

Bob Dylan; "if your time to you is worth savin' . . ."

Last Thursday night (November 2, 2000) the stage of the Elliot Hall of Music was graced by the presence of a living legend in the person of Bob Dylan. My husband and I had pretty good seats, row 19 just to the right of center, but after Dylan walked onto the stage at 7:30 we hardly used them at all. In fact the majority of the main floor seats saw little use as everyone stood and swayed and shouted and clapped and danced for two hours straight.

Dylan himself was in fine form, dressed in a white shirt and tie under a dark frock coat that nearly reached his knees and tight but wrinkled stovepipe pants that accentuated his slender legs from the knee down. His hair in that trademark style of his, he looked from my vantage point as if he really had stepped back in time somehow and was the Bob Dylan of the sixties and seventies again.

Many of the songs he sang weren't known to me, and initially, I had a hard time deciphering the lyrics through the sheer volume of the performance. Yet even so I, like all those around me, quickly became enraptured by the poetry and by the presence of the man himself. His voice, as any one who has listened to him sing will attest, is not beautiful or even melodious in the conventional sense, but we don't listen to Dylan for his voice anyway. We listen for his words; we listen for the songs within the songs, the music that wells up in us as we are lifted up and washed away by the poetry and meaning of those words.

At the end of the show, it felt to the audience as if we had barely begun. We had all been so immersed in the music, so spellbound, that we didn't

want it to end. As Dylan and his band walked off the stage and the stage went dark, we all continued to clap and shout and call for him to come back. Some held flaming lighters in the air and the rest of us just kept clapping until in our arms we could feel that characteristic tremor, the harbinger of sore muscles on the morrow. We knew, but we didn't care, and eventually he came back on, to great echoing waves of applause that swooped and lifted and crashed like the rolling surf of an incoming sea.

And then came the best of all, the return to our youth and our time. Then, as I listened, my head on Jim's shoulder, swaying with him to the ebb and swell of the music, then came the words, the poetry, that defined a generation--our generation. With the songs "Like a Rollin' Stone" and "Blowin' in the Wind" we were transported--in every possible positive way. It didn't matter that the voice that gave them to us was harsh and discordant. It didn't matter that they sounded nothing at all like the radio cuts we listened to and sang along with when we were young. It didn't matter, in that moment, that we were no longer as young and idealistic as we had been then. All that mattered was the poetry, the words that lifted you up and carried you away.

*"How does it feel?" he sang
"How does it feel? To be on your own?
with no direction home? A complete
unknown? Like a rollin' stone."*

How does it feel, Bob? Well sometimes it feels as bad as it sounds. But last night . . . it felt great.