



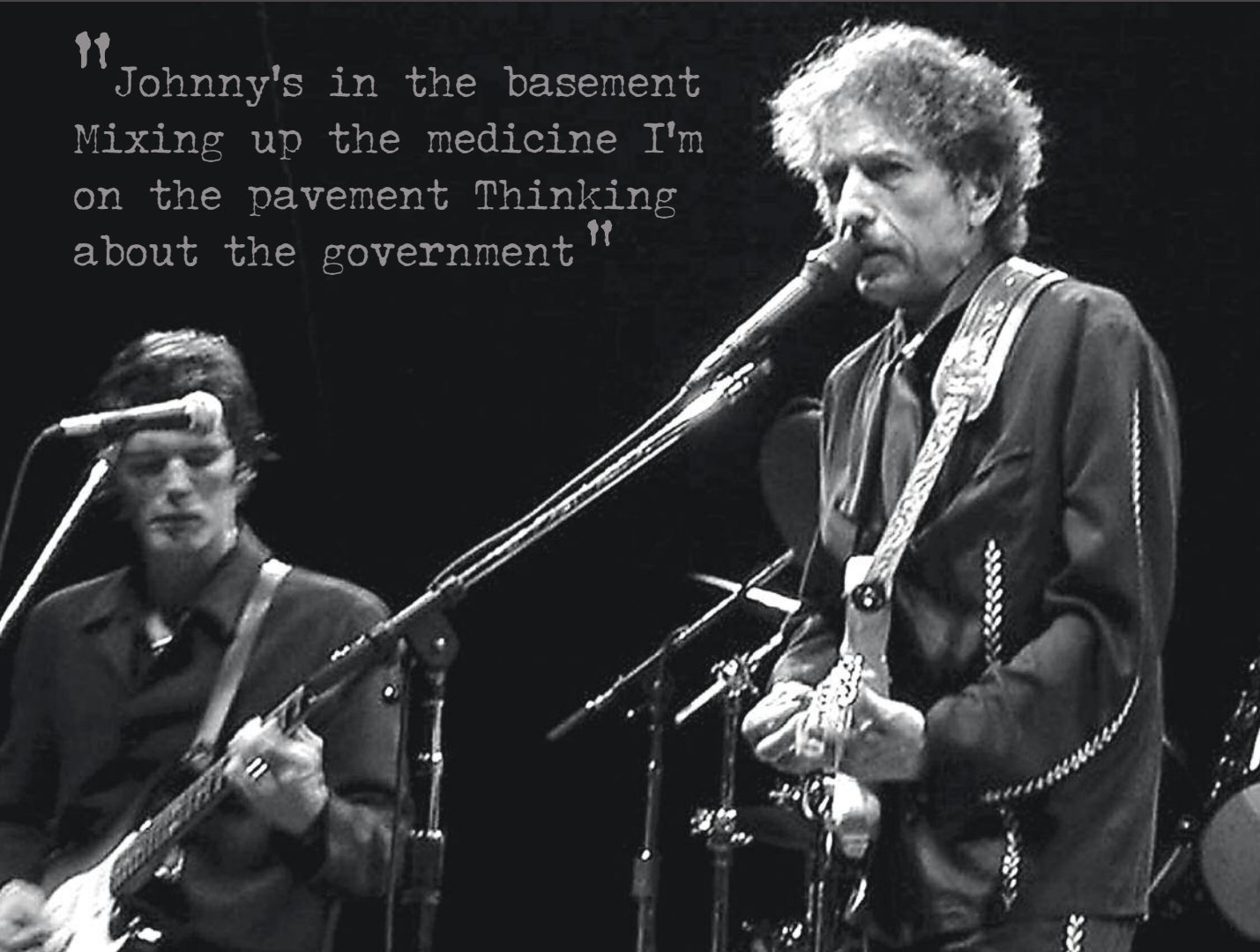
Published by the UMass Lowell Kerouac Center for Public Humanities
in partnership with the UMass Lowell Office of University Relations

