Twelve Rounds with Bob Dylan: Pugilist/Poet

Richard Westlein

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!
Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds

Recommended Citation
https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3168

This Thesis is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
TWELVE ROUNDS WITH BOB DYLAN: PUGILIST/POET

by

RICHARD B. WESTLEIN

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2019
Twelve Rounds With Bob Dylan: Pugilist/Poet

by

Richard B. Westlein

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date                                                   Eric Lott
                                                       Thesis Advisor

Date                                                   Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis
                                                       Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Twelve Rounds With Bob Dylan: Pugilist/Poet

by

Richard B. Westlein

Advisor: Eric Lott

Bob Dylan’s catalogue of songs has been labeled the most important in all rock music history by many significant journalists, scholars, music critics, and rock musicians the world over. The over-arching objective of this writing is to construct the originally written and composed songs by Bob Dylan into a creative framework that will establish and identify his albums as belonging in twelve different, distinct, chronological artistic periods that span the nearly sixty years of his songwriting. The concept was borne from a perceived gap between the decades and his music. Make a framework for newcomers who might be tangled up in Bob so they can better orient themselves in the relationship between song and culture. This model will be helpful in extrapolating an aspect of the meaning from a given song, once located within a given time period. Also, the establishment of Bob Dylan’s artistic periods will offer clarity and balance on the chronology and sub-groupings of all his albums (see appendix) even to those already familiar with his work.

My interest in Bob Dylan is due primarily to the fact that I like his songs and how they connect to my own views of the world. In keeping pace with the singer/songwriter, I began to notice his growing influence in our culture, musically, aesthetically, socially, and politically, ultimately it can be said, he brought the counterculture into the culture. It’s Bob Dylan I have to thank for expanding to some degree, my ability to see behind some of the curtains of life, in poetical, musical, ironical, cynical, and humorous kinds of ways.
The structure of the periods are based on the official chronological release order of his albums, with the exception of his eighth album *The Basement Tapes* which will be included based on it’s recording dates in summer 1967, versus its official commercial release in June 1975. The reason for this is because its period placement helps explain a large stylistic gap in the artistic conception of the two albums that surround *The Basement Tapes* which are *Blonde On Blonde* (May, 1966) and *John Wesley Harding* (Dec, 1967). Besides the chronological basis for periodic identification, musical stylings, lyrical stylings, cultural relevance, artistic aesthetics, and an album’s relationship to the artist’s body of work will also be considered for defining the albums periodic location. The cluster of albums that define their period will not cross the chronological lines of their creation, which includes songs that did not make the album but were released at a later date. Also, there are a couple of so-called “tweener” albums that don’t belong to neither the outgoing period nor the incoming period but because of its chronological relationship to the albums around it, it has to belong somewhere. More on this when addressed.

Also, it is not well known that Bob Dylan is a devoted and life-long boxing fan and practitioner who, over the years, has owned two boxing gymnasiums. Bob Dylan is a “pugilist,” which means he has trained with professional boxers and knows what he’s doing when sparring in the ring. Ergo, the twelve creative periods of Bob Dylan’s songs will be expressed in “Rounds,” for the purpose of uniqueness of thesis presentation and for providing some levity to an otherwise serious analysis of the work of a pioneering poet/singer/songwriter. In this narrative device of a fictional boxing match, even the reader may occasionally be referred to as one of the opponents Bob Dylan will face in this “twelve round championship fight.” The reader will also see Bob Dylan facing himself in a few rounds. I too shall throw jabs to justify the
rationale and logic for where, when, and why the twelve rounds of artistic periods exist, and why the given albums are identified as belonging to the given group constituting the period.

For example, Round One is called “Musical Expeditionary Period” because that’s what Bob Dylan called himself in an on camera interview in the Martin Scorsese documentary No Direction Home. A question arose about possibly of Dylan pilfering some of Folk Music Scholar Paul Nelson’s record collection while a student at the University of Minnesota, to which Dylan said, “well someone like myself who was a musical expeditionary, you have to immerse yourself in [records]” (Scorsese 30:25). So Dylan did lift some of Nelson’s records and ultimately it’s not known if he returned them. Musical expeditionary is what he considered himself to be during his earliest days of learning to play guitar, harmonica and piano before coming to New York.

Fast-forward to his second creative period, the “Solo Acoustic Period” beginning in Mar.1962 and it is named such because during the creation of the three albums and live concerts, “solo acoustic” was the singular performance mode for all his musical stylings during the period, what you got were his songs, his voice, his acoustic guitar, and his harmonica.

These are only two brief examples of how the periods in Bob Dylan’s chronological order of albums get there names. There are a total of twelve rounds to be defined in detail as laid out in the forth-coming chapters. So lace up your gloves (so to speak) and prepare to meet the pugilist/poet in the center of the ring, as he prepares to face you and the world with his words, strings, and microphone and harp. “Standing in the blue corner to my right...Bob Dylan.”

-KEYWORDS: Bob Dylan; poet; pugilist; singer/songwriter; guitar player; harmonica player.
Acknowledgements

Bob Dylan’s songs first hit my ears on the car radio in 1964, and I didn’t even know it was his song. My young, junior high school mind, knew the folk trio Peter, Paul, & Mary were singing about some pretty lofty questions in their radio hit “Blowin’ in the Wind.” But it wasn’t until my friend Mike and I crashed his older sister’s record collection, and heard the albums The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan and The Times They Are A-Changing, that we knew who Bob Dylan was. I remember this because at the age of fourteen, in the mid-sixties, everything in the nation was rapidly changing: assassinations; wars; politics; race relations; national culture; fashion; hair styles; student demonstrations; racial riots; political protests; and popular music.

My own proclivity towards music, which started on piano at age seven, was stirring during my teen years and my musical fluency was expanding into guitar. While I never got far as a musician, the powerful world of it never stopped entering my own as I loved where the music took me.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Eric Lott for his enthusiasm and sound scholarly advice and guidance in keeping some of my too over the top allegories on the editing room floor, and for sharing in constructing the basic outline and attitude, for the flow of my discourse. And I thank Naomi Stubbs for her professorial wisdom on thesis writing. Thanks also to Bernice Westlein, Denise Papania, and Joe Rombi Jr., co-author with me on the 2008 unpublished Bob Dylan: A Primer. I would be remiss if I didn’t thank my dearly departed cousin and mentor, Susan Ronning Topping and her mother Audrey Ronning Topping.
## Table of Contents

Bob Dylan’s Artistic Periods

**Introduction**

Preliminary Round (pre-fight)

1. **ROUND ONE**  “Musical Expeditionary Period”

2. **ROUND TWO**  “Solo Acoustic Period”

3. **ROUND THREE**  “Electric Expressionist Period”

4. **ROUND FOUR**  “Post Crash Period”

5. **ROUND FIVE**  “Renewed Minstrel Period”

6. **ROUND SIX**  “Blood & Desire Period”

7. **ROUND SEVEN**  “Holy Spirit Period”

8. **ROUND EIGHT**  “Post-Holy Spirit Period”

9. **ROUND NINE**  “Wilburys & Mercy Period”

10. **ROUND TEN**  “Cocoon Minstrel Period”

11. **ROUND ELEVEN**  “Emeritus Minstrel Period”

12. **ROUND TWELVE**  “Golden Minstrel Period”

13. **CONCLUSION**  “Judge’s Scorecard”

14. **APPENDIX**

15. **WORKS CITED**
Introduction

Bob Dylan on Muhammad Ali:

If the measure of greatness is to gladden the heart of
every human being on the face of the earth, then he
truly was the greatest. In every way he was the bravest,
the kindest and the most excellent of men.

(Kreps “Bob Dylan”)

If you look past Muhammad Ali to Bob Dylan you will see two pugilist/poets both of
whom made significant contributions to the culture of a turbulent America during the 1960’s, the
former more of a pugilist than a poet and the latter more of a poet than a pugilist. “The Brown
Bomber” Joe Louis was heavyweight champion of the world when Bob Zimmerman (later Bob
Dylan) was born May 24, 1941. By the time he was six or seven years old, through the power of
live radio, young boxing fan Bobby Zimmerman was able to appreciate the pugilism skills of
Champion Joe Louis against those of his challengers, which were described by the radio voice of
famed and eloquent boxing announcer Don Dunphy. In those years almost every household
gathered around the family radio to hear the President, the world series, or a heavyweight
championship boxing match. These were the early years in the relationship between sports and
mass media communications, and listening to a big pro-fight on radio didn’t cost anything, plus
you had live access to a special event that previously was only available in print media the day
after.

“Boxing was a part of the curriculum when I went to high school,” Dylan told Rolling
Stone in 2009. “Then it was taken out of the school system, I think maybe in ’58. But it was
always good for me because it was kind of an individualist thing. You didn’t need to be part of a team. And I like that.” (Kurchak “Cassius Clay”)

To this day, Bob Dylan is a boxing fan and participant who owns a boxing gymnasium adjacent to his 18th Street Coffee House in Santa Monica, California (Maymudes 269). There is a sign in the lobby area of the gym that reads “Don’t talk about it.” Pugilist Dylan works out in his boxing gym with trainer Carlos Monzon when he can, and many friends from the world of boxing drop in for a visit/workout. Dylan dropped in for boxing workouts when out on tour back in 2008 and 2012 while on the road in St. Louis. Dylan laced up in the Sweat/Pound 4 Pound Gym for pugilist workouts which included hitting the heavy bag and other forms of boxing training (Oral “Bob Dylan”). It’s worth mentioning too, that in Dylan’s autobiography Chronicles, Volume One he talks about meeting former heavyweight boxing Champion and pugilist legend Jack Dempsey in the first paragraph.

Why is the so-called “sweet science” of boxing important to Bob Dylan? Well there’s the survival imperative element in the sport that is analogous and prevalent in the art of many Bob Dylan songs throughout all his periods. I would speculate to say Dylan likes boxing because it is the essence of sport, man against man, in a civilized contest with gloves, referees, and judges. It’s not that different from his own inner battles of man against the world, within a civilized context of guitars, lyrics, harmonicas, and microphones, everybody’s dueling to survive.

Dylan’s appreciation for boxing is also evident in three of his copyrighted songs where the subject is a boxer: “Who Killed Davey Moore?” (Davey Moore); “Hurricane” (about Rubin Carter; “Gentleman” Jim Corbett gets a mention); and “I Shall Be Free No. 10” (Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali mentioned). All three of these songs are set in different musical styles and it’s Bob Dylan’s multiple musical styles that make this thesis examination so pertinent today.
The pugilist/poet shifted musical styles so often over the decades, it’s not easy to know where his artistic evolutions manifest and where the origins of his songs lay. But seen in periods, or “Rounds” as in this case, one will be able to view, by way of structured chronology, his artistic development and the creative evolutions of his work, especially as those that emerge in a longstanding contest with his audience.

The concept of artistic styles in designated artistic periods was first put forward by German scholar Johann Winckelmann (1717-1768) while studying early Greek art and deciphering the subtle differences in their mode and style. His research in Pliny and Xenokrates, and his theories of evolution in Greek art, earned him the nickname “the father of art history.” In his *The History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764) he lays out his framework for organizing and categorizing the various expressions in the centuries of early Greek art, which is based on recognizing the changing creative stylings by the artists over a given period of time (Boorstin 584). The Swiss art historian, Heinrich Wolfflin (1864-1945), in his *Principles of Art History* (1932), took Winckelmann a step further and asserted that analysis of a particular period of art would “reveal the connection of the part to the whole” (Munsterberg “Writing About Art”).

Defining and establishing an artist’s periods, gives more scope into the analytical minutiae, and by recognizing the artist in a given period, one can identify that influence on later works, as well as on other artists, and in Dylan’s case, on other artistic genres.

Similar to Bob Dylan, the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) worked in many mediums, styles and genres. Besides being a painter, whose first painting was *The Picador* (1889, age eight), Picasso was a sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist, stage designer, poet, and playwright. Today, Picasso is recognized for his revolutionary artistic accomplishments, his
lifelong dedication to art and his influences on other artistic genres and artists around the world. His work includes co-founding the art of “collage,” his countless world-renowned masterpieces, and his co-founding of the “Cubist” movement in art. Picasso’s global influence is often studied in periods associated with the timelines of his work. The periods help explain the evolution of the style and content of his creativity (est. over 50,000 various works) as seen within the identifiable timeframe (over 83 years) of creation. His ten periods are most often referred to as: Before 1900; Blue; Rose; African Primitivism; Analytical Cubism; Synthetic Cubism; Neoclassicism & Surrealism; Great Depression to MOMA ’39; World War II; Final years. Some scholars also include two additional Picasso periods, Post-Impressionism, and Symbolism. (Rile “Pablo Picasso”).

Similar to Pablo Picasso, American musical artist Bob Dylan (1941-current) has worked in many mediums, styles and genres. Besides being a singer/songwriter who wrote his first hit song “Blowin’ In The Wind” (1962, age twenty), Bob Dylan is a painter, metal-sculptor, filmmaker, radio disc-jockey, actor, poet, Civil War historian, and author. Today, Bob Dylan is recognized for his revolutionary artistic accomplishments, his lifelong dedication to art and his influences on other musical artists and musical genres. His work in the Sixties got him labeled as “the voice of a generation,” helping to pioneer the country-folk music genre, and fostering the folk-rock music genre, ultimately becoming the winner of the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature, “the man who did to popular music what Einstein did to physics” (Gates “Dylan Revisited”). Bob Dylan’s global artistic influence has never been studied in timelines associated with defined periods of his work, other than sketchily by the decade or, vaguely as early, middle and late, or stylistically by genre. These methods are clumsy and inaccurate. This thesis will try to show that
the period divisions laid out will justify and accurately describe and define the flow of timeframes that appropriately contain the related albums and songs in an expansive chronology representing all his sixty years as a recording artist.

Preliminary Round:  
“Things in the Ether” (1911-1946)

Hypothetically, the preliminary round bell rings in 1911, the year Bob Dylan’s father, Abram Zimmerman was born. The unborn Bob Dylan is a creature void of form. This “Preliminary Round” lasts until Bob Dylan’s “Musical Expeditionary Period” begins, which at his first singing engagement in the Zimmerman family household at age four or five, approximately 1946 (Sounes 15). Much was happening in the ether that would eventually affect the trajectory of Bob Dylan’s creative arc, so it’s important and worthwhile to illuminate some of the relevant events and cultural influences that will give form to the shape of Bob Dylan yet to come.

