

Dylan and 9/11: Going back to New York City

by **Jeremy Wolff**

Ten years ago Bob Dylan had just turned 60, the leading edge of the old man rock stars. He had just put out the third album of his miraculous late renaissance that started with *Time Out of Mind* in 1997. The new record was called "Love and Theft"; its official release date was September 11, 2001.

When Dylan came to play Madison Square Garden, on November 19, 2001, we New Yorkers were still pretty freaked out. Two months on, there was still faint smoke rising from the end of the island, and the smell still lingered downtown. We were back on the streets, back to work, but crowded subways, loud noises and jets overhead reminded you that "normal" was not yet back. We were polite and jumpy. Lots of concerts had been canceled and lots of concert-goers didn't feel comfortable going out into big crowds anyway. But Bob came, so we came out to see him.

It was the first big public event I let myself out for since the towers fell. Squeezing into that long line going into MSG, narrowing into packed walls and bodies, through turnstiles and security checks and men with guns, we all felt it - the fear, the unspoken possibility that hadn't left anyone's minds since September. Too many people in too small a space, frozen but no way to back out now. The paranoia took my breath away.

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played hundreds of times, they don't know where he's going next, how far they'll rise, or how goofy it might get. He's fun, serious, and challenging the audience too to keep up, to follow him down.

Nothing was phoned in. This was an artist living, breathing and working at the edge of the present moment. After the encores, he stood at the lip of the stage and gave us a good long look, as if to see if we got it, to see if we

deserved more.

Meanwhile on the floor at Bethel, yellow-shirted security walked the aisles almost constantly, scrutinizing us closely. It made me feel like I was up to something. It was distracting. This wasn't the heart of the city amid the wounds of 9/11, this was tranquil upstate, a groomed crowd of middle-agers in \$100 seats. And all this nagging security, enough to take me out of my moment, was there, not to stop

aisle dancers or seat hoppers or pot smokers, but to make sure no one was taping Bob with their phones. Things have changed.

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To celebrate Dylan's 70th birthday, Front Street Gallery will be hosting a Family Music Night jam, Friday October 14th from 6-9pm.

JEREMY WOLFF lives in Holmes with his first wife and two biological children.

Then the lights went out.

Bob was here with his band and they had a job to do. He was not going to let you forget what the night was about. There were new songs and some songs he'd been playing 40 years, but he was there to talk to you. And when he got to that line you knew was coming in *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*, the place erupted. Joy was back.

*I'm going back to New York City
I do believe I've had enough*

Bob, who spoke little in those days, as in these, said, "Most of the songs we're playing tonight were written here and those that weren't were recorded here. So no one has to ask me how I feel about this town." His gift was being comfortable in a New York crowd again.

Another thing: the Garden staff and the cops. They were at ease; they were with us. They let us move into the aisles, and didn't hassle people about cameras or pot. It meant so much to me, to the crowd there that night, I made a point of thanking them on the way out.

Now Dylan is 70 and still on tour. What does a rocker look like and what can he do in his 8th decade with 50 year-old songs? We saw him in August at Bethel Woods, ironically the site of Woodstock, the 1969 concert where Dylan was notoriously absent. This time he showed up.

Bob on a good night in a good mood still gives his band a run for their money. Within songs they've

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