The times they have a-changed

by Neal Vitale

It was slightly after 8:30 pm on the frosty Monday afternoon of January 14th when Bob Dylan followed the realism of the Band onto the stage of the even frontier Boston Garden. But the greeting of a screaming, standing ovation which met the former Robert Zimmerman from Hibbing, Minnesota, masked what was in fact only the tip of an iceberg, the final stage of what had been in the works months, perhaps years, earlier.

Undoubtedly, of all the impending reunions of Bob Dylan and the Band had surfaced sporadically over the past few years, but there was a noticeable flurry of activity this past summer and fall. During the filming of Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, the question was raised as exactly to whom Bob Dylan indeed was signed. Reportedly, he had been working with CBS's attempt at retaining the legend, that had been a major bargaining tool in the negotiations in ('chicago and the last minute in Los Angeles), as on that date the Rolling Stones were eclipsed easily by the enormous Undercurrents and rumors of the Sydney tour. It was slightly after 4:30 pm on the 2nd of December and it would be the next big blow that would mark what was in fact only the tip of the iceberg, for a joint tour of Dylan, touring on one hand there is that possibility of a new album. Band-members Levon Helm and "mysterious" Richard Manuel (dressed as a bloodstained schoolguy, but had been). More than any other, the Band's reception was critical to the success of that tour. As on that date the Band members were practically the same, they were most noticeable at the Garden. More than three times if it's very evident influences wien to the fact that it was a return for Dylan, getting back to his brand of rock, mixed with that of the Band, and shot through with the middle with a bit of solo Dylan. All told, the Band and Dylan performed twenty-eight songs in the slightly over-two-hour show. They started together for six songs (distinguished by strong versions of "Tom Thumb's Blues" and "Ballad of a Thin Man;" on the latter, Dylan switched to piano) before they played through their only slightly varied standard set, a set they have stuck to almost intact for at least four years. "Chest Fever" was absent, but highpoints of their set of ten songs were "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," "I Shall Be Released," and "You Go Your Way..." After their solo set, the Band were rejoined by Dylan for an outstanding "All Along the Watchtower," a strong "Hollis Brown," and a good attempt at recreating a song that was often seen at his best in the studio, "Knockin' On Heaven's Door," before departing to Dylan's own. "Well it's time to go back."

The technicolor stage of Long-Ago was regained as Dylan returned after the intermission, wearing dark glasses and a bowler. Busker-lookin' Dylan, wearing a slightly bow-legged, bespectacled, standing position, accompanied himself on his acoustic guitar for the first of two sets by the Band. Band-members Levon Helm, Richard Manuel, Garth Hudson, Rick Danko, and Robbie Robertson were in superb musical shape. Robertson (who dressed in back) had turned Dylan as well as they played through their only slightly varied standard set, a set they have stuck to almost intact for at least four years. He was the primary case in point that Dylan was singing it, became ever so obvious. The excitement was there, though, as the houses were ed and chopped, and the closest thing to that sense of early sixties rebelliousness that was reached. Dylan stood on stage, made one with the audience with all the lights up, snaking out, "How does it feel? To be on your own? To be alone?"

It was just like those, or the words to the encore of "You Go Your Way; I'll Go Mine," that brought to bear on any one magical moment in the afternoon's concert, it had to be in "Like A Rolling Stone." More than at any point, the harshness, and the tension, of Dylan's singing was set against an exceptionally wide smile to the crowd, the slight ludicrousness of what he was singing juxtaposed against to whom he was singing it, became ever so obvious. The excitement was there, though, as the houses were ed and chopped, and the closest thing to that sense of early sixties rebelliousness that was reached. Dylan stood on stage, made one with the audience with all the lights up, snaking out, "How does it feel? To be on your own? To be alone?"

It all makes for a confusing atmosphere. As much curious high schoolers, and hope for some sort of revitalization, or else been inculcated into apathy or else been inoculated into apathy. But it was more so, as older, hardcore Dylan fans. The climate of society has changed so much in his eight years absence as made some of what he was saying seem painfully outdated. "Like A Roll Stone" was the primary case in point in that the rebelliousness and burgeoning counterculture Dylan was addressing when that certain song has now widened in the face of setbacks and apathy or else been inoculated into apathy. By any standard, Monday, January 4, 1974 will be remembered as a truly extraordinary concert. Sadly, though, in the fact that Bob Dylan was no longer able to capture his social significance, that he will never be the force he was and was no more than he was any other. And, as he was any other. And, as he was any other. And, as he was any other. It is very difficult to determine what those feelings of what could have been... It is with more than just a bit of regret that Bob Dylan closed his concert in Boston in nearly a decade. It's time for the sentiment of "Yours or Your Nu..."