It was less than a year after the birth of Dylan’s father that singer/songwriter and major Dylan influence Woody Guthrie would be born in Okemah, OK. In the atmosphere affecting the shape of America, important political, military, cultural and industrial evolutions were expanding on a grand scale. By 1912 Thomas Edison perfected the phonographic disc. In 1913 Henry Ford began mass producing the Model-T automobile. On July 28, 1914, WWI commenced with the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. In 1914 the United States and Alexander Graham Bell are leading the world in telephone connectivity, making the world a smaller place. In 1918 World War I ended and the League of Nations was formed, with hopes that world peace might be possible. Lastly, thanks to Italian communications pioneer Gugliermo Marconi, by 1920 commercial radio was taking roots as a mass communication medium across the United States. America was growing in leaps and bounds, and rapid modernization of mass media culture was taking place. Television was just around the corner.
The world stage was being set for an eventual poet laureate/rock artist, Bob Dylan who will be bound for glory.

In the late nineteenth century, various isolated pockets of American musical culture were evolving in distinct regions of the country, with different styles originating in different regions, like jazz in New Orleans, and the blues just up river in the Mississippi Delta States and on up to St Louis (Spitzer “Making Sense”). The different roots of American music were beginning to define themselves and, towards the end of the nineteenth century, evolve into a viable commercial industry. By the time young Bob was born in 1941, radio, cheaper than phonographs, was the dominant home entertainment medium and according to early 1940’s Billboard charts, Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, The Andrew Sisters, Bing Crosby, and Billie Holiday, were among the emerging names of the country’s popular musical artists.

Also occurring in the ether, musical artists busy being born included: Robert Johnson, ‘Master of the Delta Blues’; Mahalia Jackson, ‘Queen of Gospel’; Big Joe Turner, ‘R & B Pioneer’ all in 1911; Woody Guthrie, ‘Protest & Folk’ singer/songwriting pioneer in 1912; Hank Williams, the “Hillbilly Shakespeare” in 1923; Little Richard, early ‘Rock & Roll’ pioneer in 1932; Elvis Presley, ‘The King of Rock & Roll’ in 1935; and early rock n’ roll singer/songwriter pioneer Buddy Holly in 1936. The influences of these musical artists figure prominently on the musical forms that Bob Dylan would adopt and interpret into his own unique and definitive style. Not to be omitted among Dylan’s early musical influences are Lonnie Donegan, Johnnie Ray, Jimmy Reed, Jimmie Rodgers, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, John Lee Hooker and The Clancy Brothers (Sounes 22-3).

Dylan also had plenty of literary influences from writers of poetry, philosophy, theatre, religion, history, and fiction: T.S. Eliot, Allen Ginsberg, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, Bertolt
Brecht, Dylan Thomas, William Shakespeare, John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jack Kerouac, Robert Gover, Thucydides, Junichi Saga. Not to be omitted are the books of the New and Old Testament from which lines or allusions always seem to appear somewhere on every album. By his mid-to-late-teens Bob Zimmerman had become an avid reader (Sounes 38).

The only thing I can compare him with was blotting paper.

He soaked everything up. He had this immense curiosity; he was totally blank, and ready to suck up everything that came within his range.

-Liam Clancy (Bauldie 21)

The sound of the opening bell for commencing round one is about to ring, announcing “The Musical Expeditionary Period,” from where the future Nobelist shall begin to emerge.
Round One:

“Musical Expeditionary Period”  (May, 1946 - Mar. 1962)

One official studio album and release date:

Bob Dylan  (Mar. 19, 1962)

Bob Zimmerman (Dylan) found his singing voice in early childhood through songs sung with his family and later singing solo to his family at holiday gatherings (Sounes 15). While entertaining his captive audience, Bob recognized a connection within himself for the joy and skill of live performance, as well as the ego boosting audience applause. Here the “Musical Expeditionary Period” of Bob Dylan’s career is beginning to get its legs, in approximately 1946, as he genuinely enjoys singing, thus establishing the first building block of his future career. This period still has sixteen years to go and over this span Bobby Zimmerman will become Bob Dylan and very proficient on guitar, harmonica, piano, vocals, poetry, songwriting, and performing. Eventually, no matter how accomplished he becomes, Bob Dylan will always consider himself a musical expeditionary, someone continually learning about the magic of music. This is one reason he’s able to remain an innovator. These are his musical scuffling days, a period where he is finding within himself his relationship to a union in the arts of music and poetry. A traditional song called “Drifting Too Far From The Shore,” sung by the Monroe Brothers, made the pre-teen Bobby Zimmerman feel like he was a different person, “the song made me feel like I was somebody else” giving him the realization of the true power of musical adventure (No Direction Home 3:53).

When Bob was seven or eight his family acquired a Gulbransen spinet piano which enabled Bob to begin further exploration of his fascination with music (Sounes 20). Bob found he could simulate songs and improvise musically in the various keys of triad chords and notes,
playing by ear as the saying goes. Some months later Bob got his first guitar, probably an acoustic nylon six-string and he was able to start strumming, barring, picking and riffing because he had a very good ear, acute intuition, and a Nick Manoloff basic Spanish guitar manual showing fretboard fingering positions and strumming direction (Sounes 20).

Young Bob was now armed and dangerous, so to speak, playing both piano and guitar, while putting himself into his own musical bootcamp at home. Bob began exploring the rudimentary execution skills of piano and guitar based on his own instincts and the musical fellowship of what friends and family told him, it seems he didn’t need an official teacher or instructor. Also, songs from the radio, phonograph, television and movies were teaching him the basics about songs, structure and style, he was quite capable of teaching himself the fundamentals of music with a willingness to practice every day (Sounes 23-4). The young Zimmerman used ideas as his maps (as he later put it in “My Back Pages”), his imagination and senses undoubtedly soaring while finding his own relationship to the potential forces of music.

In 1955, the “Rock & Roll” explosion hit the American airwaves, record stores, theaters, jukeboxes, and dance halls in a big way. By 1956 and 1957, according to Billboard charts, slamming hits were Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis to name a few. From 1956 to 1959 Bobby Zimmerman was part of at least five different electric rock n’ roll bands in his home town of Hibbing, MN: The Jokers, The Golden Chords, The Satin Tones, Elston Gunn & The Rock Boppers, and The Shadow Blasters (Sounes 28-9). In the summer of 1959, after graduating high school, Zimmerman performed with Bobby Vee and the Shadows in Fargo, ND, who were filling in on gigs vacated by the recently deceased Buddy Holly, who Zimmerman saw in concert in Duluth two nights before he died in the infamous plane crash. This semi-cosmic coincidence remains mystical to Bob to this day, saying
he made direct eye contact with Buddy Holly during the concert and that image lingers (like burning coal) in his memory (Sounes 40-2).

Additionally, during his high school years Bob became a true movie buff as he watched films at the family owned Lybba Movie Theatre in Hibbing, without having to pay admission. He enjoyed various cinematic genres and drew much creative inspiration, particularly from anything James Dean, Marlon Brando, Elvis Presley, Alfred Hitchcock, and Brigitte Bardot (Sounes 26-7). Later, once settled in New York City, and in the company of his live-in girlfriend Suze Rotolo, he enjoyed the “art films” of various foreign directors like Fellini, Bergman, Truffaut, Eisenstein, Kurosawa, and several others (Rotolo, 208-9). Many of Bob Dylan’s strongest songs have a definite cinematic quality, as evident in his lyrical descriptions of location scenery, time of day, character development, fashion stylings, dramatic arch, and montage-like elements of narration. As Dylan biographer Clinton Heylin mentions in *Behind The Shades*, and I paraphrase, “many of his songs are like movies for the mind.”

Zimmerman’s freshman year at the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis begins in the fall of 1959. It is here he began playing solo acoustic gigs on and around campus as Bob Dylan, (Sounes 56) singing many Woody Guthrie songs as well as other traditional folk and blues ballads on guitar and now accompanied with harmonica blown from a rack mount. Bob very rarely attended his classes (Sounes 56) and officially dropped out in spring of 1960, though he continued living and performing around the campus and in Dinkytown, the off campus artsy district. Bob was making important connections in the local and national folk music scene in Dinkytown including meeting renowned folk singer Odetta, (Wittman “Bob Dylan”) listening to and learning to play a great variety of folk songs from various friends’ elaborate record
collections, and special tutorship from upperclassman Tony Glover, giving the now known as Bob Dylan, a strong foundation for his folk music future (Heylin 51).

Bob Dylan’s personal, spiritual, and professional calling came and finally overwhelmed him in late-December 1960, as he finally realized inside himself, it was time to move on. He sensed it was the time to leave his family, the University, and the State of Minnesota, and go in search of the quest he had formulated in his heart and mind in the year of who knows when. Both Greenwich Village and Woody Guthrie were the initial landing points in his quest. So on a snowy late December afternoon, starting out in from the University campus in Minneapolis, he put his thumb out and caught a ride towards the land of his dreams (Sounes 68-70).

Over a thousand miles later, and with stops in Madison and Chicago, Bob Dylan’s shoes touched down on the island of Manhattan near the end of January 1961 (Wilentz 41), and found his way downtown to the cafes of Greenwich Village. It was open mic night at the Cafe Wha? on McDougal Street and Bob had the opportunity to perform on his first night in town, meeting folks that might allow him to crash over (Sounes 76). Once at the mic he told the meager Cafe Wha? crowd “I’ve been traveling around the country, following in Woody Guthrie’s footsteps” (Sounes 76). A couple of days later Bob made his way to the Guthrie home in the Howard Beach section of Queens, where he didn’t meet Woody due to the fact that was in a hospital, but he did meet his thirteen year old son Arlo Guthrie, and the two teenagers actually jammed and played some music together on this occasion (Sounes 77). Eventually, after five days of being in New York City, Bob met Woody and Woody’s ex-wife Marjorie at the home of Bob and Sidsel Gleason, long-time friends of the Guthrie family. The Gleason’s lived in East Orange, New Jersey, and would welcome Woody who had Huntington’s Chorea disease into their home on Sundays to give him a break from the hospital one afternoon a week (Sounes 77-8). Bob would
later visit Woody on his own accord in the Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital of Morris Plains, NJ, where Woody was confined and being treated. Bob would play and sing songs to Woody in his hospital bed as they established a rapport.

Much fruit fell from the trees for Bob in the form of folk music industry insiders he met through his association with Guthrie, the Gleason’s, and other Woody acolytes like Ramblin‘ Jack Elliott. Interesting side-bar here, both Woody and Bob have been pick picked-up by the police in New Jersey for vagrancy, Woody in Morris Plains in 1954 and was arrested (Turner “Remembering Woody”), and Bob in Long Branch in 2009 and was detained at a police station (Joyner “Outside The Beltway”). It seems to me these protest singers need to learn to carry identification when they travel the streets.

Unexpectedly, it was Bob’s harmonica skills that separated him from the majority of folk singers working the Village cafes, and thanks to that skill, he was requested to play harmonica on recordings by Harry Belafonte (*Midnight Special*) and Carolyn Hester (*Carolyn Hester*). Also raising his profile, in September 1961, a rave review by Robert Shelton in the New York Times of Bob Dylan’s performance at the Gaslight as opening act for John Lee Hooker, truly added to his bourgeoning celebrity (Rotolo 151).

While recording with Belafonte and Hester at Columbia Record studios, Dylan’s raw talent was recognized by legendary Columbia Records music producer John Hammond, who is also credited with discovering musical greats Benny Goodman, Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Big Joe Turner, Aretha Franklin, Leonard Cohen, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Bruce Springsteen. So legendary John Hammond added another musical icon to his inventory when he offered the raggedy twenty year-old Bob Dylan a Columbia recording contract in October of 1961.

-Bob Dylan’s age at end of “Musical Expeditionary Period” is twenty.
Round Two:

“Solo Acoustic Period” (Mar. 1962 - Jul. 1964)

Three official studio albums and release dates:

*The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*  (May 27, 1963)

*The Times They Are A-Changin’*  (Jan. 13, 1964)

*Another Side Of Bob Dylan*  (Aug. 8, 1964)

Singer/songwriter Paul Simon is quoted as saying: “Bob Dylan’s early compositions virtually took over the folk music genre, Dylan’s early songs were very rich...with strong melodies. “Blowin’ In The Wind” has a really strong melody. He so enlarged himself through the folk background that he incorporated it for a while. He defined the genre for a while” (Hombach 177).

Since finding his vocational legs in Round One, the contender is finding his artistic wings in here in round two’s “Solo Acoustic Period,” and as Simon is saying, Bob Dylan is soaring high above the field of his contemporaries during the creation and production of these three albums, containing thirty-four originally unique and influential songs. What is separating this period from the previous is the musical unity and songwriting maturity available on these three albums that distinguish the “Solo Acoustic Period.” It’s exemplified in the artist’s newly found ability to express relevant issues in popular song that people want to hear. Not the cover songs from his debut album.

The first album of this new period is *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, and it not only enhanced Dylan’s status as an artist but it raised producer John Hammond’s reputation at Columbia Records and throughout the entire music industry. The songs on *Freewheelin’* displayed a new intellectual dexterity in lyrical songwriting and a fresh versatility for composing
melody in folk music. With this album, Dylan floored all his previous industry doubters. His new poetic aesthetic and musical deftness prove he’s no longer a musical expeditionary.

The songs on The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan communicated deeply to millions across generations, races, genders, and social classes across the nation because Bob Dylan was capable of saying in a song what folks were thinking in their mind, about the country with regard to concerns about topical issues. Some of Bob Dylan’s ‘finger pointin‘ songs’ gelled the consciousness of the people, and for a brief time Bob Dylan seemed like a cultural leader. ‘Finger pointin’’ is a term attached to the songs Bob Dylan was singing about the political and social ills and injustices in our nation (Heylin 118).

The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan is a genuine masterpiece and a landmark collection in popular music. With classics like “Blowin’ In The Wind,” “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright” and “Girl Of The North Country,” Bob Dylan’s second album is a quantum leap past his first. Amazingly, our contender has a few more quantum leaps in the rounds ahead.

