

Puluche Album Review Rubric ©

Artist: Bob Dylan

Album Title: Highway 61 Revisited - Columbia

| Categories | Criteria | | | | Rating |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|--|-----------|
| | 4-Exemplary | 3 - Proficient | 2 - Developing | 1 - Underdeveloped | |
| <u>Compositions</u> | Every song is quality and has a distinctive appeal of its own. Tracks have a perfect flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal. | Many quality songs with distinctive appeal. Tracks have a good flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal. | Some quality songs with distinctive appeal but not sustained. Track flow and continuity have little effect on album's overall appeal. | Few to no quality songs lacking any distinctive appeal. Track flow and continuity have little/poor effect on album's overall appeal. | 20 |
| <u>Breaking Ground</u> | Has impressive elements of high creativity and is experimentally innovative. Developing own signature sound. Shows extreme growth and/or potential as a substantial and influential artist. | Features elements of creativity and uniqueness. Shows growth and/or potential as a developing and influential artist. | Has very few moments of creativity and uniqueness. Shows little growth and/or some potential as a developing artist. Displays some stagnation or notable regression as an established artist. | Has no creativity and uniqueness. Shows no growth and/or little potential as a developing or established artist. | 20 |
| <u>Engagement</u> | Music has a transcending quality with numerous songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Many songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality. | Music has transcending qualities with some songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Some songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality. | Music has some transcending qualities with few songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels, as well as having any addictive or memorable qualities. | Music has minimal transcending qualities and few to no songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels. No positive memorable qualities. | 20 |
| <u>Lyrical Voice</u> | Has a strong lyrical voice with multiple thought-provoking messages with clear and/or possible meanings and depth. | Has notable lyrical voice with some thought-provoking messages and/or possible meanings and depth. | Has limited lyrical voice with few-to-no thought-provoking messages, meanings and depth. | Has a weak lyrical voice with no thought-provoking messages or meanings and seriously lacks any depth. | 20 |
| <u>Production</u> | Masterful sound quality with noticeable studio techniques employed that demand headphone inquiry. Vision flawlessly executed. Overall packaging and artwork effectively compliments and enhances album enjoyment. | Very good sound quality with some noticeable studio techniques that demand headphone inquiry. Vision is acceptable. Overall packaging and artwork compliments album enjoyment. | Inconsistent sound quality with questionable studio techniques employed. Vision is questionable. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album. | Questionable to poor sound quality. Lacks vision. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album. | 20 |

Comments

In the summer of 1965, just after Bob Dylan and his band had finished recording the first track off of what was to become the album *Highway 61 Revisited*, an iconic protest song called “Like A Rolling Stone,” Dylan took the stage at The Newport Folk Festival to raucous applause. He was the headliner that year. He had played enormously successful shows at the Newport back in ‘63 and ‘64, and everyone there in ‘65 was expecting the same folk magic.

As Dylan and his band launched into “Maggie’s Farm,” a frantic Pete Seeger demanded that the distortion be taken out of the sound, and he ran over to the control board to plead his case. He was told no. That was how the band wanted it. “I said ‘God dammit! It’s terrible! You can’t understand it! If I had an axe, I’d chop the mic cable right now!’” Seeger later recounted.

By the time Dylan finished his three-song, 15 minute set and quickly left the stage, much of the crowd didn’t understand why he had chosen to play an electrified set punctuated by his new band acquisition, guitar phenom Mike Bloomfield. But they were mostly livid that he had only played three songs. Most of them booed. Peter Yarrow of Peter Paul and Mary walked onto the stage and asked calmly into the microphone, directing his pleas at Bob, “Bobbie, can you do another song please?” Yarrow placated the crowd, telling them that Bob was going to get his acoustic guitar.

To be fair, Dylan had electrified certain songs prior to *Highway 61*, but for myriad reasons, his performance that year at Newport was taken personally. By almost everyone.

