through a friend whose life revolves around Dylan and the revolutionary burst of music that emerged in the 1960s. At the age of 27 I am among the youngest to attend the meetings and certainly lack the type of 'Dylan pedigree' held by some of the founding members. I first saw Dylan live at

the Glastonbury Festival of 1998 and have seen him live in concert five times in total. Quite impressive you might think – but my stories pale in comparison to those of many at the society.

Speaking recently to local committee members John Nye and John Stokes, I couldn't help but be envious of their encounters with Dylan's music. Both attended his UK shows in the mid-1960s as his folk music famously 'went electric' and pioneered the folk-rock that dominates airwaves today. Together they describe how Dylan's music contrasted sharply with the love-influenced lyrics of Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley and even the early Beatles tracks. John Nye quotes, word for word, the start of *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)*:

*Darkness at the break of noon
Shadows even the silver spoon
The handmade blade,
the child's balloon
Eclipses both the sun and moon
To understand you know too soon
There is no sense in trying*

And he proves the point perfectly. Bob Dylan certainly led pop music into a darker and more

Top: (left to right): John Nye, Keith Agar, John Stokes and Chris Cooper

Above: Bob Dylan performs on the main stage at the Roskilde Festival Saturday June 30, 2001. The largest rock festival in northern Europe, some 30km west of Copenhagen attracts some 70,000 fans. (AP Photo/ Niels Meilvang/SCANPIX NORDFOTO 2001)



literary place that appealed to many music fans seeking something a little more intense. That appeal has barely waned and at the society the hunger for his work remains the same.

So, apart from a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm what can you expect when you visit The Cambridge Bob Dylan Society? Perhaps one of the first things you might notice is that the society is exceptionally relaxed and welcoming – it sets itself apart from the elitism that seems to exist among many Dylan fans across the world. It is a place to chat with fellow fans about past and future shows, favourite albums, songs and lyrics – anything you would struggle to talk about with the ‘uninitiated’ at your local pub. Each meeting commences with an introduction by Keith Agar, who always prompts more than a few laughs with his update on the Dylan world. The majority of the night is then spent watching rare footage of Bob Dylan in his prime – be it from American television shows, festivals or award ceremonies. These are not run-of-the-mill clips screened wall-to-wall

by music cable music channels to fill up time – they are the rarest of clips that catch Dylan in his finest moments. For anyone with a genuine interest in his music the memories linger longer than those of his live shows. I’m quite sure the organisers have great fun selecting the clips – much like connoisseurs selecting their favourite wines for special friends.

Currently interest in the society is reflected in the surge of talk about the great man himself. New bands are drawing on his music and sending his sounds and sentiments back up the charts and into people’s consciousness. Even Dylan himself has recently shed a little light on his past by publishing *Chronicles Volume One* – his first book of memoirs. His recent revelations and musings are only likely to fan the flames of discussion at society meetings. Although society members share a love of Dylan’s work there are many differences between them. John Nye, Long-time member of the society tells me: ‘I always put music first and words second, John Stokes is the other way around, Chris

Cooper is the archivist and collects anything Dylan, while Keith Agar just loves the nostalgia of it all.’ This diversity is a very important mix I think, as it means that whatever form your interest (or obsession) takes The Cambridge Bob Dylan Society is the perfect place to meet up with similar minds. ■

FURTHER DETAILS

When Chris Boland spoke to the local committee members John Nye and John Stokes he put them on the spot and asked for their top 5 Dylan tracks. Spot how many you’ve heard before – there’s no *Blowin’ In The Wind!*

JOHN STOKES- JOHN NYE

Desolation Row, Julius And Ethel, Restless Farewell, Danville Girl, Trying To Get To Heaven

JOHN NYE- JOHN STOKES

If Dogs Run Free, Where Are You Tonight Visions Of Johanna (on which John has written 65,000 words!), The Man In Me, Series Of Dreams

The next two meetings are on Friday May 27 and Friday July 29 at Sino Tap, 3 Pound Hill, Cambridge. Newcomers welcome.

Contact: John Stokes on 01480 468726

Website: www.keme.co.uk/~nye/bobdylan.htm