The next album in round two is The Times They Are A-Changin’ and the pugilist/poet is leading with a combination of song/punches that would deck any opponent. In the title song it sounds like Bob Dylan is ready to go to Washington, as was Mr. Smith Goes To Washington, and take on the whole U.S. Government to correct the injustices of our nation. The song “The Times They Are A-Changin’” is taking “Blowin’ In The Wind” one step further by specifically asking “senators and congressmen to please heed the call” (Dylan “The Lyrics” 81), he is asking the law makers to please rally the legislation in the needed direction for the nation, so as to put us on the right track toward justice and righteousness for all. “The Times They Are A-Changin’” is the pied piper song that opens with lyrics: “Come gather ‘round people, wherever you roam…” This
message rallies the citizens to beseech the nation’s leaders, that we need to unite against injustice for to achieve a fairer social balance. A utopian notion indeed, yet the song crystallized the collective consciousness across many classes of society, especially the American youth who were singing this protest song at anti-racist demonstrations, yours truly included.

There’s only six months between the release of *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* (May 27, 1963) and *The Times They Are A-Changin’* (Jan. 13, 1964) and much happened in that span including the assassination of John F. Kennedy, lending an eerie prophecy to the latter album, the leadership of the country was changing and indeed the times we live in were changing. So this one-two album combo punch by Dylan made him the hottest property on the American music scene and elevated not just the artist, but the entire folk music genre into the national conversation (Marqusee “Redemption Song” 145).

*The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* and *The Times They Are A-Changin’* are representative of what became known as Bob Dylan’s “finger pointin’ songs:” “Masters of War,” “Oxford Town,” “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” “With God On Our Side;” “Only A Pawn In Their Game;” “When The Ship Comes In;” and “The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll.” This is a lot of politically charged songs and along with the title-song “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” the songs became not only intrinsically connected to the cultural times they were created in, but they are definitive works reflecting the songwriter’s skills in this period and the term “genius” was beginning to be attached to his work, and he’s only twenty-three years old.

“With God On Our Side” puts Bob Dylan in center ring with the Big Guy upstairs. The song is an anti-war ballad and in it Dylan scrutinizes America’s long history of war over the centuries, and how we’ve always thought we had God on our side. In the lyrics he brings the point of whether or not Judas Iscariot had God on his side when he betrayed Jesus Christ. The
lyrics are woven in such an adroit way that you don’t really know whether Dylan is saying Judas did or he didn’t have God on His side when he betrayed Jesus with a kiss, he lets you decide for yourself (Dylan “The Lyrics” 85-6).

The next collection in this trilogy of albums that comprise the “Solo Acoustic Period” is *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*, and indeed it is that. It’s also the last time Columbia Records put a title on a Dylan album, the artist was now in charge of that department. The album, was a harbinger of the many conflicted ways Dylan would leave his fans after a creative change like the one seen on this collection, where the majority of songs are of a personal nature, he’s not ‘pointin’ his fingers’ at anyone here, he’s blaming nobody for anything, not trying to right any wrongs or find any faults (Sounes 158-9). Even in an album as unified and emotionally expressive as this one, it didn’t crack the Top Forty and was subject to mixed reviews, based less on the quality of the songs than on their assumed context. A large portion of the public felt Bob Dylan had sold out. He wasn’t pointin’ fingers and singing about any issues that mattered to his old fan base (Marqusee “Wicked” 103). Dylan at this late-point in the period moved away from political leadership, and as Dylan biographer Robert Shelton mentions in his *No Direction Home*, “he assumed musical leadership.”

Only one song on *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*, “Chimes Of Freedom,” rings the injustice bell and it does so with great poetic precision, in my opinion making it the centerpiece of the collection. The song does qualify as a member of the songs for the movement, as freedom is the greatest American ideal, and the way the poet employs his imaginative lyrics to unfold with the corresponding images, make the song sublime. Dylan sings: “Through the mad mystic hammering of the wild ripping hail, the sky cracked its poems in naked wonder...And we gazed upon the Chimes of Freedom flashing” (116). This bit of poetics from the third verse reflect the
artist’s dexterous lyrical skill. Dylan wrote this song and another masterpiece, “Mr. Tambourine Man,” during a month-long cross-country car trip three months before the recording session for the album, which incidentally, because Dylan was so prepared, required only one day in the studio to complete (Sounes 158).

With *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*, he has decided to shift thematic gears within the period, clearing the way for the following album to kick open the doors on a new period. His solo acoustic recording and performance mode remain unchanged so the album stays in this period, though it could belong in its own period. Dylan wants to lighten up and express more personal and impressionistic song narratives about the world at large. In looking at the love songs in Dylan’s purposeful pirouette, escaping the chains of ‘finger pointin’ polemics, he reveals his sensory knowledge on the subject of gender attraction and romantic love as though he were Casanova, Romeo, Don Juan, Cupid, Wilt Chamberlain, and William Shakespeare all rolled into one. In the opener, the twenty-three year old Dylan creates and performs the light hearted “All I Really Want To Do.” In it he finds an intellectual link between foreboding romantic intentions and platonic disqualifications and very poetically massages it for six verses, closing each with the quest of his objective: “all I really wanna do, is baby be friends with you.” (Dylan “The Lyrics” 113). Dylan manages to blend some humor into the song with a busy and clever rhyme scheme, and a lilting yodel on the word “do,” most likely a tip of the hat to an early singing idol, Jimmie “The Singing Brakeman” Rodgers (Mellers 133).

“The Solo Acoustic Period” is only Dylan’s second period, but it is a top tier period in his career, making his name a household word, and getting dubbed as “the voice of a generation.”

-Dylan’s age at end of “Solo Acoustic Period” is twenty-three.
Round Three:


Three official studio albums and release dates:

*Bringing It All Back Home* (Mar. 22, 1965)

*Highway 61 Revisited* (Aug. 30, 1965)

*Blonde On Blonde* (May 16, 1966)

By now Dylan was a hot commercial property.

But he was clearly, also, not just another studio-manufactured pop star. (Marqusee *Redemption* 145)

In this round the contender is bringing everything he has into the fight. Training-wise, he is primed to bring his new “Electric Expressionist Period” techniques into the ring, demonstrating a new sonic originality cloaked in an illusive style not yet heard in Dylan’s canon and it’s definitely not Rock n’ Roll. German-American philosopher, translator and poet Walter Kaufmann said after translating Donald Brown’s *Bob Dylan: American Troubadour*, “Dylan’s vision is particularly fragile and one must take care not to destroy it with a lethal reductionism.”

From any point of view, the “Electric Expressionist Period” can be considered Bob Dylan’s strongest period of his entire catalogue, as we hear him up himself from his previous period where he too broke so much new ground. He is commanding the dominion of his domain. The songwriter is creatively combining his skills in poetic prose with his musical fluency in the modes of folk, rock, blues, and R & B, and ends up delivering a quasi-surrealistic meta-abstract cubism that’s outside rock n’ roll, an unparalleled originality. Dylan remains genuinely authentic to the sound style he calls “that thin wild mercury sound,” most notably accomplished on the *Blonde On Blonde* collection but evident across all three albums of this period. (Heylin 221).
This period is labeled as the “Electric Expression Period” because Bob Dylan has now artistically elected to plug in his guitar, switching away from acoustic style. In boxing terms you might say Dylan is effectively switching to southpaw fighting style, to dazzle his opponent and throw him off his strategy.

Here Bob Dylan is changing modus operandi, separating himself from his earlier musical styles and blazing a new one. As one of his earlier albums, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, angered fans of his protest and ‘finger pointin’’ acoustic period, the first album of this round, *Bringing It All Back Home*, crushes the balance of his ardent folk music followers, though not entirely as only half the songs on the album are performed in solo electric expressionist style. To Dylan the uproar is their problem, it’s his guitar, his lyrics, his microphone, and his studio and he’s going to create what’s in his heart and mind.

All forty-four original songs released from this period attain a never-before-heard-of zenith in rock music culture, may be not so much commercially but most certainly artistically. After elevating the folk music genre, he was now elevating rock music itself and Bob Dylan’s mantle as a singer/songwriter had risen to heights never achieved by any single recording artist before. As Dylan biographer Howard Sounes put it: “because he both wrote and performed his own material and by example, encouraged a generation of artists to do the same.” “Tin Pan Alley is gone. I [Dylan] put an end to it,” “he said with a touch of self-importance” (118).

Dylan is very disturbing. Dylan gets up there and sings great thoughts and great poetry to everybody...Dylan is forcing everybody to listen to him, the quality of his work is so good and so communicative I wonder what’s going to happen. I don’t know if Dylan can get on the stage a year from now.
I don’t think so. I mean, the phenomenon of Dylan will be so much that it will be dangerous...He’s gotten inside so many people’s heads - Dylan has become part of so many people’s psyches - and there’s so many screwed up people in America, and death is such a part of the American scene now."

-Phil Ochs, 1966 (Heylin 245)

In the first album of this electrified period, *Bringing It All Back Home*, Dylan is doing just what the title implies, he’s bringing home the kind of music he’s always wanted to play since he was in The Jokers, The Shadow Blasters, and The Rock Boppers. He admits he later realized that in the folk music genre, an artist can say more meaningful and important expressions and be heard, which rock and roll is not know for. Dylan knew he had important things to say so he started leaning creatively toward folk music as his preferred mode because he wanted to say something that people could take in. Basically, after hearing Odetta and Guthrie’s folk singing records back in autumn ’59, Bob swapped his electric guitar for an acoustic one (Sounes 45), and now he’s bringing it all back home and swapping his acoustic guitar for an electric one (Dettmar 131). What the artist said in his “Solo Acoustic Period” he’s going to continue to express, though not singing about topical events and news making issues, Dylan will be penning more creative and imaginative literature as an “Electric Expressionist,” in a more rock n’ roll-like framework, his lyrics will be re-born in a new mode by his standards.

The pugilist/poet is throwing lefts and rights and scoring at will. The first track, “Subterranean Homesick Blues” shakes the rafters with a very unique bluesy interpretation, slick “beat” style rhyming scheme and all kinds of moral-bromides flying by in very rapid poetic
expressions, one almost doesn’t have time enough to enjoy it because the ensuing superior lyrics are flying in. It’s enough to make even Buddy Holly tilt his head (were he still around).

Bob Dylan made three of the greatest folk albums of all time and now he’s having some fun riffing on urban street life in a scene taking place behind a London SoHo hotel, iconically filmed by D.A. Pennebaker in 1965, showing Dylan flipping cue cards with the politically charged lyrics from “Subterranean Homesick Blues” printed on them. Poet Allen Ginsberg and fine artist/songwriter Bobby Neuwirth share an inaudible conversation in the background. It’s not the first music video ever made but it’s close to it (Sounes 174).

On “Maggie’s Farm” Dylan swings from an unforeseen angle buckling the opponent with a nice uppercut as he relishes walking off Maggie’s farm so to speak, refusing to work for those left leaning folkie purists wanting only finger pointin’ songs. Bob Dylan was shedding that layer of skin and freeing himself to become an “Electric Expressionist.” Outside of his high school bands, this was the first electric song our contender ever performed in public. He sang the electric “Maggie’s Farm” at the Newport Folk Festival on July 25, 1965 right in their “Folk” faces and it is culturally recognized as one of the most significant moments in rock history. It is remembered as his final kiss off performance to the folky purists (Marqusee “Wicked” 150-1).

Available in his Lyrics on page 144, the pugilist/poet said it thusly in a song: “But everybody wants you to be just like them, they sing while you slave and I just get bored, I ain’t gonna work on Maggie’s farm, no more.”

“Mr. Tambourine Man” wafts through the mind like a dream from childhood, reminiscent of the days of innocence and early life experience. While the artist lyrically blends mature perspectives of romantic memories and human dilemmas, the listener gets something of a journey into the artists own creative mind because no one but Bob Dylan could have written this
song. The track is unquestionably one of Dylan’s best, an absolute classic, and once covered by
The Byrds, who took the song to number one on the wings of Roger McGuinn’s twelve string-
guitar and the group’s gripping harmonies in 1965, the nation was able to hear the working
artistic genius of poet/musician Bob Dylan during their lifetime. This lyric from “Mr.
Tambourine Man” is among my favorites because when I listen to the verses with my eyes
closed, I appreciate the visualization experience of the song.

To dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free
Silhouetted by the sea, circled by the circus sands
With all memory and fate driven deep beneath the waves
Let me forget about today until tomorrow (152).

The song “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” from Bringing It All Back Home, is another
farewell to his “Solo Acoustic Period,” almost an effigy to the musical mode and lyrical style he
is leaving behind. Dylan is now voicing images of “empty handed painters, seasick sailors and
carpets too moving under you” (159), creating surreal and psychedelic scenarios than can
connect sanely and soberly, making the strange seem normal, a true Dylanesque achievement.

The next jab thrown in this round is “Highway 61 Revisited” and the side two title track
fires off with a high-pitched penny-whistle trilling sound that shoots right through your ear
drums and into your marrow, it’s the harbinger for a new rocking Dylan expression, too
sophisticated to be called rock n’ roll. Bob’s thin wild mercury rock-folk-blues rumbling lies
vigorously underneath the snappy lyrical surface of this song, as he is again discussing the Big
Guy upstairs, this time in the context of God telling Abraham to kill his son, out there on
Highway 61. That Bob Dylan can appear so sac-religious in one instance and then so self-
righteous in another instance, “With God On Our Side,” makes one wonder just who is Bob
Dylan aligned with, a question that will arise again when he converts to Christianity from Judaism as seen later. Ultimately an artist is free to say and do what they want and when they want, so again, Dylan leaves the choice up to you, if it’s sac-religious or not, yielding thematic credibility to his frequent, so-called, “religious carnival” style of songwriting (Heylin 243).

In the previous period Bob Dylan was targeting his guitar at the establishment as a finger pointer, now he’s waving it at both the bourgeois and the proletariat. This can only mean that Bob Dylan is a pure and true artist, putting forward through his medium, his urgent artistic expression regardless of polemic consequence. In this upcoming song’s lyrics, the Aesop of our time, is cutting to the chase of survival and salvation and possibly redemption in these modern times, as his song “Like A Rolling Stone” lists the pitfalls of society and foibles of humanity, then asking, sincerely or sarcastically, “how does it feel?” “Like a Rolling Stone” has been voted by many critics, scholars, journalists, and musicians as the best song in the history of rock n’ roll. Significant is Bruce Springsteen’s recollection, “the first time I heard ‘Like A Rolling Stone,’ was on the car radio with my mom and on came that snare [drum] shot that sounded like somebody kicked open the door to your mind (Springsteen “Elvis Freed”). Dylan biographer Robert Shelton quotes Dylan as saying: “‘Like A Rolling Stone’ is the best song I ever wrote” (Shelton 288).