Perplexed audience members, mostly folk purists, accused him of selling out to the establishment and betraying his fan base. But many rock scholars and musicians argue that it was this moment, at least in the U.S., that singlehandedly ushered in what we all now think of as the 1960s in terms of popular culture.

Highway 61 Revisited was Bob Dylan’s sixth album, and in the most simple of descriptions, it is an erudite absurdist’s dream of what Americana had become. It is purposeful in its veiled accusations and its broad literary and historical references.

The opening track, “Like A Rolling Stone,” owes its existence as much to serendipity and chance as it does to careful planning. During the fourth take of the song in June of ‘65 in a Midtown Manhattan studio, musician Al Kooper finagled himself a seat at the organ and improvised the part that is now the song’s heaviest musical identifier.

“Why don’t you let me sit in on the organ? I got a great part for this [song],” Kooper told producer Tom Wilson (later admitting that it was total bullshit; that he was that determined to be on the record). Today, it’s impossible to imagine Dylan’s voice as he howls, “Oooohhh, how does it feeeeeeeeeeel...,” not cradled by the now legendary organ riff.

There’s not really a wrong way to interpret “Like A Rolling Stone,” as is the case with all great songs. The song is universal through many different life experiences, and it inspires minds of all different temperaments and philosophical backgrounds equally.

By the time the first side of the record ends with “Ballad of a Thin Man,” the poetic insurgence of Dylan’s soul has surely pervaded in even the most passive listener. It’s during “Ballad of a Thin Man” that Dylan emphasizes the emergence of the new artistic counterculture into the mainstream world through the eyes of the still confused media of the day trying desperately to accurately describe it. “Something is happening

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| | <p>here, but you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?"</p> <p>It's sentiments like this that frequently left Dylan under constant attack from the media, creating an ever more truculent Dylan in the face of what he considered nonsense press conferences and interviews. To Dylan, everyone was missing the point when they would ask him what a certain song of his was about, or if he believed in the music he was playing.</p> <p>Side two of Highway 61 begins similarly to side one with the song "Queen Jane Approximately." It's as ambitious as "Like a Rolling Stone" both in length and lyrics, but with less contempt for the person/entity he's addressing.</p> <p>The next song and title track, "Highway 61 Revisited," is a punch-in-the-gut transition from "Queen Jane." It begins in a frantic blues boogey similar to Subterranean Homesick Blues. "God said to Abraham, kill me a son. And Abe said to God 'You must be puttin' me on.'"</p> <p><i>Highway 61</i> closes out perfectly with "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" and "Desolation Row." The sequence of the record is another testament to its greatness, and though for several years after this record, some of his "fans" were still calling him a traitor to the genre of folk, <i>Highway 61 Revisited</i> is the album that first told the world Bob Dylan could and would do whatever the hell he wanted to do. The question of whether he would keep his fan base was inconsequential to him, and that's probably a major reason why he ultimately kept it.</p> | |
| <p><u>Commendations</u></p> | <p>Prior to <i>Highway 61</i>, fans of Dylan had grown used to his engaging poetry behind mainly just an acoustic guitar. Songs like "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright," "A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall," "Let Me Die In My Bootsteps," and "Blowin' In The Wind" enamored people to his musical presentation. <i>Highway 61</i>, the entirety of it, proved that not only was Dylan not a one-trick-pony, but that the majesty of profound and genius lyricism can rest comfortably upon the laurels of any genre.</p> | |
| <p><u>Next Steps</u></p> | <p>Since <i>Highway 61 Revisited</i>, Dylan has gone in many different directions. He temporarily joined The Band, became a born again Christian (a development that still defines him today), and continues to write albums about whatever he deems fit to be written about - the most current moment of his life. But that's always been the case for Dylan.</p> | |
| <p><u>Reviewer</u></p> | <p>Brian Rash</p> | <p><u>IRC:</u> Bill Pulice</p> |