

Chrissie Hynde's Live Homage to Bob Dylan – London, 26 December 2021

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On the evening of Boxing Day 2021, Chrissie Hynde, best known as the vocalist of the classic group the Pretenders, offered the world a concert streamed from the Royal Opera House in London. It featured 17 songs, nine of them by Bob Dylan. The US-born, UK-resident singer performed the same nine Dylan compositions as on her album *Standing in the Doorway* released earlier this year, in the same order but with the added spontaneity and immediacy that comes from live performance, certainly when the artist gives it their all as Chrissie Hynde did that night:

<https://chrissiehynde.veeps.com> (*at time of writing, stream available till 2 January 2022*)

The artist's song selection for CD and concert reveals an in-depth knowledge of Dylan's work and an emphasis away from his better-known earlier work. The songs were, in order: 'In the Summertime', 'You're A Big Girl Now', 'Standing in the Doorway', 'Sweetheart Like You', 'Blind Willie McTell', 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit', 'Don't Fall Apart on Me Tonight', 'Tomorrow is a Long Time' and 'Every Grain of Sand' – thus, two from the 60s, one from *Blood on the Tracks* (1975), all of five from the *Shot of Love/Infidels* period (1981/83) and one from *Time Out of Mind* (1997).

The songs were performed in line with the original lyrics, with no stanzas left out and, interestingly, with two divergences from Dylan's own main album versions removed as compared with Hynde's own CD. In 'Don't Fall Apart On Me Tonight', 'Saint James Street' is restored from from *Infidels*, whereas the CD had 'Napoleon Street', as in Dylan's drafts of the song recently released on *The Bootleg Series vol. 16*; and in 'Sweetheart Like You' the first half of the second stanza, on the CD altered to restore lines ('You know, conmen don't need strangers ...') that Dylan sings on the draft released on that same volume 16, is changed back to what appeared on *Infidels* ('you know I once knew a woman who looked like you ...'). For 'Every Grain of Sand', choosing from Dylan's alternate lines at the end she prefers 'reality of man', as on *Shot of Love*, to 'perfect finished plan'. Chrissie Hynde has thus done her homework: she has made her choices and shown herself to be conversant with the history of the songs.

It is difficult to point up standout performances with a set of so uniformly high a standard and a vocalist so very much inside the songs, articulating Dylan's words with such care. However, an elegiac 'Tomorrow is a Long Time', a contemplative 'Every Grain of Sand' and a doom-laden 'Blind Willie McTell' were particularly impressive. Hynde's choice of 'Every Grain of Sand' to end her Dylan selection gels nicely with Dylan's own recourse to the same song as encore in his most recent tour setlist.

The remainder of the concert offered diverse material including Pretenders numbers, notably two Ray Davies songs famously covered by the group, 'Stop Your Sobbing' and 'I Go To Sleep', and, as encore and in French, Charles Trenet's 'Que reste-t-il de nos amours?'. All were well performed, but it is a fair guess that most spectators will remember this concert for the Dylan material. As Chrissie Hynde said from the stage at one point, 'it's all in the writing ...

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