The final collection of this period is the pinnacle album, *Blonde On Blonde*, within the pinnacle period, “Electric Expressionist Period,” and here the songs are beyond category. Dylan said in the March 1978 Playboy magazine interview of this, the first double album in rock & roll history, “it’s the closest I ever got to...that thin wild mercury sound. It’s metallic and bright gold...that’s my particular sound” (Heylin 221), and like Olympic gold, it doesn’t get any better than this.
At this point in the contest, nothing in Dylan’s fight strategy could be working better. In this round he establishes unequivocal brinkmanship musically and lyrically, he marries the love of his life Sara Lowndes in November 1965, their first child Jesse is born January 6, 1966, *Blonde On Blonde* is released May 16, 1966 and goes gold as it reaches the top ten, and Dylan continues performing on his successful world tour with his backing band The Hawks. Bob Dylan is sittin’ on top of the world.

Then, once back home in Woodstock for a breather from all the joy and successes, and before entering a demanding new phase of multiple professional commitments, Bob Dylan crashes while riding his motorcycle on July 29, 1966 (Sounes 217). This is indeed a revelatory event in his life, family, and career, so the pugilist/poet takes a standing eight-count from the ref, after which the bell rings ending “Round Three” and Bob Dylan heads to his corner, going from zenith to nadir.

-Dylan’s age at end of “Electric Expressionist Period” is twenty-five.
Round Four:


Four official studio albums and release dates:

- *The Basement Tapes* (recorded Summer 1967)
- *John Wesley Harding* (Dec. 27, 1967)
- *Nashville Skyline* (Apr. 9, 1969)
- *Self Portrait* (June 8, 1970)

There was plenty of uncertainty and mystery regarding Bob Dylan’s motorcycle crash on July 29, 1966 on the back roads of Woodstock, NY. Ever mindful of guarding his privacy, Dylan kept from the public the severity of his injuries. Word on the street was Dylan was in dangerous health. Dylan Biographer Howard Sounes relates conflicting reports from sources close to the event (218). There is no police report and no hospital visit, but Bob ended up healing in the home of a Dr. Thaler in neighboring Middleton, NY. When interviewed by Sounes, the Doctor and his wife corroborate that he suffered several broken vertebrae and took refuge for about six weeks on the third floor of their home, which included a visit from Odetta (Sounes 220).

Nevertheless, speculation and rumors were rampant adding to our contender’s mystique. The motorcycle accident definitely marks a change in musical period. There is no returning to the “Electric Expressionist Period” as that creative style had run its course and Dylan now was on the precipice of new musical and lyrical expression, and until he’s able to recover, he had no concern for where he’s going artistically, he was intent on recuperating and settling in with his domestic life (Sounes 220).

At the sound of the fourth round bell, up from his corner stool he rose, still a bit dazed but with plenty of fight still in him. Bob Dylan and The Hawks would embark on months of
homestyle recording sessions, amassing over one hundred songs in the basement of a house called Big Pink, where all the members of The Hawks lived. During the recording of this first album in the “The Post-Crash Period” called The Basement Tapes, the Hawks would change their name to The Band and soon begin cutting their own albums. Big Pink, located in West Saugerties, New York was very near Dylan’s family home in Woodstock and the proximity afforded limitless opportunities for jamming, creating and recording.

*The Basement Tapes*, as the Big Pink sessions became known as have had many incarnations as an album collection, first appearing on the black market as a bootleg album, the very first bootleg album in industry history. Called the *Great White Wonder* and released in July of 1969, the two disc collection included Dylan songs from both *Minnesota Hotel Tapes*, miscellaneous out-takes from earlier albums, one live song from the Johnny Cash Show, and seven of Dylan’s new songs from the *Basement Tapes* sessions (Heylin 280). Those sessions were never intended to be an official Columbia Records release, the purpose of the collection was partially for laughs and partially for an industry Demo record. But what happened was the bootleg *Great White Wonder* became so popular on radio and black market, that Dylan and Columbia decided to officially release it on June 26, 1975 as *The Basement Tapes*, a double-album with twenty-four new songs, eighteen by Dylan, two co-written with Band members and four traditional cover songs (Sounes 222-4).

Recorded crudely on low-fi industrial recording equipment by Band organist Garth Hudson over a five or six month time frame in 1967, yet another incarnation of these recording sessions emerged as *The New Basement Tapes* in March 2014. Produced by T-Bone Burnett with a big assist from Elvis Costello, the album presented twenty written Dylan songs never recorded. The cache of handwritten song lyrics surfaced in 2014 and it’s not known by whom,
but a treasure it is indeed. T-Bone, Costello, Rhiannon Giddens, Taylor Goldsmith, Jim James, Marcus Mumford and Johnny Depp, assembled in Capital Studios Hollywood in 2014 and gave musical life to twenty of Dylan’s recently discovered handwritten song lyrics from this period (“The New Basement Tapes”).

Finally, adding to the enormity of this ever-expanding collection, Columbia Records released the final incarnation of this almost holy grail-like collection *The Bootleg Series Vol. 11: The Basement Tapes Complete* on Nov. 3, 2014. Complete is the operative word because this collection contains one hundred and eleven total songs, with approximately forty-five being fresh to audience ears in the form of new original songs by Bob Dylan, performed with the then Hawks. *The Basement Tapes* is another Dylan collection beyond category. As Dylan scholar Greil Marcus appropriately phrased it, *The Basement Tapes* reflects the character of “old weird America” and its roots music expressed here by Bob Dylan and The Band (Wilentz 341). The collection contains American musical originality at a characterized level of contemporary and archaic lyrical creativity, reflected in the musicians authentic musical performance. It had to contribute to Mr. Dylan nearing the Nobel Prize in Literature nearly fifty years down the line, “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition.” (Dwyer “Bob Dylan”). Ironically, Bob Dylan predicted his Nobel Prize in the movie *Hearts of Fire* where he plays an aging rock star who says to his girlfriend “I guess I’m not the kind of one of those rock n’ roll singers that’s ever going to win any Nobel Prize.” (“Heart of Fire” 16:03).

A year and a half passed between the release of Dylan’s next commercial album *John Wesley Harding* and his last from his “Electric Expressionist Period,” *Blonde on Blonde*. In this gap the public was unaware of *The Basement Tapes* and consequently it was very difficult to understand the quantum stylistic musical change between the surreal urban sublimity of *Blonde*
On Blonde and the austere dirge-like musicality inside the cryptic parables on John Wesley Harding, which everyone thought were back-to-back albums. However The Basement Tapes, residing between them explained everything. By now everyone can see that Bob Dylan is a style changer, a musical chameleon, a shape shifter if you will. The cultural chasm between Blonde On Blonde and John Wesley Harding was bridged by The Basement Tapes but it took eight years to know the bridge existed, another turn in shaping the myth of Bob Dylan. John Wesley Harding as a whole was contrary to the psychedelic rock flavor of contemporary 1967 albums such as Sgt. Pepper; Are You Experienced; Beggars Banquet; and Surrealistic Pillow. Jimi Hendrix covered one song from John Wesley Harding and turned it into a psychedelic rock music masterpiece, “All Along The Watchtower.” Dylan remarked in the Florida Sun Sentinel in 1995 “It overwhelmed me really. He had such talent, he could finds things inside a song and vigorously develop them.”

Getting back to The Basements Tapes, they are like the missing link in Dylan’s artistic evolution because the contrast in musical styles of what the public got between Blonde On Blonde and John Wesley Harding, appeared as though Bob Dylan is two different people, two different artists, well he is a Gemini, which might explain something. The Basement Tapes bridges the conceptual gap in Dylan’s abrupt, or shall we say drastic, change of style.

On John Wesley Harding and in the song “I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine,” Dylan sings about Swedish-American Joe Hill who was an early twentieth-century union leader and activist found guilty of a murder that he and many others say he did not commit. Railroaded at his trial, Hill was found guilty in Utah and executed by firing squad in November of 1915. He was memorialized in a poem by Alfred Hayes which was put to song by Earl Robinson entitled “I Dreamed I saw Joe Hill” (Beviglia 7-8). Joan Baez performed it regularly. Dylan has lined up
the story of St. Augustine and framed it in the context of Joe Hill’s memorial song. What we end up with is a sublime, somber, almost lullaby for a dream/nightmare about another soul that’s misunderstood and misjudged. In the weaving of these two victims of injustice, Dylan is again ringing the bell for the downtrodden, albeit in the most interesting way (Wilentz 53).

The third album of the “Post-Crash Period,” is *Nashville Skyline* and it too created many ripples in Dylan’s musical waters, confirming his reputation for always challenging his past. By touching the fringes of country and western music it reveals that the artist will belong to no category. “Lay Lady Lay” received considerable air play in the summer of 1969 and reached number seven as a single. The song has simple but poetic lyrics, expressed in a more western than country style, but it’s Bob voice, pedal-steel guitar, smooth musical mood, and brass-bed imagery that sell the song. This song was scheduled to be included on the soundtrack for the film *Midnight Cowboy* but Dylan was somewhat tardy with completion and the song was left out.

In a song from the period’s third album *Nashville Skyline*, Bob duets with Johnny Cash on “Girl From The North Country,” rendering a distinct version of their two iconic voices in complementary harmony. These two artists have a history of mutual admiration and recorded an album together during this period in Nashville, *The Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash Sessions*, but not rehearsed enough to hide the sloppiness to be officially released, however, many bootlegs of those sessions do exist (Sounes 238). Having heard the bootleg myself, I would argue that it’s very enjoyable, their iconic voices in unison make it unforgettable.

Revered rock music critic and historian Greil Marcus reviewed Bob Dylan’s next album *Self Portrait* in the June 8, 1970 issue of Rolling Stone, opening his review with and I quote, “What is this shit?” That was the feeling among many fans and critics as they listened to an almost one-dimensional assemblage of songs that seemed to deter the audience from enjoying
the music and respecting the artist for their creation. With an impressive catalogue of original albums behind him, it was mysterious to journalists and his fan base, why he chose to deliver such shallow songs to the public. It was as if he didn’t have a clue as to what he was good at. Did he somehow forget how to write great songs or was he trying to release, as many suspected, an album of mediocre quality to ebb the flow of his celebrity.

The first track says it all, “All The Tired Horses.” Yes, Bob Dylan by this point was tired, tired of having to live up to the established standards of his work, and to all labels and accolades of a very brilliant career so far.

Eventually different anachronisms were thrust upon me
anachronisms of lesser dilemma - though they might seem bigger...Legend, Icon, Enigma (Buddha in European Clothes
was my favorite) - stuff like that, but that was all right.
These titles were placid and harmless, threadbare, easy to get around with them. Prophet, Messiah, Savior, those are tough ones.

(Dylan Chronicles 124)

The Self Portrait track list includes Dylan covering songs once recorded by Elvis (“Blue Moon”), Simon & Garfunkel (“The Boxer),” Gordon Lightfoot (“Early Mornin’ Rain”), and himself (“Like A Rolling Stone”). These covers while mildly interesting, display nothing new under the sun and even the three new originals “All The Tired Horses,” “Living The Blues,” and “Minstrel Boy” are performed with redundant lyrics and a shallow musicality, not a Dylan signature in the slightest sense of the word. Greil Marcus had it right. This time Dylan’s not only dismissing a niche audience with a stylistic change, he’s dismissing everyone whoever liked him for any reason. Self Portrait is a weird album. Speculation about whether or not it was a self-
inflicted canonical wound is corroborated in Clinton Heylin’s *Behind The Shades Revisited*: “Self Portrait was a deliberate concerted attempt to dispel much of the iconography surrounding him, once and for all” (313). Dylan’s ultimate intention was to make an album so bad it would stop fans from clamoring at his home in Woodstock, fans were invading his residential property by entering through the woods and climbing onto the roof etc., imperiling his wife and children, all during the nearby “Woodstock Music Festival” time-frame of Aug., 1969 (Heylin 307).

Fortunately and timely, Bob Dylan, his family, and the Hawks, were all invited to the “Isle of Wight Music Concert” in the U.K. Performance dates were Aug. 29, 30 &31. After accepting the gig, and by deciding to sail to England on the QEII, Dylan and family were out at sea and missed the dates of the “Woodstock Music Festival” in the U.S., not returning until some time in September (Heylin, 306-7).

-Dylan’s age at end of “Post Crash Period” is twenty-nine.
Round Five:


Four official studio albums and release dates:

New Morning  (Oct. 21, 1970)

Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid  (May 1, 1973)

Dylan  (Nov. 16, 1973)

Planet Waves  (Jan. 17, 1974)

Our contender never took his corner stool between these rounds because he wanted to get back in the ring as fast as possible, knowing he had a poor final minute as the bell rang ending round four. Round five, “Renewed Minstrel Period” begins with the new album New Morning, which came quick on the heels of the disappointing and suspect Self Portrait, appearing only four months earlier. To explain the logic of this period’s name it necessary to understand what is meant by the word “minstrel.” As the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it: one of a class of medieval musical entertainers / especially a singer of verses to the accompaniment of a harp / a wandering minstrel / musician / poet / (2nd def.) a member of a type of performance troupe caricaturing black performers that originated in the U.S. in the early nineteenth century. The second definition of the term implies a racially charged meaning of white performers wearing black face in performance, something he never did. Bob Dylan is a-racial, just look at his family. Bob Dylan today is a traveling minstrel, musician, and poet. Bob Dylan is a minstrel of the ages in the first definition of the word, it’s organically and naturally what he is, in his heart, he is very much like a medieval traveling singer. So in this thesis, the term minstrel will be applied to the character of Bob Dylan, without racial overtones being implied or intended.
This round is called the “Renewed Minstrel Period” because the minstrel was turning over a new leaf, entering a fresh creative period expressing a renewed vitality with songs of a more rural and serene gravity. Stylistically there is not a huge demarcation in musical difference between these two periods (Post-Crash and Renewed) except in Dylan’s thematic attitude, artistic expression, and dogmatic flavor, which as seen here is enough to keep these four albums from residing with the previous four albums. Also Dylan’s hitting that age where he can’t be trusted, thirty, and that’s bound to be shifting some gears in his matrix, as we’ll see.

