Bob Dylan

Robert Alan Zimmerman was born in 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota. His life has been marked by continual personal and professional reinvention. He went on to become one of the most influential musicians and poets in the world. Politicians and singers from Jackson Browne to Jimi Hendrix have credited his influence over their lives. He was the youngest first rock star ever to receive Kennedy Center Honors, considered the nation's highest award for artistic excellence. Ever heard of him? Maybe you know him as “Bob Dylan.”

In high school he was known for playing loud keyboard with bands, emulating his idol at that time: Little Richard. But while attending the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, he began performing folk and country songs at locally. Dylan, as he later changed his name to (in an homage to the late Welsh poet Dylan Thomas), dropped out of college to move to New York. There he connected with his new idol, American folk artist, Woody Guthrie. Woody’s music and personal life had great influence over Bob’s music and lyrics.

After one of his performances received great reviews in The New York Times, Dylan signed a recording contract with Columbia Records. Released early in 1962, Bob Dylan contained only two original songs, but showcased Dylan's gravelly-voiced singing style in a number of traditional folk songs and covers of blues songs.

The next year his release of The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan marked Dylan's emergence as one of the most original and poetic voices in the history of American popular music. The album included two of the most memorable 1960s folk songs, "Blowin' in the Wind" (which later became a huge hit for the folk trio Peter, Paul, and Mary) and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." Bob was establishing himself as the pre-eminent American acoustic folk singers in the earliest days of the genre.

His next album, The Times They Are A-Changin', firmly established Dylan as the definitive songwriter of the '60s protest movement, a reputation that only increased after he became involved with one of the movement's established icons, Joan Baez, in 1963. His romantic relationship with Baez lasted only two years, but it benefited both immensely in terms of their music careers, as Dylan wrote some of Baez's best-known material and Baez introduced him to thousands of fans in her concerts. By 1964, Dylan was playing 200 concerts annually, but had become tired of his role as "the" folk singer-songwriter of the protest movement. It was time for a new reinvention.

Another Side of Bob Dylan, recorded in 1964, was a much more personal, introspective collection of songs, far less politically charged than Dylan's previous efforts. But in 1965, Dylan scandalized many of his folkie fans by recording the half-acoustic, half-electric album Bringing It All Back Home, backed by a nine-piece band. On July 25, 1965, he was famously booed at the Newport Folk Festival when he performed electrically for the first time.
The albums that followed: *Highway 61 Revisited* including the seminal rock song "Like a Rolling Stone" and the two-record set *Blonde on Blonde* represented Dylan at his most innovative. With his unmistakable voice and unforgettable lyrics, Dylan brought the worlds of music and literature together as no one else had. He had established himself as both a voice on paper and in performance.

Over the course of the next three decades, Dylan continued to reinvent himself. Following a near-fatal motorcycle accident in July 1966, Dylan spent almost a year recovering in seclusion. His next two albums, *John Wesley Harding* including "All Along the Watchtower," (later recorded by guitar great Jimi Hendrix) and the country-toned *Nashville Skyline* were far more mellow than his earlier works. At this time he teamed with country legend, Johnny Cash.

Cash had met with Dylan in the mid-1960s and became closer friends when they were neighbors in the late 1960s in Woodstock, NY. Cash was enthusiastic about reintroducing the reclusive Dylan to his audience. Cash sang a duet with Dylan on *Nashville Skyline*. Critics blasted the two-record set *Self-Portrait*, and *Tarantula*, a long-awaited collection of writings Dylan published in 1971, also met with a poor reception.

It was time for another reinvention. In 1973, Dylan appeared in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, a feature film. He also wrote the film's soundtrack, which became a hit and included the now-classic song, "Knockin' on Heaven's Door." The next year, Dylan began his first full-scale tour since his accident, embarking on a sold-out nationwide tour with his longtime backup band, the Band.

An album he recorded with the Band, *Planet Waves*, became his first No. 1 album ever. He followed these successes with the celebrated 1975 album *Blood on the Tracks* and *Desire* (1976), each of which hit No. 1 as well. *Desire* included the song "Hurricane," written by Dylan about the boxer Rubin "Hurricane" Carter. Dylan helped popularize Carter's cause, leading to a retrial in 1976, when he was again convicted.

Following a painful split with wife, Sara Lowndes, Dylan again reinvented himself, declaring in 1979 that he was now a born-again Christian. The evangelical *Slow Train Coming* was a commercial hit and won Dylan his first Grammy Award, for Best Rock Vocal Performance, Male. The tour and albums that followed were less successful, however, and Dylan's religious leanings soon became less overt in his music.

In the 1980s, Dylan began touring full time, sometimes with fellow legends Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers and the Grateful Dead. His concerts were sometimes rambling and sloppy, and many fans began to suspect he was burning out in his middle-aged years. Notable albums during this period included *Infidels* (1983); the five-disc retrospective *Biograph* (1985); *Knocked Out Loaded* (1986); and *Oh Mercy* (1989), which became his best-received album in years. In 1985, he appeared in a solo on the single, “We Are the World” with a host of American rock, pop, blues and country stars to raise money for African relief, produced by Quincy Jones.
He recorded two albums in 1989 with the all-star band the Traveling Wilburys, also featuring former Beatle George Harrison, the late Roy Orbison, Tom Petty and Jeff Lynne. That same year, he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. In his introduction rock singer Bruce Springsteen said, “He (Dylan) invented a new way a pop singer could sound, broke through the limitations of what a recording artist could achieve, and changed the face of rock and roll forever."

In 1994, Bob returned to his folk roots, winning the Grammy Award for Best Traditional Folk Album for *World Gone Wrong*. In 1997, Dylan became the first rock star ever to receive Kennedy Center Honors, considered the nation's highest award for artistic excellence. That year, his album *Time Out of Mind* reestablished this one-time folk icon as one of the preeminent of rock’s wise men, winning three Grammy Awards including Album of the Year. In 2000, he recorded the single "Things Have Changed" for the soundtrack of the film *Wonder Boys*. The song won Dylan a Golden Globe and an Academy Award for Best Original Song.

Dylan took time out from his music to tell the story of his life in 2004. The singer released *Chronicles: Volume One*, the first in a three-book memoir series. Dylan gave his first full interview in 20 years for a documentary released in 2005, titled *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*. Dylan released *Modern Times* in 2006. It reached the top of the album charts in 2006. It was a mixture of blues, country, and folk. The work was praised for its rich sound and imagery. Several critics remarked the album had a playful, knowing quality.

In August 2010, *Variety* reported the release in October of, *Bob Dylan: The Original Mono Recordings*. This box set was the first time that Dylan’s eight earliest albums, from *Bob Dylan* (1962) to *John Wesley Harding* (1967), were released in their original mono mix in the CD format. Dylan also released Volume 9 of his Bootleg Series, *The Witmark Demos*.

From high school keyboard rocker, to acoustic folk singer, to electric performer to born-again evangelist to legend, Bob Dylan has continually reinvented himself, influencing stars from country to heavy metal with his lyrics and song styling.

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