www.uml.edu

BOB DYLAN

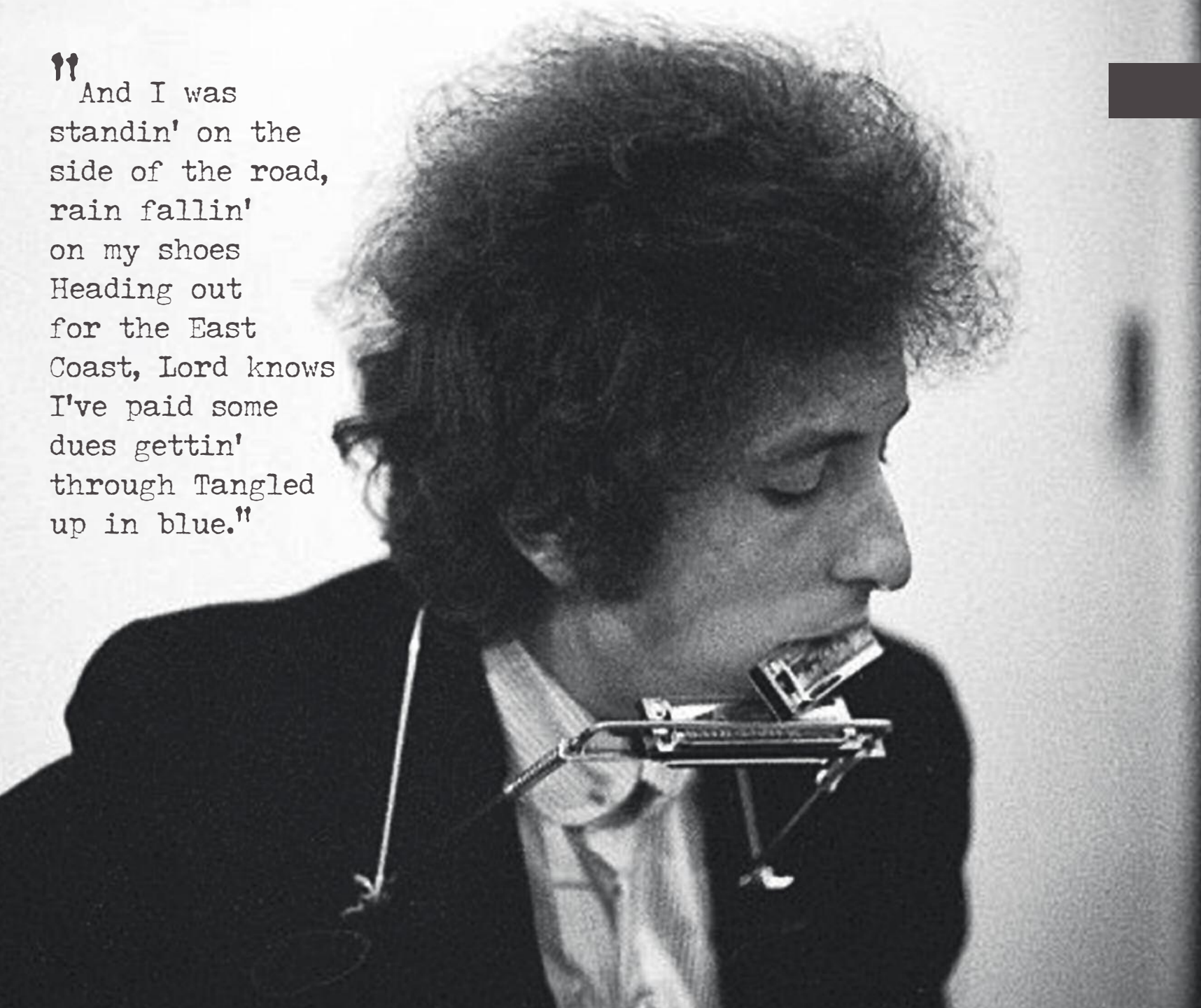
BRINGS IT ALL BACK HOME, TO LOWELL

"Johnny's in the basement
Mixing up the medicine I'm
on the pavement Thinking
about the government"



”

And I was
standin' on the
side of the road,
rain fallin'
on my shoes
Heading out
for the East
Coast, Lord knows
I've paid some
dues gettin'
through Tangled
up in blue.”