Between rounds the pugilist/poet wanted his corner men to know that his new strategy concerns songs about his growing family life and capturing atmospheres in the idyllic picturesque countryside. The albums Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid (film soundtrack) and Dylan (revenge album) are not belonging in this new artistic angle as those collections originated from music industry manifestations. New Morning and Planet Waves are Dylan’s fresh artistic concepts for consideration in this period, distinct from “post crash” because the artist is writing and singing with a new vigor as a new musical horizon is appearing revealing a fresh artistic maturity and new thematic concerns, this ain’t the old Bob Dylan.

New Morning opens with “If Not For You,” which is given a crisp lively poppy-ish flavor by the artist, the closest he ever gets to a pop song. Good friend and ex-Beatle George Harrison included his own version of “If Not For You” on his hit album All Things Must Pass and the two duetted on the song at Harrison’s Concert for Bangladesh during the following year. The next song, “Day Of The Locusts” has a smoke-ring history behind it. The trouble-making David Crosby cajoled Bob into accepting an honorary Doctorate degree from Princeton University. When Bob made it to the podium “a swarm of locusts settled on to the old trees on the campus, making a loud droning sound. It was this sound that inspired Bob to write “Day of the Locusts.”
In the lyrics the man mentioned standing next to him in the song, whose ‘head was exploding,’ is David Crosby, who says they had been smoking ‘some killer weed that day” (Sounes 259).

“Went To See The Gypsy,” a medium paced rocker might be understood as being about meeting Elvis Presley, and the lyrics in the first two verses do support references to the King. Dylan has not spoken about meeting Elvis but it’s well known how much respect he had for The King, and when Elvis passed, Bob was quite taken aback, grieving for a number of days (Heylin 455). When Dylan entered the hospital after his potentially fatal episode with histoplasmosis on May 29, 1997, he said he thought he was on his way to meet Elvis (Sounes, 420).

This author’s favorite song from this collection is “If Dogs Run Free,” because it is Dylan’s one and only attempt at a genuine jazz music, and all the musicians involved artfully pull it off. Al Kooper’s genuine jazz style piano, and Maertha Stewart’s supportive, unique scat-style singing in the background, give Bob Dylan a solid ten in rendering this fun and playful jazz gesture, the one and only true jazz number of his career. Dylan dabbled in so many styles of American music but can list attempts at jazz only once. During its performance, there’s an uplifting connection in the lyrics, music, vocals, and instrumentation that fuses together a certain sonic freedom inside the song. With its true to form jazz music atmosphere, “If Dogs Run Free” succeeds at expressing the artist at play inside one of the great American song traditions.

The title song “New Morning” is a refreshing baptismal for the new minstrel’s new rural environment, an indication that the artist has found a place where he thinks he’s at, even if it’s just momentary. For Bob Dylan it’s a new morning, a new day, and he’s entering a new way of song expression, searching for his new wings that will eventually appear in the next period.

*New Morning* concludes with “Father Of Night” which is reminiscent of a Biblical prayer, a nice landing for a solid, genuine and authentic Dylan album which actually in part
started out as a musical score for a theatrical drama by esteemed Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Archibald MacLeish called *Scratch*. When explained why he chose not to collaborate with MacLeish on the play he said, “There was no way I could make its purpose mine” (Dylan “Chronicles” 131). Before closing out on the album I want to bring attention to three songs that didn’t make the *New Morning* album collection which are very strong songs and were written and recorded during the sessions for it, they are “Watching The River Flow,” “When I Paint My Masterpiece,” and “George Jackson.” The former is blues rock produced by Leon Russell, who also contributes piano, and the result is a fantastic Dylan signature song that thankfully did make *Greatest Hits Vol. 2*. “When I Paint My Master Piece” is Dylan flexing his intellectual dexterity in both lyrics and musicality. The song might be wistful at times, but it also has gravity in the scope and commonality of a dream we’ve all had for how different things will be after “I paint my masterpiece,” and who doesn’t have a masterpiece up their sleeve? “George Jackson” is a new finger pointin’ song that reveals the ills of corrupt prison protocols that endangered the likes of black activist/author/prisoner George Jackson and getting him killed in prison, causing a fatal and injurious riot. In the song Dylan conveys that Jackson was set up due to his past out spoken political positions on prison corruption and racial injustice. Dylan concludes the song, “sometimes I think this whole world is one big prison yard” (273).

The next set of songs from this period actually form a motion picture soundtrack. In late 1972 Bob Dylan was contacted by Hollywood film-maker and screenwriter Rudy Wurlitzer and invited to the movie set for *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* in Durango, Mexico. After arriving with wife and kids in tow, the now country cowboy Bob Dylan duly impressed the film director Sam Peckinpah during his music audition, and Peckinpah offered Dylan the role of Alias, a small but important minor acting role. Dylan was happy to be shifting artistic challenges and pursuing new
creative areas that include acting and scoring a movie sound track (Greene “Pat Garrett”). In an
Aug. 30, 1973 Rolling Stone magazine soundtrack review of Pat Garrett Jon Landau wrote,
“The most significant white rock figure of the sixties has turned himself into one of the least
significant of the seventies” (Landau “Rolling Stone”). Pugilist Dylan does stagger Landau with
a crisp connecting counter-punch as “Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door” from the Pat Garrett & Billy
The Kid soundtrack album is a hot summer long radio hit, charting at number twelve and going
gold. I guess Landau missed hearing the pathos on this one.

There is one additional unfinished song from this collection that didn’t make the album
called “Like A Wagon Wheel/Rock Me Mamma” but it did make a bootleg version of these
sessions. Originally credited to bluesman Arthur Crudup in 1944, Dylan’s different arrangement
of it is called “Wagon Wheel.” In 2004 country & western band Old Crow Medicine Show
released it’s finished co-written version including a publishing agreement between Bob Dylan
and co-writer Ketch Secor. Now simply called “Rock Me Mamma,” Darius Rucker covered it in
2013 and hit number one on the country charts. It took forty years but it’s a Dylan punch that
finally scored (Greene “Bob Dylan”).

In the next moments of Round Five the contender takes a kidney punch from Columbia
Records as they released a revenge album in Dylan’s name but without his involvement or
consent. They did this because Bob Dylan punched below the belt and signed a record contract in
early 1973 with industry competitor Asylum Records, founded by industry magnate David
Geffen (Heylin 348-9).

The album in question is entitled Dylan and is symbolic for its spite, and despite the fact
there are no new original songs, the platter reached number seventeen and went gold, so who
wins this exchange? The song list for Dylan consists of out-takes from his previous two
collections of which Columbia does co-own the material. They knew releasing it would raise the ire of Mr. Dylan. So here is Dylan exposed au natural. His versions of “Can’t Help Falling In Love,” “Mr. Bojangles,” and “Big Yellow Taxi” are something to behold. Performed in the studio as warm-ups for the musicians, there are actually is some real quality and character in the numbers, but overall a bit sloppy. The album had been deleted and was officially unavailable for decades until it became available on iTunes in 2013 (Grey 194).

In the final minute of this round the mystery tramp lands his biggest punch of the round, *Planet Waves*. Here in this “Renewed Minstrel Period” and on his new label Asylum Records, and with his newly named backing band The Band, the renewed minstrel is still a very game fighter and proves it on *Planet Waves*, the first number one album of his career. With two versions of the same song as centerpieces to this collection, a song that had been floating in Bob’s head he confesses for about five years (Heylin 354), “Forever Young” was recorded twice, once as a sweet slow lilting folksy prayer, this author’s preferred version because it savors a musical delicacy and lyrical sincerity versus the take on side two which delivers the song at a quicker pace with more energy but less overall sensitivity. Either way, The Band has a way of evoking, eliciting, and complimenting Dylan’s musical exclamation points.

-Dylan’s age at end of “Renewed Minstrel Period” is thirty-three.
Round Six:


Two official studio albums and release dates:

*Blood On The Tracks* (Jan. 17, 1975)

*Desire* (Jan. 16, 1976)

With “Renewed Minstrel Period” firmly in the rear view mirror, the forthcoming period is truly a championship round for the contender. To borrow a short poem from fellow pugilist/poet Muhammad Ali, in this period Bob Dylan is going to “Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee.” The two albums presented in this brief “Blood & Desire Period” demonstrate a career high point and a cultural acme that any artist would be proud of, but could never accomplish. These two albums possess much musical beauty and much lyrical sting, the songs have to be listened to numerous times in order to comprehend the full meaning.

This brief eighteen month period is strictly defined by these two albums, *Blood On The Tracks* and *Desire*. Despite their difference in musical styles and overall message, they are similar in degree of artistic originality, strength of aesthetic achievement, power of cultural influence, and endurance as classic rock albums, a solid one-two punch combination for the pugilist/poet in the seventies.

I know I’ll have to debate some critics who do not equivocate these albums, perceiving *Desire* as the inferior of the two. While I do agree that *Blood On The Tracks* is a superior album for its romantic universality and musical and lyrical originality, I have to say *Desire* is also all that but from a different angle, a flavor change that’s less caucasian. I find the musical energy level on *Desire* to be more exciting and diverse. It’s more far reaching conceptually too,
embracing a wider range of creative challenge and artistic expression. Of course Dylan had the help of co-writer Jacques Levy which diminishes nothing and enhances everything.

The first album of the period is *Blood On The Tracks* and it displays a lyrical cubism for the mind’s ear as the artist changes tenses, genders, pronouns, and timelines like he’s the maestro of three separate orchestras at once. He’s bringing in a well defined musical cohesion and storytelling lyrics that leave one wishing to hear it again. The literary angles in the descriptions of the visual portraits, connect to the link that Dylan does best, turning something personal into something universal. *Blood on the Tracks* has been called the greatest “break-up album” of all time because the narrator is undoubtedly singing from his heart about the finality of his real life marriage to Sara Lowndes, and the unexpected emotional realizations that accompany such a transition apply to everyone in detail who has gone through it, so they can relate to it. The listener can tell there’s nothing phony being said here, the poetry of emotion is being spoken here, and the feelings in the lines are real and connectable, it’s Bob Dylan at his best.

Bob gets “Tangled Up In Blue” on the first track and the narrator brings the listener in touch with their own experiences relating to love lost, while hearing the poet’s own tales of woe. “Tangled Up In Blue” unfolds like a psychedelic sixties movie trailer with multi-layered images of scene descriptions, weather reports and fashion statements all flying around at the speed of sound. Dylan weaves pronouns, tenses, syntaxes, and colliding cliches like he’s working in a rug factory. The painting lessons he took from Norman Raeben a short time before writing these songs influenced Dylan’s use of tenses and pronouns. Thanks to the cubist thinking Raeben, this added a fresh artistic creativity to the entire album. As a teacher to Dylan, Raeben didn’t care who Dylan was, and verbally hammered him when critiquing his paintings like he did everyone else in the class, it’s part of his teaching style. This also helped give Dylan new mettle towards
his own self-disciplines and poetic writing techniques (Heylin 369). The collection contains some of the most creative and beautiful expressions of romantic and emotional pain ever described in song in any language. In fact Dylan himself said “he found it hard to understand how people could enjoy hearing that type of pain” (Heylin 373).

The second “piece-de-resistance” of this period is the collection *Desire*. When Bob bumped into Jacques Levy on a Greenwich Village street one afternoon in the Spring of 1975, they agreed to converge on co-writing some songs together that Bob principally had in mind after reading Rubin “Hurricane” Carter’s book *The Sixteenth Round* (Sounes 286).

Bob hadn’t written a finger pointin’ song since 1970’s “George Jackson,” but as an avid boxing fan and practitioner, Dylan felt compelled to join in on other known efforts to gain the release of falsely accused and imprisoned middleweight contender Rubin “Hurricane” Carter. He was charged along with Jon Artis for the murder of three people in 1966 inside the Lafayette Bar & Grill of Paterson, New Jersey. (Carter 5)

Back on his protest horse, Dylan rode to Rahway Prison in New Jersey to visit the ‘Hurricane’ and share conversation on the injustice of the accusations against him. To this point Dylan and Levy combined their songwriting skills and came up with the phenomenal cinematic-like lyrics to “Hurricane,” which once again captured the consciousness of the nation and put the album at number one on the charts. *Desire* is loaded with elevated songs in a new rock variety not heard before, an amalgam of middle-eastern gypsy, prog Saharan, effusing blues, desert folk, and arid rock. What Dylan is hearing in his head and putting on record in *Desire* is a rock flavor no one has tasted before which is another reason it belongs in the same stratosphere as *Blood On The Tracks*. Scarlet Rivera’s violin is the pivot for everything compositionally, and with Dylan as leader, it’s going to be a very unique and dramatic blend musically, with Rivera’s violin
perfectly expressing Dylan’s musical ethos, and in response and reaction to his tonal expressions, she is possibly stealing the show, as without her these songs would not soar (Gray 579).

Dylan actually picked up Scarlet on the street one 1975 summer afternoon near the Village. While he was driving he spotted a tall gypsy-like looking woman with very beautiful long black hair, carrying a violin case. “Can you play that thing he asked”...and the rest is history (Sounes 289). Dylan is daring to be different on every album, regardless of period. One could argue that each album is a different period unto itself for the artist. While there may be some truth in that it’s taking things a little too far in trying to understand his work. This two album, “Blood & Desire Period” of Dylan’s is so commercially vital and artistically mature on a whole other level from his work in the previous two periods, that these two albums rank up there with his best work from any period.

-Dylan’s age at end of “Blood & Desire Period” is thirty-six years.
Round Seven:


Four original studio albums and release dates:

*Street Legal* (Jun. 15, 1978)

*Slow Train Coming* (Aug. 18, 1979)

*Saved* (Jun. 20, 1980)

*Shot Of Love* (Aug. 12, 1981)

The personal and artistic evolutions that brought Bob Dylan into his “Holy Spirit Period” are very complicated. In simple terms his wife Sara wanted out of their marriage, and in artistic terms he was looking for a new bag. Also, a mystical event occurred during a 1978 San Diego concert performance which plays a role in Bob Dylan’s conversion to Christianity. These factors plus other spiritual and personal influences combined to contribute to Bob Dylan’s religious conversion. This thematic and spiritual distinction separates the “Holy Spirit Period” from the periods around it, it stands on its own Christian musical ground.

