

American Soul
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Like no popular poet since perhaps Walt Whitman, Bob Dylan has both celebrated and questioned the American spirit in a way that has forever redefined our understanding of it. During the '60s, in both his social protest and personal songs, he sang to the young, searching generation about compassion for the abused, empathy for the misused, and his feelings of kinship with the confused. In the same way that Whitman declared, "Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you," Dylan declared that he sang for "every hung-up person in the whole wide universe."

Paul Simon said of Dylan, "He made us feel at a certain time that it was good to be smart, good to be observant, that it was good to have a social conscience."

Bruce Springsteen said, "Elvis may have freed our body, but Dylan freed our soul."

And as Bob Dylan, now 56, continues to sing, he continues trying to help free the souls of a new generation. At his current shows, you're likely to see tie-dyed college students grooving alongside balding baby boomers. Bob sings the same truths to them both.

Dylan cites the strong influence of his songwriting predecessors. In a recent *New York Times* interview, he said: "My songs come out of folk music. I love the whole pantheon. To me, there's no difference between Muddy Waters and Bill Munroe. My songs, what's different is that there's a foundation to them."

The voice that sings these songs, cracked and often aching with emotion, isn't always an easy voice to hear — but it is an unmistakably real voice, one that belongs to a man who has trod the long, uneasy roads of America and come back to tell us what he has seen.

Dylan still tours regularly. When asked about the rigors of his schedule, he is humble, saying that while he does about 125 shows a year, "B.B. King [who is 70] does 300." Earlier this year, Dylan suffered a serious heart infection, yet he's fully recovered and back on the road, recently performing for the pope in Bologna, Italy. Just another gig, another stage.

And after a seven-year period without any new songs, Dylan's regained his muse with the new album *Time Out of Mind*. *Time* magazine says the widely praised CD is "cathartic and ultimately hopeful: There is salvation, and it comes from within."

This December, Dylan will be honored for his lifetime achievement in the American arts by the Kennedy Center, which notes, "His songs remain forever young, irresistibly touching reflections of the American soul."

Dylan remains forever restless, forever yearning, forever questioning, forever striving to discover that which is essential and real.

And for that, we forever listen.

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