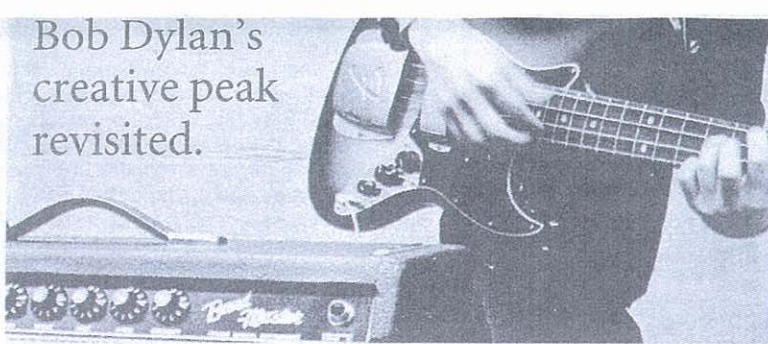


Bob Dylan's creative peak revisited.



BOB DYLAN

No Direction Home: The Soundtrack (The Bootleg Series Vol. 7)
(Sony BMG)

All the evidence is that creativity, particularly in the case of genuinely important artists, comes in a short, sharp explosion of blinding light. Arthur Rimbaud wrote his entire output between the ages of 15 and 20. Wordsworth had written most of his best work by the age of 28. And in the case of Bob Dylan, his greatest work occurred between the ages of 20 and 25.

Those five years, as this "soundtrack" to Martin Scorsese's film *No Direction Home* bears witness, were a period of

extraordinary creativity. Here are alternative versions (only two of the 28 tracks have been previously released) of the songs that form the essence of Dylan's greatness.

Forget all that rubbish about Dylan changing the nature of pop music by taking folk and going electric. His particular "genius" lay in the songs he wrote and the way they painted pictures through words and music in a way that no one had done before.

Dylan was never the wittiest lyricist or the most imaginative writer of tunes (he borrowed shamelessly from folk) but he was a unique voice who spoke compellingly to a generation.

If you are looking for an album that reaffirms Dylan's status and

the great Woody Guthrie with a melancholy, ambiguous version of *This Land is Your Land* recorded just before Dylan's 20th birthday and mesmerising live versions (most from late 1963) of the early classics *Blowin' in the Wind*, *Masters of War*, *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*, *When the Ship Comes In* and *Chimes of Freedom*.

The second CD is predominantly a collection of excellent alternative versions of songs from the *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde* recording sessions, with the infamous electric *Maggie's Farm* from the 1965 Newport Folk Festival and *Like a Rolling Stone* from Manchester, England, in 1966 thrown in for good measure.

These days, as Dylan tours and reinterprets his songs endlessly, and is lionised without discrimination by legions of Bobsters, it is easy to forget that he was a daring, brilliant singer-songwriter without equal. This is a reminder of that explosion of blinding light. Every track is a masterpiece. And it comes with a handsome 58-page booklet. **Bruce Elder**



Listen to Bob Dylan's
Mr Tambourine Man at
smh.com.au/music

SIGUR ROS

Takk
(EMI)

"It's strange to say, but still would pretty much cover all descriptions of Sigur Ros. The best electronic band who play standard instruments; ambient band who actually some astonishing noise; the lyrically incomprehensible still seem to make a lot of sense prog band who prefer heart virtuosity. And, maybe stray with this album - their fourth are the "one-trick pony" still new ways to astonish.

Unlike the vast space, psychological as much as their previous album - which untitled but usually referred to as *Takk* works hard at engaging emotionally. In songs such as *and Hoppipolla* it is almost impossible not to be swept up in the rush feeling and *Gong* is just beautiful.

Sigur Ros haven't skimp those soundscapes that he people like me babbling on the sound of icebergs, etc, you can see more flesh and standing in those glacier fields. **Bernard Zuel**

AVANT GARDE



NAKED CITY

Complete Studio Recordings
(Tzadik/Birdland)

We recently looked at a new compilation of previously unreleased material from John Zorn's Masada. Now, this opulently packaged boxed set pulls together the studio albums of another Zorn band, Naked City.