The first album of this period is *Street Legal*, an important collection of songs in the Dylan catalogue, it is a “tweener” album, one of three in the overall periodic scope, *Infidels* (1983) and *Under The Red Sky* (1990) being the other two. What is meant by “tweener” is that the album doesn’t fit the guidelines of belonging in the period before it nor the period that it chronologically ends up in, it’s in between the guidelines. In accordance of the criteria for maintaining the critical basis of the twelve periods, the “tweener” albums shall be defined as such and explained as such. *Street Legal* is being grouped in this period because it doesn’t belong in the “Blood & Desire Period,” principally because it is not equal in conceptual originality, aesthetic quality, and musical innovation to those aspects on the two previous
albums. *Street Legal* doesn’t truly belong in “The Holy Spirit Period” either because there are no spiritual songs on it. However, musically it could be considered a harbinger of the new period with it’s sprinkled in horns and oft employed backup female gospel singers.

Now on the heels of *Blood On The Tracks* and *Desire*, Bob Dylan’s status has expanded from star of the counterculture to superstar of establishment culture. It’s been sixteen years since his first album and in the span, Bob Dylan has unequivocally established his stamp on musical culture for over a decade and a half. The first track on *Street Legal* is “Changing of the Guards” and it rumbles off the phonographic needle with a great burst of energy in a strong driving, apocalyptic nickelodeon narrative, concerning among other things, “a cold blooded moon,” “merchants and thieves hungry for power,” and the love, “who was torn between Jupiter and Apollo” (383). The song lyrics, vocal performance, and musical craftsmanship, definitely rages in this the center-piece of the collection.

The song “New Pony” has a stretched out bluesy electric R & B feel with the background gospel ladies hitting the right harmonies at the right times with Bob’s rhythm and fusing with the narrator’s new lyrical love allegory, “I once had a pony, her name was Lucifer” (385). Wrestling for six verses with visions of sin intertwined with images of a mystical kind of atmosphere, the pugilist/poet is demonstrating how his linguistic versatility flows from his pen onto the page, creating thoughts we didn’t know we’d ever have. The words ‘new pony’ seems like a metaphor for an alternate angle on portraits of various forms of woman, Dylan closes the song with “You’re so bad and nasty/But I love you, yes I do” (385).

Seeking redemption after all that sinning, our contender steps up here in “The Holy Spirit Period” with the album *Slow Train Coming*. These eight songs that deliver the word of Jesus and the message of the Lord, confounded the cultural tenets of most Dylan fans. The album shook
more than the rafters of rock music, people’s minds pirouetted across the country in disbelief, as the shock of their champion of the counter-culture and a Jew, had found Jesus Christ and renounced his natural born faith. So spiritually and musically and for his audience’s benefit, Bob Dylan proclaimed Jesus Christ as his Savior. At his concerts during this period, Dylan sang and preached that Jesus is everyone’s savior, and that if you don’t accept Him, you’ll be left off the train (Heylin 498-9).

Dylan’s Christian conversion was the result of the aforementioned divorce from Sara, the custody battle for the children and advice from then backup singer and future mother of their future daughter Desiree, Helena Springs. She suggested to make things better, Bob needed to start praying (Heylin 493). Dylan was also at an inspirational loss, a creative low point, and his latest work was not doing well on this side of the pond (Heylin 491). All in all Bob Dylan wasn’t feeling very well, another nadir you might say. Then something happened at the concert in San Diego on Nov. 17, 1978, “towards the end of the show someone out in the crowd, knew I wasn’t feeling too well. I think they could see that. And they threw a silver cross on the stage...so I picked up the cross and put it in my pocket” (Heylin 491). A night later in his Tucson hotel room:

There was a presence in the room that couldn’t have been anybody but Jesus...Jesus put his hand on me. It was a physical thing. I felt it. I felt it all over me. I felt my whole body tremble. The glory of the Lord knocked me down and picked me up. (Heylin 491)

The first track on Slow Train Coming is “Gotta Serve Somebody,” a culturally monumental number of tight rhythmic musicality and powerful lyrics delivered by the narrator’s
mischievous yet confident voice delivering the ultimatum, the devil or the Lord. The song is a journey and expose brilliantly proclaiming, no matter who you are, whether an ambassador or a construction worker, you’re going to have to serve somebody. No matter what rung of society you dwell on, you’re still gonna have to serve somebody. Dylan narrows it down to the devil or the Lord, either way in his estimation, it comes down to that. Ex-Beatle John Lennon took exception to the song and recorded two versions of a song entitled “You’re Going To Have To Serve Yourself,” which was never commercially released but most amusing nevertheless, in the parody and satire of Dylan’s original lyrics (“Serve Yourself” Beatles Bible). Also, I don’t have the source for this pearl of diplomacy as I heard it decades ago on the car radio. The DJ came on after playing Dylan’s “Gotta Serve Somebody,” and said he heard John Lennon was curious: “when did Bob Dylan start working in a cafeteria?”

The title song “Slow Train Coming” is no slouch either. The metaphor of the slow train works very well in the context of the song and the album title. In the title song we have the narrator working the human nature angle in with the context of an ethereal higher moral existence, but as all are waiting for the train, we don’t know if Dylan’s saying whether the train is heading for salvation or doom. Musically, it’s delivering Bob’s gospel sound his way, because like his folk music, and like his rock music, and like his country music, his gospel music can’t be stereotypically categorized. It’s too original and variant to the constrictions of genre.

Saved is the next album of this “Holy Spirit Period” and that’s just what pugilist/poet is trying to do, save the world (again). During most of his “Holy Spirit Period” concerts, Dylan has addressed the audience very purposefully about the salvation of Jesus (Heylin 519-20). Prior to this period, and since it ended, Bob Dylan has traditionally had very little to say to his audiences, but when it comes to the Kingdom of Jerusalem he wants to stir some souls and orate from the
pulpit and share the light from above. The title song “Saved,” co-written with bass player Tim Drummond, delivers a full on rock gospel music sound spun by the spiritual poet and all his energetic musical support to create the big Baptist feel. Fred Tackett stepping in for Mark Knopfler, displays some savvy licks and the arrangement is all Dylan’s, fully Biblically charged. The song saves the album artistically, but the album failed to achieve gold-record status commercially, and reached only number twenty-four on it’s five weeks on Billboard (Trager 540).

“Pressing On” has a stately, holy quality about it and the musical feeling is again similar to being inside a southern Baptist Church on Sunday morning where the gospel experience can overwhelm you. Dylan indeed is raising the church roof with some of these songs but people are not buying it, religion doesn’t sell well on the concert stage, so Saved wasn’t successful commercially, setting up the final album, Shot Of Love, as the last of the period (Trager 540).

On Shot Of Love, Mr. Dylan is definitely sowing the seeds of change as most of the songs are not overtly religious in content. The strongest, “Every Grain Of Sand” is Dylan’s most beautiful hymn of the entire period. One can feel through the Biblical and lyrical poetry, combined with the hymnal musical arrangement supporting the images and messages, that you have Bob Dylan channeling spiritual creativity into our ears via the fire and brimstone timbre of delivery which makes “Every Grain Of Sand” a Dylan piece de resistance. The song is both ancient and contemporary and the pure beauty of its musical elements has the power to draw a tear. “It is perhaps his most sublime work to date” (Heylin 529).

Importantly, a remarkable song recorded during these sessions that didn’t make the cut, is “Caribbean Wind,” perhaps because it was too secular. Inspired when sailing while visiting St.
Vincent Island in the Caribbean (Sounes 339), the song was released on compilation album *Biograph* four years later (1985).

The muscular “Groom Still Waiting At The Altar” provides a purgatorial framework for a secular narrative with holy overtones concerning expectations and disappointment. The number is a strong Dylan rumbling rocker and roller, another apocalyptic mind trip of abandonment, human vulnerability, and surreal high-jinx, the song is a lyrical and musical precursor to the incoming period’s first album.”

Prayed in the ghetto with my face in the cement

Heard the last moan of a boxer, seen the massacre of the innocent

Felt around for the light switch, became nauseated

She was walking down the hallway while the walls deteriorated.

(Dylan“The Lyrics” 446)

It’s good enough to be the centerpiece of the album but “Every Grain Of Sand” steals the show and steals the entire “Holy Spirit Period,” for which it is the centerpiece.

-Dylan’s age at end of “The Holy Spirit Period” is forty-one.
Round Eight:


Four official studio albums and release dates:

*Infidels*  (Nov. 1, 1983)

*Empire Burlesque*  (May 27, 1985)

*Knocked Out Loaded*  (July 4, 1986)

*Down In The Groove*  (May 31, 1988)

I’m a Sixties troubadour, a folk-rock relic,

a wordsmith from bygone days, a fictitious

head of state from a place nobody knows.

I’m in a bottomless pit of cultural oblivion.

(Dylan *Chronicles* 147)

Our contender faded during this period, his toughest round of the fight so far, basically because his current songs don’t fit in with the contemporary youth culture of the day, and they’re the one who buy the songs. This period is about the song-craft work Bob Dylan does after “The Holy Spirit Period,” hence it is entitled the “Post-Holy Spirit Period.” Also distinguishing it from “The Holy Spirit Period” is the fact that there are no holy, spiritual songs or hymns among these four albums, it’s more about the street than the pulpit. The shape-shifter has transformed himself yet again here in round eight.

Looking at the contender in the eighties as an artist rooted firmly in the establishment and a relic from the old counterculture, Bob Dylan just couldn’t find a way, try as he may, to musically fit into this decade, that is until the end of it and in the next round. Surviving this
round, as we will see, will be a testament to the boxer’s constitutional fortitude, which is revealed to be nothing short of Ruthian.

The first album in this round is a sweet series of jabs entitled *Infidels*, which is the second ‘tweener’ album for the reason it doesn’t truly belong in the preceding “Holy Spirit Period” and it is quite distinctly superior in craftsmanship, lyrical originality, musical vitality, and aesthetic value to the three album collections that follow it here in the “Post-Holy Spirit Period.” This period which represents the contender’s career nadir is due primarily to the mediocrity of the compositions and lack of musical originality, the albums offered too few new song ideas and what there was on these albums sounded unidimensional, with the exception of one pearl song on each album. Not enough for cultural traction but enough for a measure of artistic redemption.

*Infidels* however, is a top tier album but because of its chronological order in the scheme of period criteria, it ironically gets grouped in with this stretch of albums. The song line up on *Infidels*, if re-mastered to include some of the album’s outtakes, would be a Bob Dylan pinnacle album. Consider the songs: “Jokerman;” “Sweetheart Like You;” “License To Kill;” “Man Of Peace;” “I And I;” “Don’t Fall Apart On Me Tonight;” and outtakes “Blind Willie McTell;” “Foot Of Pride;” “Tight Connection To My Heart;” and the outtake from previous album “Caribbean Wind.” If these ten songs comprised *Infidels*, it surely would have amounted to a top album, in a period of its own, right up there with his other thirteen zenith albums. But that’s the beauty of Bob Dylan, his cup runneth over and for any artist, it’s not easy to decide what songs belong where in the scheme of determining creative and artistic excellence or mediocrity. Who really knows the answer to the choice of taste versus the choice of preference, especially before the public has had a chance to chime in. There is some guess work involved in deciding on the
song list, and as long as the artist is being true to themselves, destiny will display the results. *Infidels* did okay on Billboard reaching number twenty with gold status, his fourteenth.

The next three albums in the “Post-Holy Spirit Period,” *Empire Burlesque, Knocked Out Loaded, and Down In The Groove*, have our boxing poet against the ropes. He himself said he doesn’t fit artistically into this decade, too many new young artists were dominating the scene with fresh exciting musicality. Dylan’s mettle is really being tested throughout this round, but his mental and physical fortitude keep him from going down.

Album number two from this period, *Empire Burlesque*, contains a trifecta of imaginative, vibrant love songs, but due to Dylan’s new senior-like vocal qualities, (as compared to the younger singing voices of the day) and misfired production values, these songs didn’t have the current cultural currency to stand up to the competition. The three love songs that will stand the test of time from this collection are: “Tight Connection To My Heart (Has Anybody See My Love);” “I’ll Remember You;” and “When The Night Comes Falling From The Sky,” as they each possess a classic romantic quality, evident when covered by other artists.

Dylan’s next album, *Knocked Out Loaded*, has one strong pearl, the song co-written with friend and actor/playwright Sam Shepard entitled “Brownsville Girl.” The song saves the album, which failed to make the charts, giving the collection some artistic and aesthetic merit. The epic song has plenty of lyrical originality and some multi-period noir prose, in that it pictorially recounts the narrator’s steps taken during a journey to the movies, and a film starring Gregory Peck. Dylan and Shepard, milk an entangled and imaginative love story that includes a trip through a space-shifting narrative and a transforming landscape, in order to reach to the movie theatre to wait in line, for all it’s worth. (Dylan “The Lyrics” 510). The song is like a movie within a movie that’s within a movie. It intertwines the narrator with the characters both in the
Gregory Peck movie *The Gunfighter* (Beviglia 125) and those in his song “Brownsville Girl,” not to mention the dimension of the narrator’s real or imaginary friends Henry Potter and the Brownsville girl herself who are outside the theatre. The swaying horns, the rhythmic gospel vocals, the eleven minutes of descriptive narrative prose climaxing, coming full circle, combined with Dylan’s hypnotic vocal delivery, all make “Brownsville Girl” stylistically unique, distinctly original, and culturally unforgettable. A Dylan and Shepard pearl indeed.

The final collection of Dylan’s “Post-Holy Spirit Period” is called *Down In The Groove* and it is just that for the artist, down on a knee without a groove in songwriting pocket. The pugilist/poet takes a knock-down punch from writer’s block, not much is emerging from his pen or microphone. Ranked as one of his worst albums, which again did not chart, there exists a lone pearl, “Silvio,” giving the collection some redemptive value, and now you can say there is at least one pearl on every Dylan album. “Silvio” is a lively and almost danceable rock ballad co-written with fellow poet and Grateful Dead multi-instrumentalist Robert Hunter. The two poets combine nicely on this number with efficient yet expressive and descriptive prose illuminating a character named Silvio, who’s actually not a person, but a totem pole of monetary status, cash evaluations, material possessions, human greed, and something “only dead men know” (Trager 561). Speaking of monetary status, and to quote Bob Dylan from “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” “money doesn’t talk, it swears” (“The Lyrics” 156).