Bob Dylan Brings it All Back Home, to Lowell

BOB DYLAN IS THE GREAT AMERICAN MINSTREL on a never-ending road trip. And tonight, he'll be staying here with you.

Dylan has always treated Lowell well. It is the fourth time he's performed in the Mill City, following Tsongas Center gigs in 2000 and 2010 and nearly four decades after he first rolled into town and onto the UMass Lowell campus leading the remarkable, ramshackle Rolling Thunder Revue.

A caravan of friends and compadres old and new, Rolling Thunder was a broad, loose Dylan trek, on the heels of the previous year's high-expectations reunion tour with The Band. It took place between the recording and the release of Dylan's 17th studio album, "Desire." Sometimes, the show seemed like a honky-tonk jam, others a folk-revue, still others the quest of a man throwing off his old selves while creating a new one. Or all three at once.

And on Nov. 2, 1975, Lowell's university was Rolling Thunder's fourth stop, the first to feature Dylan in whiteface. The lineup included Joan Baez, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Roger McGuinn, Bob Neuwirth, David Bowie guitarist Mick Ronson and a crack band led by future super producer T-Bone Burnett.

Riding shotgun was poet Allen Ginsberg, who had run hard with Lowell homeboy Jack Kerouac during the movement of the Beat writers.

Tickets were \$7.50.

Kathy Rourke was visiting her sister, who had a baby that day. Rourke was 23, recently returned to her Acre neighborhood from a stint on the West Coast, a new mom herself, and a Dylan fan.

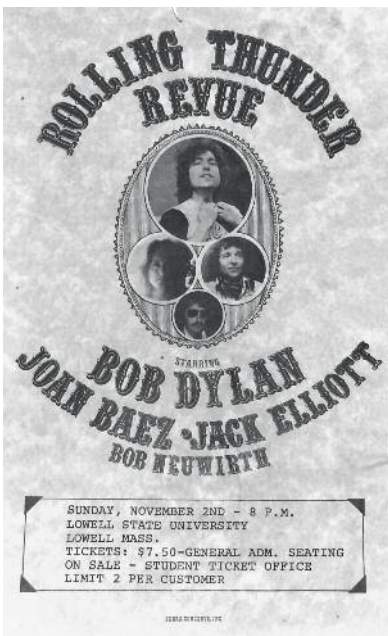
A third sister showed up at the hospital, clutching a Dylan ticket.

"Look what I got!" she said. The show was that night.

Rourke, hearing of Dylan's performance for the first time, fled the hospital. She scored a scalper's ticket for \$10. Though it was hours before the show, she stuck around. She was first in line, and when the ebb and flow of the crowd's push was relieved with opened doors, Rourke scored floor space at the front of the stage.

Things have changed. The Rolling Thunder show took place in Costello Gymnasium, which has since received a major facelift and the more formal name, Costello Athletic Center. The institution itself bore a different name, the University of Lowell (though the ticket and subsequent references have mistakenly dubbed it Lowell State University—perhaps appropriately, given that Dylan started out as Robert Zimmerman).

On that day in 1975, Adam Ayan, a future graduate of UMass Lowell's Sound Recording Technology program, was not quite 3 weeks old. Now living in Portland, Maine, Ayan is one of the recording industry's behind-the-scenes stars, earning Grammys and other accolades for his ability to weave sonic magic as a recording engineer.



The flier advertising the Nov. 2, 1975 Bob Dylan/Rolling Thunder show in Lowell. Note that the school name is mistakenly listed as "Lowell State University."

These days, UMass Lowell is bigger and more diverse, a bastion of synergy and synthesis. UMass Lowell is not merely a less expensive option, but a Division I honeycomb of challenge and innovation.

Tonight’s performance, at the 7,000-seat Tsongas Center, takes place in one of the University’s state-of-the-art facilities. (Kathy Rourke—who has worked at the University for 30 years, now serving as the M.B.A. coordinator for the Manning School of Business—bought her Dylan tickets early this time.)

