



A Simple Twist of Fate: Bob Dylan and the Making of Blood on the Tracks

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In 1974 Bob Dylan wrote, recorded, reconsidered, and then re-recorded the best-selling studio album of his career. *Blood on the Tracks* was composed as Dylan's twelve-year marriage began to unravel, and songs like "Tangled Up in Blue" and "Shelter from the Storm" have become templates for multidimensional, adult songs of love and loss. Yet the story behind the creation of this album has never been fully told; even the credits on the present-day album sleeve are inaccurate. Dylan recorded the album twice-once in New York City and again in Minneapolis, with a rag-tag gang of local musicians, quickly rewriting many of the songs in the process. For *A Simple Twist of Fate*, the authors have interviewed the musicians and producers, industry insiders, and others, creating an engaging chronicle of how one musician channeled his pain and confusion into great art.

A Simple Twist of Fate: Bob Dylan and the Making of Blood on the Tracks Details

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barry says

Fascinating story of Bob Dylan travelling back to MN after recording Blood on the Tracks in New York and then re-recording most of the album with no-name MN musicians and releasing the album with 8 of the MN tracks but no credits to the MN musicians. Told by the MN musicians themselves.

Fascinating story but rather poorly organized and quite uninterestingly written. A must-read for those that think this to be one of the best albums ever recorded (like I do) but a bore for anyone else. 4 stars: the story; 2 stars: the writing. Listen to the record.

Jason Clarke says

I really enjoyed the guts of this book - the studio stories and technical details of making the record, both in New York and Minneapolis. I liked the stories behind the guitars used in Minneapolis and the energy in the studio there. I was definitely interested in the microphone used in the session and the book enriched my listening to album. The long, verse by verse analysis of every song on the record was tedious and too much criticism and supposition to enjoy. I've never needed to know every excruciating detail of what a Dylan song means. Part of the cool is that we can all have our own experience of it without dissecting it.

Also, I get that the Minneapolis band feels hard done by, and according to this telling, they sure were. Maybe a little too much time was spent on that, but since one of the authors was one of the studio guys I guess I understand it.

Mark Goddard says

Fascinating account of the sessions for Blood On The Tracks.

Raymonds009 says

The authors make a cogent argument that the album "Blood on the Tracks" deserves to be included with Dylan's very best outpourings. Great background information. Leaves you with wanting to know more and re-listen again and again.

Peter says

I am a big fan of the album Blood On The Tracks and this is a not bad but not great telling of the circumstances behind the production of the album and in particular the two very different recording so the

album, one done in New York and one done in Minnesota. There is some very nice analysis of the music and the musical turns as well as some insights into the lyrics and structure of the songs. Where the book sags is in the odd bits of sociological and political analysis the co-authors feel compelled to indulge in. I estimate the book could have been about half the length it is and would have been that much better for it.

Brooke says

Does not hang together as a book at all. I disagreed with at least 3 of the authors' huge generalizations about the music industry/community right from the first chapter. Then they go on to *not* focus on what they said they were going to describe, the background of Bob's personal relationships and how they were revealed various songs. I really didn't learn anything new from the "interpretations" here and the rest of the recording information was only mildly interesting. If you're a Dylan fan, you already know he's a jerk, and if you're not, you probably won't care enough to read this.

Chris Ingalls says

This is essentially a must-read if you're like me and consider "Blood on the Tracks" Dylan's best album. It's also one of my favorite albums by anyone, period. It's an interesting story, and I loved hearing about the initial New York sessions and how many of the songs were re-recorded in Minneapolis a few months later with all-new (and relatively unknown) musicians. The musicians, producers and engineers from both sessions are all quoted in this book, and it's a fascinating peek into the art and mechanics of making an album. The famously reclusive Dylan is – of course – not quoted or interviewed at all, and his mystique and oddball studio behavior is often humorously recounted here. Told chronologically, the book is a rather slim affair (212 pages, not including appendices), and it's largely padded near the end with quotes from reviewers and mentions of the album's critical accolades. There's also a ton of (necessary) backstory in the beginning about Dylan's personal and professional life in the years leading up to the making of the album. Overall, it's an entertaining read (especially if you're a fan of the album), but it probably would've worked better as an entry in the 33 1/3 album series.

senator jensen says

Well researched. I have read more Dylan-based books than I'd like to admit but this one keeps it real. Not much of the usual star-fucking pandering prose. Mostly just the story from the session musicians who played on both the New York version and Minneapolis version of the record. Overall, a nice account without any real insight into Dylan's head. If you want that, just listen to all of his songs a couple hundred times each. Then try to forget 'em.

Bob Peru says

bobby and the recordin' of "blood on the tracks". one of, if not THE, greatest dylan records. dude was only in his early 30's when he wrote these songs. as joan baez said early on about (i think it was) "masters of war": "it's hard to believe that song came outta that little frog." or somethin' like that. dylan is our greatest

songwriter and poet. no one else even comes close. no one. even though he says he only a "song an' dance man."