-Dylan’s age at end of “The Post Holy Spirit Period” is forty-seven.
Round Nine:

Two original studio albums and release dates:


*Oh, Mercy.*  (Sept. 12, 1989)

The songsmith’s training is paying off as he regains his pugilist form in Round Nine, “Wilburys & Mercy Period.” After being defeated for not fitting in the previous “Post-Holy Spirit Round,” the boxer/songwriter regroups and delivers a strong one-two punch combination that saves his reputation in the decade, rebalancing the artist who was caught off guard in the previous period. He’s battling the same elements in this round, it’s just that now he’s got his timing back and power too, restored by the Wilburys gang, ex-Beatle George Harrison, Tom Petty, Jeff Lynne, and Roy Orbison. Later in the round Daniel Lanois steps in to cover as the new cut-man in his corner, for the album *Oh Mercy.*

The two back-to-back albums *The Travelin’ Wilburys Vol. I* and *Oh Mercy* restored Bob Dylan’s artistic dignity in the eighties and increased his prize money too. Many critics and scholars might disagree with this statement especially since *The Travelin’ Wilburys* is not officially a Dylan album. I argue, were it not for Bob Dylan, the *Travelin’ Wilburys* would have had a lesser sonic and lyrical power, and for what Dylan brings to the table, by any musical standard, is worthy of recognition for artistic accomplishment. Ergo, the *Wilburys* album belongs in each of the contributing artists canons, and for Dylan it was like a reawakening, reconnecting him to his writing and singing skills all of which at the end of the day, had to have helped him get his creative confidence back after that questionable string of previous albums. The result of Dylan’s involvement in the *Wilburys* lifted his song-crafting skills and vocal passion, evident by
his ensuing album, *Oh Mercy*. *Oh Mercy’s* songs plus the two pinnacle outtakes “Series Of Dreams,” and “Dignity,” are reflective of a highly regarded album collection of very salient songs. Since round one, the pugilist/poet is knocking down opponents in the sixties, seventies, and here in the eighties, and with the nineties coming right up, he’s bound to stand victorious in there. Fact is, Bob Dylan is one of only three international recording artists to have a top ten album in every decade since the sixties, accompanied by Carlos Santana and Barbara Streisand.

The chemistry was there for all five musicians to gel creatively. The song “Handle With Care,” was taken from a cautionary label on a cardboard box behind Bob’s garage door, and once written and recorded was to be the B-side single for Harrison’s label obligation. The song was too good for a B-side one off, and right there, with “Handle With Care,” they became The Travelin’ Wilburys (Sounes 384). Over the ensuing days they were able to schedule recording sessions and complete another nine songs and an entire additional album, (recorded without Roy Orbison who passed away after their first album), *The Traveling Wilburys, Vol. 3*, which was, in a nutshell, good but not great (Sounes 390). No doubt Orbison’s absence diminished the overall creative chemistry on the second album, entitled *The Travelin’ Wilburys Vol. 3*, entitled as such as a gesture to Roy Orbison. Creatively, volume two would have included Roy Orbison, but since he passed the balance of the band agreed to skipped a number as a tribute to their lost member, and went directly to volume three (Trager 639).

No longer against the ropes, Dylan is duking it out in the second half of Round Nine, writing and recording the songs for the *Oh Mercy* collection. It was U2’s Bono who suggested to Dylan that he use one of their former producers, Daniel Lanois to aid in production of the new songs. After a meeting and a visit to Lanois’s state-of-the-art recording studio costumed formed to fit into a mansion residence in New Orleans, it was agreed they’d work together. Later Lanois
said “I was looking to make a masterpiece for Bob Dylan” (Browne Oh Mercy 68). Dylan was up to the challenge and arrived at the studio on day one armed with several original songs of various musical stylings, some a little bit haunting, some a little bit country, some finger pointin’, some gospel and some love songs, and once completed, the album was said to have been a return to artistic prowess and creative form for Mr. Dylan. The opener, “Political World” is reminiscent of early sixties Dylan, like he’s going back to the future, but now with more guile and journeyman-like experience on topics and issues, he’s able to deliver a directness of message in a new lyrical maturity:

We live in a political world
Love don’t have any place
We’re living in times where men commit crimes
And crime don’t have a face
We live in a political world
Where peace is not welcome at all
It’s turned away from the door to wander some more
Or put up against the wall

(Dylan “The Lyrics” 525)

-Dylan’s age at end of “The Wilburys & Mercy Period” is forty-eight.
Round Ten:


Four official studio albums and release dates:

*Under The Red Sky* (Sept. 17, 1990)

*The Travelin’ Wilburys Vol. 3* (Oct. 19, 1990)

*Good As I Been To You* (Nov. 2, 1992)

*World Gone Wrong* (Oct. 10, 1993)

Here in the tenth, the pugilist/poet almost throws in the towel, but wisdom prevails and he doesn’t surrender, minstrel that he is, fighter that he is, he simply changes strategy and retreats into his minstrel cocoon until he gets his mojo back. Like Sun Tzu said in *The Art Of War*, “retreat is not necessarily defeat.” No doubt he had a very good previous round, but the first two albums of this round were not received well at all anywhere so he went into a deflecting mode, covering up against the tide of the newly formed cultural and generation gap, a chasm he could not bridge artistically. Consequently, Bob Dylan did not deliver anything original for the next seven years. This period clearly identifies itself by Dylan’s purposeful creative withdraw into a timeframe of no new songwriting.

This round is called “Cocoon Minstrel Period” because that’s essentially what Bob Dylan is doing, working his artistry in the performance of traditional folk and blues cover ballads as he had done in his earliest months in Greenwich Village, and on his first album *Bob Dylan*. This mode is his home base music pocket for Bob, a place where he is at home, a musical cocoon if you will, like the one he came out of in his first musical incarnation. By retreating into his musical cocoon, he is keeping his craft alive without the onus of critical imperative on new creative material.
The first collection of this period is *Under The Red Sky*, and as mentioned earlier in this writing, is the last ‘tweener’ album, obviously not belonging in the previous round with the sublime one-two punch of *Travelin’ Wilburys* and *Oh Mercy*, and it doesn’t really belong here with cover albums *Good As I Been To You* nor *World Gone Wrong*. *Under The Red Sky* seems lost at sea in several ways as there really is nothing with any artistic or commercial gravitas on it except maybe the title song “Under The Red Sky,” which in my opinion is the lone pearl. This collection reminds me of his earlier new young family related albums *New Morning* and *Planet Waves*, where Bob’s sprouting family is influencing some of those songs. Here, he is father to four year old daughter Desiree, and husband to second wife and Dylan backup singer, Carolyn Dennis, mother of Desiree. They are the members of Dylan’s young new sprouting family at the release of *Under The Red Sky*. Dylan succeeded in keeping hidden the existence of his new family, but towards his artistry their existence may have influenced some of the songs on *Under The Red Sky*, like “Wiggle, Wiggle,” “Cat’s In The Well,” “2 X 2,” “Handy Dandy,” and “Under The Red Sky.” These songs have a bit of family-like concerns and flavors, explaining the conception of some of the songs. The poorly received *Under The Red Sky* (Sounes 391-3) could belong in the “Post-Holy Spirit Period” were it in that chronological sequence, however it did poorly enough to propel the artist into his creative cocoon for seven years, after which he’ll emerge with the phenomenal and worth waiting for album, *Time Out Of Mind*.

Not much to say about *The Travelin’ Wilburys Vol. 3* except without Roy Orbison who passed away after volume one, the result is rather flat and hurried, no real originality, no pearls on this collection. No question Orbison is missed, artistically and vocally (Sounes 390), and I’d venture to say spiritually too.
*Good as I Been to You* is the title and the only thing creatively written by Dylan for the album collection. If you consider the wording of the title, and depending on who you think he is talking to, you might sense a little irony or regret or even resentment in the tone of the album title. Dylan turned fifty during the recording sessions for these songs and his performance of them is nonetheless quite crisp, fresh, and true to the roots Americana source from whence they came. Dylan’s vocal renditions as recorded live with his guitar playing, feel authentic to the genre. Some of these songs reflect Dylan’s own musical origins and by performing and recording them, it allowed him to tap into their ancient musicality, reconnecting him with his own roots and roads he hadn’t been down in ages. Immediately you can tell the ‘voice of a generation’ is in a musical pocket, at home delivering “You’re Gonna Quit Me,” a gentle early blues ballad, Dylan sounds like he’s playing it for himself, alone on the front porch of a dusty farm house while watching the world go by. The closer “Froggie Went A-Courtin’” is a traditional ballad covered here and there by Woody Guthrie, but in this Dylan arrangement, even the listener finds a way into the musical pocket of appreciating the artist’s performance. It’s almost as if Dylan is bringing it all back home with these renditions of archaic ballads requiring a different guitar string picking technique (Trager 213).

Sister album *World Gone Wrong* is titled after the opening smokey, bluesy, traditional song of the same name and it’s Mr. Dylan again at the mic giving genuine solo acoustic performance of these older tunes, again reconnecting with by-gone songs that still matter, and so matter to his spectators.

“Blood In My Eyes” fits perfectly into Dylan’s repertoire lyrically and musically because it is simply characteristic of his musical personality. Also on board is a cover of Blind Willie McTell’s “Broke Down Engine” and Dylan’s spirited rendition on guitar sprinkled with rhythmic
finger tapping on the wooden guitar body, blend to give the song’s feel authentic flavor (Wilentz 217-8). One can feel Dylan in the groove with these two vinyls, and maybe he’s getting his groove back.

-Dylan’s age at end of “The Cocoon Minstrel Period” is fifty-five.
Round Eleven:


Three official studio albums and release dates:

*Time Out Of Mind* (Sept. 30, 1997)

*“Love and Theft”* (Sept. 11, 2001)


I don’t think too many people were capable of thinking that eternal minstrel and Doctor Bob Dylan, (Ph.D from Princeton 1970) was capable of another quantum leap in the world of modern contemporary music, but on Sept. 30, 1997 Columbia Records released Dylan’s latest creative effort “Time Out Of Mind.” This sent millions into Tower Records and other music retailers across the country because again, Bob Dylan was on top of the charts, and with a new original sonic quality, attached to a new contemporary plateau of poetic lyrics, it made the baby boomer generation look like bobble-headed dolls on a car dashboard. This period has the distinction of distinguishing itself from the preceding period because the artist reaches a new pinnacle in a new artistic musical genre. Stylistically nothing has ever sounded like this. Yes there are resemblances in the musical ether, but nothing with this sort of precision.

Praise the Lord, Bob Dylan is doing it again, lifting the collective consciousness of a couple of generations of American culture, connecting to the evolved creativity of an old familiar artist, in music, song, and message. He is again spinning songs that matter, songs of light, songs of darkness, songs of struggle, songs of victory, and songs of the hereafter. The “Cocoon Period” helped enable Bob Dylan to reach into his musical cauldron and pull out a kind of holy Americana Rockin’ Appalachian Rollin’ n’ Rockin’ Dixie-ish Swing Blues that makes the listener sit up and pay attention. That’s a lot of adjectives which are necessary to explain the
style of sound because it’s more than mere rock-a-billy. The adjectives help describe the unique fusion of what Dylan has going on with this collection, and in the background you can hear the influence of Canadian producer Daniel Lanois, who did work as a producer on the set of songs. Eight years after their first collaboration, Oh Mercy, Dylan and Lanois’ professional relationship pays off on this record again as the new songs created for this collection reach new cultural ground in American contemporary music culture. It ultimately lead to both a Golden Globe Award and an Academy Award for Best Original Song, “Things Have Changed,” which was part of The Wonder Boys movie sound track, starring Michael Douglas.

The Honorary Doctorate of Music Degree endowed by Princeton University in 1970 made Dr. Bob Dylan a man of letters, an Emeritus Professor if you will and in this period he is displaying in a scholarly fashion what he is capable of doing with song-craft, hence the name for this round is “The Emeritus Minstrel Period,” a phase where all his talents, abilities, and life experiences come to the fore.

The first song on Time Out Of Mind has the patient hurrying to the clinic because they’re “Love Sick.” In this moody and captivating number the pugilist/poet is waxing eloquently on the symptoms of unrequited love and we get a stylized noir discourse in the first verse:

I’m walking through streets that are dead
Walking, walking with you in my head
My feet are so tired, my brain is so wired
And the clouds are weeping (“The Lyrics” 559)

“‘Til I Fell In Love With You” is could be considered Dylan doing stand-up. There’s plenty of serious humor in this number as the poetry man describes how well he was doing in life until he fell in love, which for most folks is a lifelong quest. The originality and well-time
delivery reveal the song belongs to the mature imagination of a cynical romantic, reminiscent to our own similar senior experiences, which is an established Dylan trait, again connecting the personal to the universal. “I just don’t know what I’m gonna do/I was alright ‘til I fell in love with you” (“The Lyrics” 565).

The next album of the period is “Love and Theft,” released on a day of infamy, Sept. 11, 2001, and the artist is bringing an enriched version of his Americana Rockin’ Appalachian Dixie-ish Swing Blues sound to the scene, as this disc soars to cloud level musical heights, aesthetically equalling or exceeding his previous effort and confirming the Emeritus caliber of the period. The centerpiece song “Mississippi” lands a direct hit as both as performed by the original artist and by singer/songwriter Sheryl Crow, who gave it a new contemporary musical flavor when she covered it on her album The Globe Sessions (1998).

The album title “Love and Theft” conveys a wide juxtaposition of moral extremes, visible within the songs of the collection, but the album title is not constructed by Dylan’s pen. Though he refuses to confirm or deny, most agree, since Dylan is a known American Civil War historian, his album title is a lift from a history book about American minstrelsy entitled Love and Theft by author and cultural historian Eric Lott published in 1993, eight years before the thief’s album, perhaps hence the quotation marks (Wilentz 264). For centuries minstrels copy and borrow melodies and lyrics from wherever they can, and transform them, making them in a new guise, something of their own, “it’s a form of larceny that is as American as apple pie” (Wilentz 266).

The majority of the songs on “Love and Theft” are up tempo, feisty, fun, paranoid, and Rabelaisian. “Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum” as the opener, moves like a swift Aesop parable that’s more about real human foibles than a nursery-rhyme depicting fabled twins. Of course
that’s the literary device used in the song to amusingly portray those “can’t be suppressed” qualities of being human. The closer “Sugar Baby” has its own musical quality apart from the rest of the album, it feels like early post-dusk, with a shimmering musical vibration underneath, a production touch perhaps borrowed from Daniel Lanois. But the effect does the song justice as you ride into the evening with the narrator.