Lowell, where the American Industrial Revolution was born, a place cut in half by a mighty river, remains a perfect setting to see Dylan.

On that November night in 1975, Lowell and its college gym offered “an honest, unpretentious, down-home working-class environment,” wrote Larry “Ratso” Sloman in his book “On the Road with Bob Dylan.” The gym’s hardwood was covered by a green tarp, and as the show opened, Neuwirth greeted the crowd, packed into the venue a la festival seating.

“Here’s an on-the-road song for ya,” Neuwirth said.

He went on to dedicate several songs to Kerouac while Dylan paced backstage. The band was “smoking” enthused Sloman, everyone was “really on tonight.” Neuwirth did his opening songs, Ronson did “Life on Mars,” and Ramblin’ Jack played his mini-set.

Dylan took the stage to a roar and did “When I Paint my Masterpiece.” He was tough and deliberate, spitting out “Isis” as if it had betrayed him. After an intermission, Baez and Dylan dueted on four songs (including a cover of Johnny Ace’s “Never Let Me Go”) followed by Baez’s set. It ended with the whole troupe gathered onstage for “This Land is Your Land.”

Now 71, road warrior Dylan still makes music that matters. His body of work continues to be feted. As with most things involving Dylan, it is difficult to tell how much he cares about the fuss.

Just last month, the American Academy of Arts and Letters voted to make Dylan an honorary member after its exclusive, 250-member body was unable to decide whether to honor him for his music or lyrics. He is the first rock musician honored by the group. And last May 29, Dylan was at the White House to receive the Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama.

There was an Oscar in 2001 for “Things Have Changed,” from the soundtrack for “The Wonder Boys.”

His Lifetime Achievement Grammy came in 1991, but some of Dylan’s finest moments have come in the 22 years since. His “Time Out of Mind” LP took home three Grammys in 1997 and his memoir, “Chronicles,” was a best-seller. And the Bootleg Series, about to unleash its 10th multi-disc volume, is dedicated to giving fans Dylan’s previously unreleased back pages.

In 2008, Dylan received an honorary Pulitzer Prize for his “profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary poetic power.” The



Bob Dylan and Allen Ginsberg read from Mexico City Blues at Jack Kerouac's grave in Lowell's Edson Cemetery.

“Oh God said
to Abraham,
“Kill me
a son” Abe
says, “Man,
you must be
puttin’ me
on” God say,
“No.” Abe
say, “What?”

same man who dragged folk into rock, kicking and screaming, pushed rock into the halls of intellectual influence.

The Lowell tour stop in 1975 saw Dylan tuned in to his relationship with the works of Kerouac. Having Ginsberg along certainly didn’t dampen his enthusiasm.

They managed a visit to The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, smack between the University’s North and South campuses, a place nestled behind the Franco-American School. It offers vivid Stations of the Cross and a Christ figure rising up from the shell of a prayer area, its back to the Merrimack River. Kerouac visited here and wrote about the place in “Dr. Sax.”

Dylan, Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky also visited the grave of Kerouac, shadowed by the tour’s filmmakers. Kerouac had been gone six years, and lay in a modest plot in Lowell’s Edson Cemetery. Ginsberg carried a copy of Kerouac’s “Mexico City Blues.”

Kathy Rourke’s mom, Peggy, was working in the Edson Cemetery office that day. Three of her children had seen Dylan perform at Costello Gym the previous night. A younger clerk tipped her off about the identities of the scruffy folks who wanted to visit Kerouac.

“Oh, Mr. Dylan, my children really enjoyed your concert last night!” Peggy told Dylan.

“He thanked her,” says Kathy, “and told her he was glad to do it for Lowell as Kerouac loved this city so much.”

Peggy ended up briefly in the background during the graveside scene in “Renaldo and Clara,” Dylan’s 1978 film.

Decades later, in “Chronicles” and Martin Scorsese’s documentary, “No Direction Home,” Dylan spoke of his Kerouac affinity.

