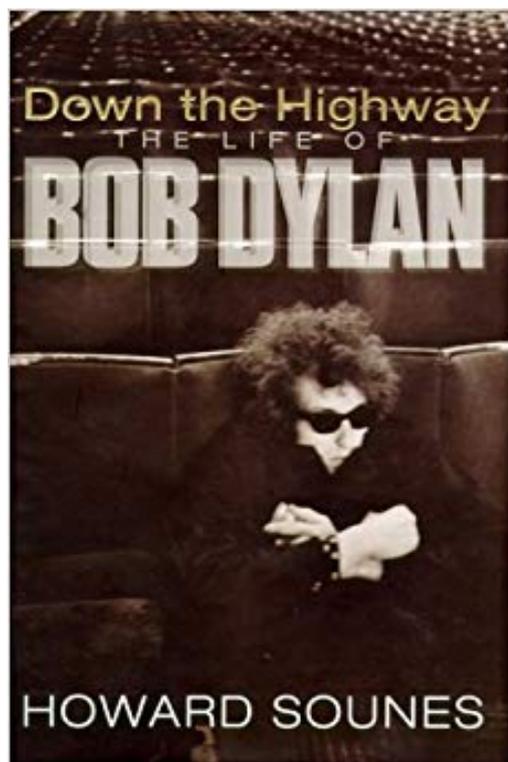


## down the highway the life of Bob Dylan *by* Howard Sounes



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## Reviews of the **down the highway the life of Bob Dylan** *by* Howard Sounes

### Brakree

I recommend this book to the serious Dylan fan. In *Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan*, Howard Sounes manages to capture Bob Dylan's poetic and musical genius, from unknown singer imitating Woodie Guthrie to multimillionaire recluse while leaving one wondering who the man is. Even with all the research, this reader feels he's standing outside looking in. Perhaps we have to chalk that up to the nature of a subject who strove from the early sixties on to obfuscate his background and motivations. In addition, it's no wonder a man who's running from fans and even colleagues becomes to a large extent "the man who wasn't there"—isolated, with few friends or confidants. Described many times as shy and withdrawn, even at the height of his fame, one wonders

how he could have stood up in front of a hundred thousand people to perform.

The author spends a surprising amount of time on Robert Zimmerman's early years in Hibbing and at the University of Minnesota; these pages detailed his family life, friends, and early musical influences, not to mention his strong ambition to become a famous musician. No question he was driven.

Though this is not a "hit piece," Sounes does not spare Dylan; he was known for using and then discarding more established performers in his early days, and then forcing out or firing his musicians and other staff after he became a powerful force on the music scene.

Of course, Sounes thoroughly covers Dylan's lack of interest in left-wing politics as well as the changes in his music from pure folk to electrified rock, country, and blues and to what extent friends and fans hated him for that evolution. To this reader it was also informative to what extent his evangelical conversion devastated his career in terms of the quality of several of his recordings and his ability to draw the crowds--they wanted to hear "greatest hits" concerts and so stayed away to avoid being proselytized.

Oh, and the women. There were obviously far too many to mention so the author tries to concentrate on fifteen or so, many of whom he stayed in contact with over multiple decades—an interesting insight into Dylan's character.

The author pierces the veil of mystery Dylan tried to maintain and thus Sounes exposes in detail the artist's ethnic and religious backgrounds, and in several places one gets the feeling the author may have made deals with some of his sources so he could get their viewpoints and information in return for keeping them in the background—in two-dimensional roles.

Sounes recounts each recording session and tour in a straight chronological catalogue, in formulaic fashion. He might have emphasized some of these depending on their importance. However, I suppose his approach is perfect for someone interested in a blow-by-blow of Dylan's entire canon and how it came to be as well as Bob's need to continually tour to financially support his failed marriages.

I did find fascinating Dylan's idiosyncratic style of recording and performing—wanting it to seem fresh and "live" by keeping the set list a mystery from his backing bands and the number of takes and rehearsals to a minimum. Many of the musicians who worked with him could only guess which songs he would play, what key he might play in, and when the chord breaks might occur.

### **Rich Vulture**

This was meant to be the definitive biography of Bob Dylan to mark his 60th birthday in 2001. In the years since, as he hit his 70th year and beyond, it still stands as an extremely well-researched and insightful look at a man who has done his best to remain mysterious and elusive as a celebrity, while keeping his private life shrouded in almost total secrecy.

\*

For more than half a century Dylan's songs have been listened to, shared, studied and analyzed as if they were micro-insights into the thoughts and opinions of a generation that prided itself on questioning authority and making a change in the world. When you discuss the 1960's, it's impossible not to also discuss Bob Dylan.

\*

The making of an image that eventually became a legend is covered in detail. Fans of Dylan's music will soak in every detail about the songs, recording sessions and endless tours. But what makes this book stand out is his story. Dylan himself was notorious for leading journalists down blind alleys or

simply fabricating the “where, what and who’s” of his life. The author tracks down the details through public records, past accounts, studio notes and interviews with friends, family, associates, musicians – and seemingly anyone that had anything to do with Bob Dylan, outside of Dylan himself and his first wife Sarah.

\*

His early years in Minnesota as Robert Zimmerman may contradict any image his fans might have of a Woody Guthrie wannabe riding the rails with an acoustic guitar singing songs of America and life on the road. From a well-to-do family, he played piano in the style of his hero Little Richard with high school bands, proving he was a rocker long before turning folkie. He dropped out of college after his freshman year and headed to New York to find fame and fortune. Lucky breaks, chance meetings, generous girlfriends, supportive peers and a name change were equally as important to his success as his talent and headstrong ideas.

\*

Dylan’s song inspirations and actual dedication to his early role as a rebellious leader (composer of Blowin’ In The Wind) for his generation are discussed, as well as his transitions through musical genres including folk, rock, country, religious and Traveling Wilbury. The motorcycle accident in 1966 that changed his career path, problems with management, record companies, first marriage, and a secret second wife are told in detail.

\*

Ten years after the first edition of this book was released in 2001, there was an update for Dylan’s 70th birthday. As a Dylan fan I could discuss in detail the original version for being informative and entertaining. But as a reader and reviewer of the newer release, I found the updates to be forgettable and not needed.

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