

Bob Dylan

Middleweight boxing title contender, Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter was falsely accused of a triple murder in a New Jersey bar and was sentenced to serve three life terms. In 1966, Bob Dylan wrote a song, "Hurricane" that depicted the murder, corrupted authorities and expressed his belief in Carter's innocence. After the release of the song was made official, crowds of Dylan fans worldwide expressed their horror of, "...the story of Hurricane, the man the authorities came to blame, for something that he never done...". Because of "Hurricane" three Canadian activists and a New York teen continued to fight for true justice until Carter was eventually freed, after 20 years for a crime he didn't commit.

Bob Dylan ironically, shaped the course of popular music by mistake. Even before the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Beach Boys, a creative and new style was introduced by this young wandering musician. Since beginning his career in 1960, he has been a poet, a political activist, a musician and a mystery. His songs drew upon every style of American music, including rock and roll, blues, gospel, folk and country. Dylan's life as a singer-songwriter captured the public's attention from a time of mass confusion until today, opening up the expressive possibilities of rock. Composing over 100's of songs, performing worldwide including Woodstock 1969, following his own path and believing in his own causes, Dylan has become an idol, young artists everywhere can admire.

Born Robert Allen Zimmerman on May 24, 1941, in Duluth Minnesota to Beatrice and Abraham Zimmerman, Dylan was soon to move to Hibbing in 1947. It, like many other small towns felt the optimism, prosperity, and conformism that followed WWII. Hibbing became more directly touched by national events with the onset of radio, movies and television. By the mid 1950's it, too, felt the social tensions that were rolling across the country, especially with Senator Joesph McCarthy accusing innocent americans of being communists. Meanwhile the civil rights movement was gaining momentum. In 1954 after the case of Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, the segregation of races in public schools is declared a violatation of the equal protection clause. The Supreme courts decision launched the struggle against prejudice nationwide.

While the social revolution was being fought, Elvis Presley, Chuck Barry and Little Richard began playing rock and roll music, music that gave teenagers a vehicle for expression and an identity that was distinct. The early rock and roll singers also gave voice to the rhythm and blues of African Americans and the country music of poor southerners, who felt ignored by the whites in society. While in film, actors like James Dean, Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift impressed the idea of self determined rebel upon a new generation, a characterization that seems to have coincided with the defiant style of rock and roll music then. All of these elements: conformism, social revolution, rock and roll music, and the "rebel" movie hero, converged into a creative and excepting time for the young Dylan to grow up in, a time for the mainstream American and the youth behind it to emerge.

As a child Dylan was comfortable being the center of attention, often writing creative poetry for his mother and on occasion singing. Dylan had no formal music lessons, but none the less he began to compose. Later at age 14, he took up the guitar and shortly after formed a band, one of many he played the guitar in. Always plunging ahead, performing to his up most potential, Dylan absorbed his surroundings as a source of inspiration. Even during his early efforts Dylan responded very positivly to mainstream musicians, such as country star Hank Williams. Yet, he responded especially well to early rock stars such

as Little Richard, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis. In the summer of 1959, after graduation Dylan began to work at a cafe, where he began to pay increasing attention to folksingers such as Judy Collins and Jesse Fuller. Finding an instant connection with their songs, songs relevant to social issues. Dylan was drawn into both the musical style and the social message of these individuals.

In 1959 he left for college, but instead of concentrating on his studies he devoted himself to his music. He sang wherever he could, his performance style, a nasal tone with enunciation problems sometimes drew applause while other times criticism, yet this would later become his trademark sound. It was also around this time when he began performing with a guitar and harmonica. It was during his performing days in Dinkytown that the young Bob Zimmerman first began using Bob Dylan as his stage name. No clear reason can be ascertained for the choice of Dylan. Whatever its source, the name gave him a public image distinct from his Jewish heritage, enhancing his already growing career.

Beyond this, an influential figure stepped into the light in his life. Woody Guthrie, a dying folksinger emerged, consuming Dylan's attention. After Guthrie's death in 1967 Dylan adopted his style of: a rough, hoarse voice with guitar accompaniment in a folk music orientation. By the end of 1960 Bob Zimmerman made his final step into becoming Bob Dylan, the last stage in his early life. He decided to move to New York, to try to make it "big". Despite his early interest in rock, Dylan's music turned folk. Playing everywhere, he made his name known among musicians and audiences alike. Many people were drawn to his messages, others to his unique voice. In 1961, Robert Shelton of the New York Times decided to attend a performance of a young musician at Gerde's Folk City Cafe, curious as to who this man was. After his attendance, Shelton wrote a favorable review in September and by October of the same year Dylan signed a recording contract with Columbia Records.