“On the Road,” said Dylan, “had been like a bible for me. I loved the breathless dynamic bop poetry phrases that flowed from Jack’s pen. ... I fell into that atmosphere of everything Kerouac was saying about the world being completely mad, and the only people for him that were interesting were the mad people, the mad ones, the ones who were mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn, all of those mad ones, and I felt like I fit right into that bunch.”

Kerouac echoes through some of Dylan’s work, from “Desolation Row” to the mention of “Mexico City Blues” in “Something’s Burning, Baby,” from the 1985 album, “Empire Burlesque.”

“Dylan isn’t short on influences,” says Michael Millner, co-director of UMass Lowell’s American Studies program. “He’s a sponge. But Kerouac’s writing must have been on his mind as he was writing many of the songs from the mid-’60s. There are Kerouac-like titles—‘Visions of Johanna’ from Kerouac’s ‘Visions of Gerard,’ ‘Subterranean Homesick Blues’ from ‘The Subterraneans,’ and ‘Desolation Row’ from ‘Desolation Angels.’

“But I’d say the influence goes beyond riffing on Kerouac’s language; the influence is in the cadences of Dylan’s songs from the period. I’m thinking of ‘It’s Alright Mama, I’m Only Bleeding’ and ‘Desolation Row’—songs where every line turns into a wave of words. You just can’t believe



Lowell native Jack Kerouac had his own chops on the keyboard.

Fred DeWitt (Courtesy of Orange County Reg. Hist. Ctr)

"ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now."

that Dylan can get that many words into a line of song just like you couldn't believe those long, looping sentences in 'On the Road.'

And there is "If Dogs Run Free," from the 1970 "New Morning" album, which sounds influenced by the sort of scat-poet Beat wordplay Kerouac engaged in during live sessions with David Amram. (Fittingly, Dylan played "Dogs" here in 2000.)

In their spontaneous session at Kerouac's grave, Dylan and Ginsberg read verses from "Mexico City Blues." Dylan said he read the work in 1959 in Minnesota, and "it blew my mind. It was the first poetry that spoke my own language."

Footage from the graveside visit (plus some brief images from the Grotto stop) showed up in "Renaldo and Clara," as well as a 1991 Dylan video for "Series of Dreams."

Ginsberg and Dylan improvised a slow blues chant in Kerouac's honor.

And the tour rolled on to Providence.

Paul Marion, UMass Lowell's executive director of community and cultural affairs, was in the crowd that night in 1975, just a few months before he graduated from the University. Marion is a poet, too, who penned "Dylan Sings to Kerouac," in the wake of the concert.

A quarter-century later, Dylan returned to a stage in Lowell, on Nov. 11, 2000.

Marion was there again. He thought of the man onstage as an American treasure on par with a National Park.

"I had the feeling that we were at a scenic overlook, seeing a master artist doing his work, like watching Picasso paint, but this figure was distinctly American with the grit of the Mesabi Range in his bones and traces of the Mississippi River and Empire State Building and Grand Canyon and Malibu Beach in his veins," he said. "He took it all and made a sound of it, put words together to transmit what it feels like and means and where it comes from."

In 2000, Adam Ayan was well into his career, working with the esteemed engineer Bob Ludwig in Portland.

By the time Dylan rolled through for his third Lowell show on Nov. 20, 2010, Ayan had earned three Grammy awards, a slew of other industry accolades and worked with everyone from Pearl Jam to Carrie Underwood.

A year ago, Dylan's songs and the University's Sound Recording Technology program linked, in a sense. A four-CD set of Dylan covers, "Chimes of Freedom, The Songs of Bob Dylan Honoring 50 Years of Amnesty International," was released, featuring 80 popular artists, from Adele to Ziggy Marley, interpreting Dylan songs. Ayan was among the technical pros who volunteered to master the project for free to help benefit Amnesty International, which is celebrating 50 years of fighting for justice, freedom and human dignity.