Matt says

As a behind-the-scenes look into a hugely influential record, this book is fantastic. As writing about music, it is utterly disappointing. Some of the raw information is completely fascinating, and it's a noble thing to put forth the opinions of the unsung musicians who played on the record, but the writing is tepid and uninspired. While the record is often viewed as the ultimate Dylan "confessional" statement, to try and infer what was going on in his personal life on the basis of these songs seems vaguely ridiculous. A more nuanced book would get at the broad implications of the songs while framing them within the skeleton of Dylan's personal life, and would dig at what the music DOES, not what it REPRESENTS. Overall a decent read with some good stories, of significant interest only to Dylan nuts.

Denis Farley says

Interesting to the point of Andy Gill's (doubt that co-writer and participating musician in the Minneapolis sessions, Kevin Odegard would have added much to this section) analysis of the songs, which almost caused me to drop the rest of the book . . . however I pressed on through this tedium to useful musical and technical information. It's nice to hear how other artists, especially one as enigmatic and paradoxically well known as Dylan, approach the physical creation of the medium within they work. *Chronicling Blood On The Tracks*, one of his most successful studio albums, the book covers participants largely uncredited in the official album releases, their memoirs, subsequent activities and comments, including, Bob's brother, David Zimmerman.

Steve says

Uneven but fascinating account of Dylan's recording of *Blood on the Tracks*. Personally, *Blood on the Tracks* is my first and favorite Dylan album. When it was issued, I was probably a second (or third) wave listener to Dylan. I was in high school at the time, and my main "listens" were the Stones, the Who, and the Beatles (all good stuff). But I had never encountered songs with lyrics this deep before, even if I only scratched the surface of what would prove to be Dylan's most painful and personal album. (Also, at the time, NBC, amazingly ran a concert piece from the Rolling Thunder Revue. I can't recall if it was live or not.) Anyway, I was hooked. For life. And that includes that bad albums (*Knocked Out Loaded*, *Down in the Groove*), because even the bad ones always had a few cuts that worth listening to -- repeatedly.

Authors Gill and Odegard recreated a lot of this period for me, and if you didn't live through this time, they provide a clunky pause or two to get you caught up with Nixon, the music scene, and Dylan. Then they get down into the weeds as far as the songs (and their composition). I'm not a musician, so a lot of that stuff just flew by me, but the song analysis is excellent. You also get a lot of Bob-in-the-studio. He generally comes across as a good guy, with only a few asshole moments. What I did not know was the BOT was recorded in New York with Eric Weissberg's "Deliverance" band, and then five songs were rerecorded in Minneapolis with local (and excellent) musicians that Dylan's brother, David, was able to pull together. The original New York versions are quite good, but the re-dos are better. (Especially so when it comes to "Idiot Wind.")

Interestingly, Gill writes about how Dylan, while on his Rolling Thunder tour, changed a line in "Idiot Wind" signaling a growing anger that was seeping outside the original lyrics. "Visions of your chesnut mare" becomes the harsh "visions of your smoking tongue." (You can hear this on the live *Hard Rain*.) Gill indicates that at this point in the tour Dylan was often drunk, and frequently whoring.

What is really nice about the book is how the authors give voice to the various session musicians. Their thoughts -- then and now -- are often surprising. For some, who are experienced pros, it's just a gig, for others (especially the Minneapolis crew), it's the chance of a lifetime. One member would actually be offered (by Dylan himself) a slot on his upcoming tour. He turned it down! (He would go on to have a very successful career with Disney.) Some of them are bitter. This is at least partially understandable since the Minneapolis group was never acknowledged on the record sleeve (they were told they would be). This seems fixable, even now, though some wave it away saying that it's a detail that the artist doesn't care about, and that the record people didn't follow-up on. That sounds weak, and as one wife of a musician points out: that's on Dylan. He needs to make it right, because these guys helped to make a very special album.

Ron Jensen says

First 2/3 of the book was pretty good. I learned some things about how recording sessions are put together and produced, and about Dylan's writing process. And I gained new understanding and appreciation of the complexity of these simple acoustic songs. But the writing was mediocre, and the last part of the book was like reading an endless album jacket analyzing the "meaning" of these songs, which I think speak for themselves.

Dave Beebe says

Blood on the Tracks is easily my favorite Dylan record. And everyone knows that the majority of the material here is about the bottom of his marriage falling out, even though he's denied and admitted this (after all, he is Bob Dylan). However, this book speculates way too much on just what exactly the music stands for, if it should stand for anything. Sure, it is THE greatest break-up record of all time, but the author takes a chunk of liberty in detailing the album. The only redeeming quality of this book is the technical side. The fact that these songs were recorded in two separate sessions and some of the songs on the album are one-takes; that is interesting. Had this book stuck with detailing the recording itself instead of speculation on the songs themselves, this would have been a much better read.

Ron Coulter says

This could have been a Rolling Stone article. A lot of padding was added to make it book length, including discourses on the state of the country and music in the early '70s. Plus, multi-paragraph quotes from the musicians (and their spouses!) that could have been summarized instead of copied and pasted. Nevertheless, there were enough interesting bits to make it worth a read:
The stories of Dylan's brusque dealings with the original New York musicians.

As someone who lives an hour west of Ashtabula, I've always wondered how he came up with that place name in *You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go*. Turns out it was the birthplace of Ellen Bernstein of Columbia Records, with whom he had a relationship in 1974.
