

Dylan's latest effort proves he has not been forgotten



Time Out of Mind
Bob Dylan
Columbia Records
★★★★ 1/2 (out of five)

By MICHAEL SCHAUB
Staff writer

Bob Dylan wore the mantle of flower-child hero like an albatross or a cross. Like Kurt Cobain would 30 years later, Dylan spent much of his career avoiding the dubious title of "poet of his generation." But it never seemed to work. He alienated hard-core folk fans by going electric at Woodstock, went on to record some brilliant straight-ahead country albums (John Wesley Harding and Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid), and shocked the nation with his conversion to Christianity in the early '80s — the result of which was a stunning gospel album, *Infidels*. Pop culture, however, followed him, and continued to embrace his persona. He became an icon of America itself, not just a hippie relic.

Time Out of Mind, Dylan's first original album

in seven years and his best in 20 years, proves the singer-songwriter is in no danger of being forgotten by the musical world he created.

Musically, Dylan has never been better. He plays with the best group of musicians since The Band in the '60s. Called "the Austin album" by critics in the state's capital, *Time Out of Mind* showcases Texas musicians like keyboardist Augie Meyers (The Texas Tornadoes), guitarist Duke Robillard (Roomful of Blues) and slide guitarist Cindy Cashdollar (Asleep at the Wheel).

The instrumentation is all blues, with Dylan's harmonica adding a touch of folk to the songs. The album is more than a little similar to *Blood on the Tracks*, his dark, troubled, mid-'70s masterpiece.

Straight blues numbers like "Love Sick" and "Cold Irons Bound" contrast with folk songs like "Not Dark Yet" and "Standing in the Doorway" — some of the most accomplished songs to ever enter the Dylan catalog.

"When you think that you've lost everything," Dylan sings in "Tryin' to Get to Heaven," "You find out you can always lose a little more."

Such hopelessness is the theme of the album, which sounds incredibly dark both musically and lyrically.

Dylan touches on familiar ground with his lyrics. "Standing in the Doorway" and "Love Sick" are love-lorn laments, while "Not Dark Yet" and "Dirt Road Blues" explore self-doubt and anomie.

Even when Dylan sings lines like, "Don't know if I saw you, if I'd kiss you or kill you / Probably wouldn't matter to you anyhow," the tone of *Time Out of Mind* does not seem precisely dark or cynical. Rather, Dylan's rugged voice suggests disillusionment and subdued anger.

All of which becomes understandable, and even beautiful, after "Highlands," the album's 17-minute closing track. The song, like all of Dylan's music, is a sad, confused paean to America — or, more precisely, the American



Dylan

road, the American subconscious.

Bob Dylan has lived 56 years, the last of which saw his near-fatal battle with heart disease, and the rise of his son Jakob (The Wallflowers) to alternative rock deity.

It is this world-weariness, this confusion, that makes *Time Out of Mind* such a revelation. Dylan sees himself in America, and vice versa.

His new album, as dark and weary as it may seem, is a perfect collection of love songs to the country and culture he helped define.

Dylan, as usual, sums it up best:

"My sense of humanity has gone down the drain / Behind every beautiful thing, there's some kind of pain ... / I just don't know why I should even care / It's not dark yet, but it's getting there."

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