Looking at the third and final collection of the “Emeritus Period” we hear Modern Times and it’s delivery of ten fresh tunes constructed in the theme of the earlier two but with its own more rural flavor. The opener “Thunder On The Mountain” sets the table. It is a tight, jumping rocker of a cinematic-like journey through space, time, and all kinds of weather conditions. The pugilist/poet mentions singer Alicia Keys by name twice in the first verse, throwing in he knew she was born in Hell’s Kitchen. Is this a tip of the hat, or an eye for the cat? The song moves crisply and the musicality is like a blue grass mountain rocker and back porch knee-slapper. The prose is flowing with each passing image and you don’t want to miss a thing the poet might say. The verses relate like a big bouillabaisse stew of antidotes and moral bromides, making the mind wonder where the song is going because it seems to be about everything and nothing, all at the same time. The meanings coagulate on each passing description of this wonderfully rapid earthbound journey, but to what end you wonder, discovering the song’s just really about the ride and Dylan’s version of the sound of thunder on the mountain.

The implication in “When The Deal Goes Down” is death, a common subject of the poet, who will be with her when the deal goes down.

Each invisible prayer is like a cloud in the air

Tomorrow keeps turning around

We live and we die, we know not why
But I’ll be with you when the deal goes down.

(“The Lyrics” 610)

The music video for “When The Deal Goes Down” features Scarlett Johansson as the contemporary muse in the poet’s lyrics. The song journeys the imagination during the lyrical flow of romantic gestures that may be in vain but worth every attempt on the dream-like road that unfolds as he sings word by word, I’ll be with you when the deal goes down!

At sixty-five Bob Dylan is still a very hip cat and I’m sure he had some say in the production style and values of this video, it does deliver a cultural statement visually and lyrically. This Round Eleven, “The Emeritus Minstrel Period” ranks among the pugilist/poet’s best rounds of the whole fight. In it he elevated his game, displayed the Dylan shuffle, and quieted down the heart of his challenger known as “the writer’s block,” and the crowd too went silent, you could almost hear a pin drop at the closing bell.

-Dylan’s age at end of “The Emeritus Minstrel Period” is sixty-five.
Round Twelve:

“Golden Minstrel Period”  (Sept. 2006 - current)

Three official studio albums and release dates:

Together Through Life  (Apr. 28, 2009)

Christmas In The Heart  (Oct. 13, 2009)

Tempest  (Sept. 10, 2012)

The bell rings and suddenly it’s the final round. The contender is not even sweating. Up from his stool he rises and with the amount of winning rounds behind him, he knows all he has to do to remain champion is, hold his own until the closing bell, signaling the fight is over and the contest his. In this “Golden Minstrel Period,” so-called because at sixty-five, Bob Dylan is in the golden years of his life and career. Although the pugilist/poet is far from what one would consider is retirement, he’s not ready for the beach or the golf course, in fact he’ll never be, that’s just not in his character.

This period differs from the previous because Bob Dylan is in a different working mode. Here in the “Golden Minstrel Period” he has slowed the frequency of new original album creativity and concentrated more on vocal delivery and instrumental execution of other songwriter’s songs he is covering. Behind him is the “Emeritus Minstrel Period” because those three albums belong to an artistic family cluster which needs to stand alone as a triad of related musical texture and lyrical content. Dylan and Columbia Records have released twenty different albums here in the “Golden Minstrel Period” that began in 2006, and I’m sure there’s more to come. Only two of the twenty albums contain any original songs that might apply to this thesis and are open for discussion.
The first album of the “Golden Minstrel Period” with original songs is *Together Through Life* and it debuted at number one. Nine of the ten songs are co-written with old song writing partner and Grateful Dead multi-instrumentalist Robert Hunter, the one solo Dylan composition is “This Dream of You” which is a beautiful slow dance accompanied with violin and accordion, told in five verses of original romantic and regretful views expressed within the poetry of the song.

Jumping off the bat in this collection is “Beyond Here Lies Nothin’” and Dylan quite masterfully takes this number, on the live version, by the throat musically, lyrically, and vocally, no pun intended. There’s no doubt who’s in charge with this ancient mountain man’s rockin’ blues that lands squarely in the romantic bylines of a noir love story (again) in a timeless slice of David Lynch like surrealism. The song’s image aesthetic is heightened by the gravelly and gargley presentation of the narrator’s vocal timbre, making the musical reality cut straight to the marrow. All the musical elements concerned, create an unusual yet familiar musical quality as complete to the ear as his sixties “thin wild mercury sound.” It is deserving of a handle all its own because the timbre is indicative of a quantum step (not a leap) in Dylan’s repertoire.

On “I Feel A Change Comin’ On,” Dylan is again singing about change, but this time not socially or politically. In this light, floaty accordion and snare drum driven love song, Dylan’s voice portrays sincerity in the lyrics that shape a budding romance, “Baby, pack you clothes with mine/I feel a change comin’ on” (638).

Everyone knows Bob Dylan is a God-fearing man, so no one should be surprised that he came out with a Christmas album, and generous it is in that all proceeds go to charity, the Organization For Feeding America. What is surprising is how he sounds on it. In my mind Christmas songs are known for their beautiful vocal qualities and are pleasant to the ear.
Nonetheless, it’s surprising to the ear to hear Bob Dylan’s counter-cultural aged voice rendering these beautiful, sweet, classic Christmas songs that you grew up with from childhood. But hearing the pugilist/poet delivering these same songs his way, opens a whole new door on the word “Noel.” Hearing Bob Dylan sing noel carols is a mind-expanding experience.

Sliding over to his final original studio album *Tempest*, you have to appreciate these songs on the merits of the vast range of moods they present. Dylan paints another masterpiece that reaches number three and in terms of the broad strokes he applies, he takes us through “Pay In Blood” (morality), to “Early Roman Kings” (corruption), to “Tempest” (the Titanic), to “Soon After Midnight” (twisted romance), to “Long and Wasted Years” (regret), and “Roll On John” (John Lennon), he gets you thinking about universal truths in different angles of reality. While Dylan is mixing it up with this collection, every song hits the right artistic delivery. In the gravity of the thirteen minute song “Tempest,” you can feel Dylan connecting to the tragedy of lost lives in the Titanic disaster as he unravels the details of the actual historical steps that occurred in that starry night where so-called modern man-made technology meets modern human error, in a possibly predestined tragedy of great magnitude. Dylan has never shied away from addressing the dark-side topics, and does so here demonstrating his precision of language with the appropriate musicality and dramatic vocal emphasis. Dylan does blend the real-life passengers on the Titanic with those from the 1997 film, “Leo took his sketchbook/He was so inclined/He closed his eyes and painted/The scenery in his mind” (“The Lyrics” 661).

The last number, of the last period is “Roll On John,” a tip of the hat to John Lennon who was a distant friend but constant competitor and mutual admirer, and perhaps a sometimes muse, as they both influenced each other from across the pond. There is interesting video footage of the two of them together in the back of Lennon’s Rolls Royce on YouTube shot by D.A. Pennebaker.
in 1966. In “Roll On John” Dylan is acknowledging the greatness of the Liverpudlian singer/songwriter when he sings:

From Liverpool docks to the red-light Hamburg streets

Down in the quarry with the Quarrymen

Playing to big crowds, playing to the cheap seats

Another day in the life on your way to your journey’s end

Shine your light/movin’ on/you burned so bright/

Roll on, John                  (“The Lyrics” 666).

What Dylan is not doing in this final period is producing a lot of original albums and songs. What he is doing is polishing his song-craft skills on live studio albums of cover songs and compilation albums of former original songs. Most likely this may be the final curtain on his creative artistry for composing original studio albums and creating original songs, he has not released an original song since 2012.

At this juncture it’s necessary to mention three studio recorded albums by Bob Dylan during this period: *Shadows In The Night* (2015); *Fallen Angels* (2016); and *Triplicate* (2017). Because they do not include any original songs they do not qualify as relevant to period placement and are therefore not related to any period. *Good As I Been To You* and *World Gone Wrong* also have no original songs but count due to creative progress and artistic development.

-Dylan’s age to date by thesis deadline 10 Apr. 2019 is seventy-seven, his birthday 24 May 1941.
Conclusion:

“The Judge’s Scorecards”

The final bell has rung, the fight is over. The ref is holding up high the right hand of the pugilist/poet in traditional posture of declaring the winner. That a mere welter-weight singer/songwriter could do so much heavy-weight damage to the cultural realities in America and around the world, is a testament to the slight guitar player from the Mid-west with the tall imagination and Herculean fortitude. What we witnessed is twelve rounds of versatile fist-a-cuffs in the form of thirty-seven albums, over five hundred songs, and a Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to the pugilist/poet/voice of a generation/singer/songwriter who rang-up eleven winning rounds out of twelve. You can’t win ‘em all Bob, or can you? There is I think a “Greatest Hits” album locked inside the so-called losing eighth round, “Post Holy Spirit Period,” but that’s for a different kind of fight.

In this thesis the periods of Bob Dylan’s musical and poetic expressions become clearly defined in their appropriate chronological clusters which are shown in the past eighty pages, and they evolved in sync with the artist’s oeuvre and remain accurate distinctions over the span of decades as verified periods in the artistry of Bob Dylan. A victory for clarity of periods.

Bob Dylan prevailed against all his foes and can walk out of the ring a champion. What he tallied up is a grand total of over seventy commercially released albums; had over sixty scholarly books written about his work in several different languages; acquired thirteen domestic and international special civilian and academic citations and honors; published over fifteen books himself; created eight albums of historical significance which were inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame; received thirty-nine Grammy Award Nominations, with eleven wins;
(his poet/musican son Jacob Dylan is two for six); one Pulitzer Prize Special Citation Award; one Golden Globe Award; one Academy Award; and as has been mentioned, one Nobel Prize in Literature. Not to mention his numerous art gallery openings around the world of his fine still life and portraiture paintings, and his unique metal sculpture work for which there is a long waiting list of recipients for his creative metal gates. Also there’s his work in the cinema, which includes over a dozen major involvements in full scale film-making productions as either producer, director, editor, writer, and actor.

Bob Dylan left home looking for a home and he finally found it on the road, where there is no home. Since June of 1988 Dylan has been on the so-called “The Never Ending Tour,” labeled as such by journalist Adrian Deevoy during a Q Magazine interview published in December 1989 (Gray “Bob Dylan Encyclopedia” 173-4). I think it’s safe to say that Bob Dylan finally did find his home and it’s on the stage where he can express his music and poetry.

This time traveling poet/thinker has graced us with his visions and artistry and given our hearts and minds an ability to view what an empowered person can achieve, meaning this is what is possible to accomplish in a single life time. Bob Dylan is a creative pioneer who did change the world, I’m just not sure if everybody caught it or else forgot about it, but for those of us who did and remember, Amen.

William Shakespeare closed his playwriting career after thirty-seven plays with the last one called being called The Tempest. If Bob Dylan closes his songwriting career after these thirty-seven studio albums with the last one being called Tempest, he’ll have dueled William Shakespeare to a draw over his life time. Cosmic or deliberate, you make the call.
Appendix
Photographic References

Figure 1. Bob Dylan shadow boxing with Mary Travers and Donovan in the background. U.K. 1967.

Figure 2. Bob Dylan and Mohammed Ali at Madison Square Garden, 8 Dec. 1975.
   www.pinterest.com/pin/206532332887167852

Figure 3. Bob Dylan and un-named trainer circa 2000.
   www.needsomefun.net/bob-dylans-boxing-addiction-2/

Figure 4. Bob Dylan and Rubin “Hurricane” Carter in 2013 (last time together).
   www.pinterest.com/jennykoraca/rubin-hurricane-carter/

Figure 5. Bob Dylan and un-named trainer inside boxing gym, 25 Jun. 1994.
   www.needsomefun.net/bob-dylans-boxing-addiction-2/

Figure 6. Bob Dylan and Manny Pacquiao, 14 Mar. 2014.
All Albums
- Numbered albums reflect albums belonging to that artistic period.
- Musical Expeditionary period shows all unofficial recording sessions that were not for album designation, except debut album *Bob Dylan*.

Type of album (designation):
S/O: Studio Original; S/R: Studio Recorded; U: Unofficial; L: Live; C: Compilation

**MUSICAL EXPEDITIONARY PERIOD 1946-1962** (by recording date) (One album).
U......*Two A-Capella Songs by the Jokers* (circa summer 1956, Minneapolis).
U......*The Suitcase Tape* (circa May, 1959, by Ric Kangus).
U......*Karen’s Apartment/Armpit Tapes* (circa May, 1960).

**SOLO ACOUSTIC PERIOD 1962-1964** (Three albums).

**ELECTRIC EXPRESSIONIST PERIOD 1964-1966** (Three albums).

**POST CRASH PERIOD 1966-1970** (Four albums).
RENEWED MINSTREL PERIOD  1970-1974  (Four albums).
    L...........Before the Flood  (June 20, 1974).

TRACKS & DESIRE PERIOD  1974-1978  (Two Albums).

HOLY SPIRIT PERIOD    1979-1981  (Four albums).
-20. S/O......Saved  (June 20, 1980).

POST HOLY SPIRIT PERIOD    1981-1988  (Four albums).

WILBURY’s & MERCY PERIOD   1988-1990  (Two albums).
    L.......Dylan & the Dead  (Feb. 6, 1989).

COCOON MINSTREL PERIOD    1990-1995  (Four Albums).
EMERITUS MINSTREL PERIOD  1995-2006  (Three albums).
C........Bob Dylan’s Greatest Hits Vol. 3  (Nov. 15, 1994).
C.........Masked And Anonymous  (July 15, 2003).
C.........The Best of Bob Dylan  (Nov. 2005).
-34.  S/O....Modern Times  (Aug. 2006).

GOLDEN MINSTREL PERIOD   2006-current  (Three albums).
C.........Dylan (Greatest Hits)  (Oct. 2, 2007).
C.........Original Mono  (Oct. 19, 2010).
C.........Bob Dylan The Best of the Original Mono Recordings  (Oct. 19, 2010).
C.........Bob Dylan Complete  (Nov. 4, 2013).
S/R.....Fallen Angels  (May 20, 2016).
Works Cited


Arena/BBC Productions. 2005


Spitzer, John and Ronald Walters. “Making Sense of American Popular Song.” *History Matters*: 78