Beyond Zorn's spiky alto saxophone, this had guitarist Bill Frisell, avant rock and free improvisation hero Fred Frith playing bass (rather than guitar), Wayne Horvitz on keyboards and drummer Joey Barron, as well as occasional guest singers.

Zorn has remastered everything with typically fetishistic attention to every detail. The resulting quality could well be enough to incline even those who already own one or more of the original albums to investigate the complete catastrophe.

There were seven albums from 1989 to 1993, all crammed with eccentric romps through whatever combinations of surf music, spy themes, cowboy music, thrash rock, free-form squalls, cocktail jazz and anything else Zorn found useful to use, abuse or send up. The results are enthralling, exasperating, hilarious, exciting, occasionally unlistenable and always unpredictable. **John Shand**

JAZZ



MATT KEEGAN TRIO

Roadscape
(Jazzgroove)

Duke Ellington wrote a lot of music on trains. When he fell asleep, the pages would fan out away from him over the vibrating floor. I don't know where Matt Keegan writes, but he has toured America with rock bands and motion has entered his bloodstream.

Forward motion is not a rhythm (the sounds of the train and its rocking were rhythms for Ellington). Motion is all rhythms waiting to be separated. It can be calibrated by fence posts and poles and punctuated randomly by trees. Speeds change or hold steady for what seems like hours. The roadside flashes back faster than the middle ground. Distant mountains creep forward.

Somehow Keegan, with his sweet-toned tenor saxophone, bassist Cameron Undy and drummer David Goodman have synthesised all this in a kind of dream. Sometimes the road is bumpy and Keegan has a very personal way of playing rocky ranch. Sometimes you can feel those contrary speeds in the rhythm section. It is always quite beautiful. Even the occasional road-tiredness is beautiful. **John Clare**

POP



JOSH RITTER

Hello Starling
(V2/Festival)

Josh Ritter would have been a scientist had he followed in his parents' footsteps. Instead he picked up a guitar, listened to the cream of the US alternative roots scene and embraced the music of such folk legends as Nick Drake and Leonard Cohen. Now, after much struggling, he has come up with a delightful, infectious, appealing bunch of songs for his second album.

Here is a real rarity: an album without a bad track. Start with *Wings*, a wonderfully complex and mythical song, with cascading elliptical lyrics, recalling Cohen's *Suzanne*; then move on to the deliciously delicate *Bright Smile* (which has a Nick Drake fragility) to appreciate the breadth of Ritter's talent. Then there's *Kathleen*, which mixes Hammond organ and acoustic guitar to antique effect. *You Don't Make It Easy Babe* hovers somewhere between Donovan and Dylan.

Not since Ryan Adams appeared on the scene in 2000 has such a singular singer-songwriter emerged. Put Ritter in the same bag as Adams and Ron Sexsmith. Yes, he's that good. **BE**

HIP-HOP



GYM CLASS HEROES

The Papercut Chronicles
(Decaydance/Shock)

A papercut is a lot less show than a gunshot wound and schoolkid hero is just a blo political landscape. These stories told by this very un New York hip-hop crew.

On this accomplished *de* Heroes stick to life experience rhyming about what they rather than far-fetched taghetto. More rock band than orthodox turntable beats rhymes, the live drumming guitars add organic warmth makes MC Schlieprock's s clever and witty adolescent both humorous and naive. There's the *Make Out Club* reminiscing about past kids of potty talking and bad *Cupid's Chokehold* (with a gorgeously kitsch Supertramp sample) is a sweet tribute girlfriend who cooks pancake.

With lightness must can balance achieved with the *Everyday's Forecast* and t chemical-driven love and l in *Pillmattic* and *Taxi Drive* darkened by mournful guitar melodies, so hard to replicate hip-hop's sample-based st **Chloe Sasson**