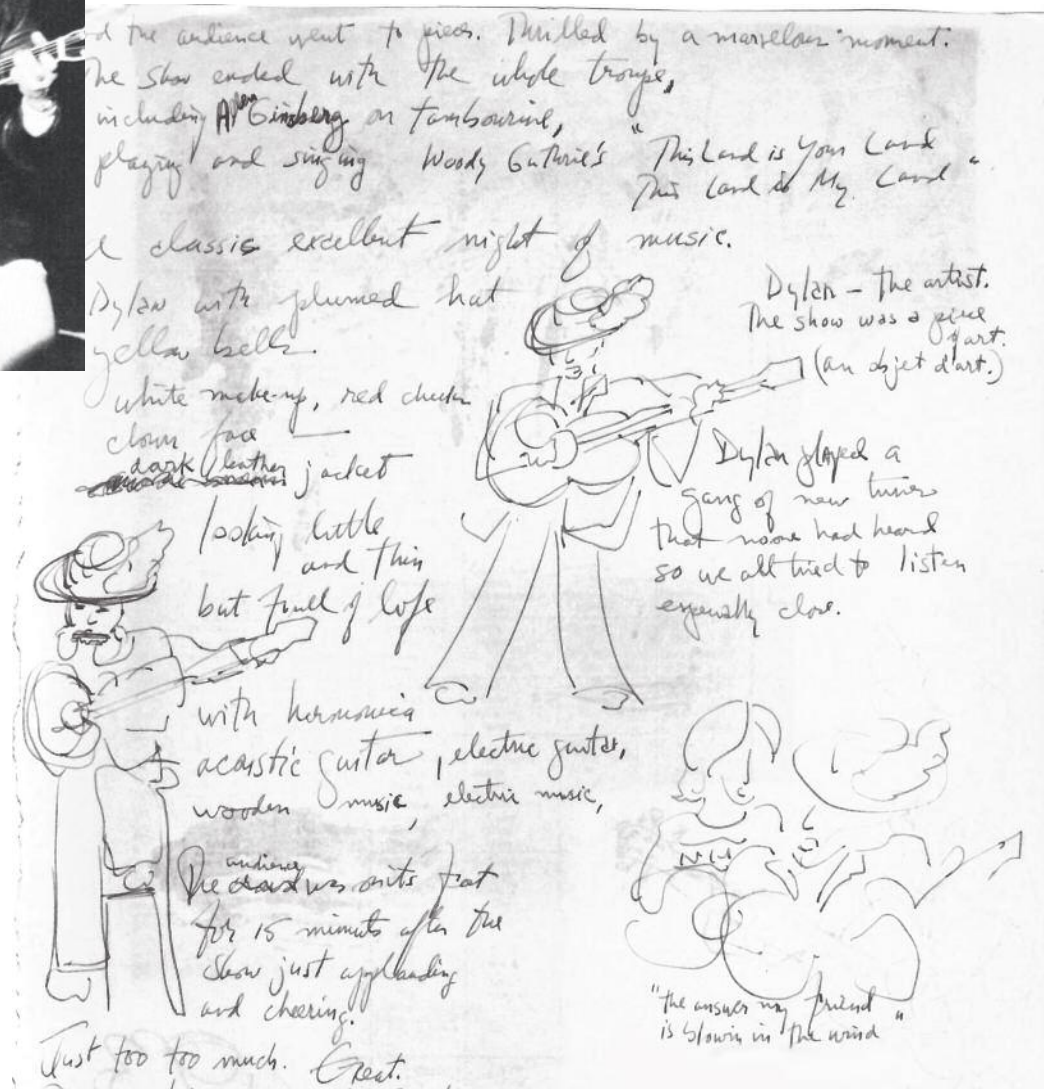
People still examine every Dylan twitch for meaning. When he hits the stage, audiences and



Bob Dylan, at the University of Lowell on Nov. 2, 1975

scribes examine each turn of phrase, each lyric, the cut of his garment, the set list and everything other detail. Working like a crafty pitcher with a wide repertoire, Dylan has never come close to playing similar sets here.

Tonight, he'll do it again. And then Bob Dylan will pack up and move on to the next town on the Never-Ending Tour.



Written by: David Perry