

Dylan Explores His Roots, American Music History

By MICHAEL ABERNETHY AND BROOKS FIRTH
Staff Writers

Four decades of experience bringing life to music — and vice versa — has not changed Bob Dylan very much.

He is still the Everyman of singer/songwriters, a troubadour for numerous generations. He is the loner, the man in love, the drifter — both a casual observer and a passionate participant.



Bob Dylan
Love and Theft
★★★★☆

Love and Theft, the latest addition to Dylan's lengthy discography, traverses through an entire century of musical styles to critique music's current state.

The album's 12 tracks hold to the high standards we would expect from Dylan. But things have changed since last we heard from him on *Time Out of Mind* —

Dylan has been listening to the blues.

With each listen, something striking about this album becomes more obvious. Dylan, an artist who pushed music forward, has taken American music back to its roots with the blues, rockabilly, bluegrass and jazz.

The album grooves, flows, ducks and reels through its variety of styles. With the exception of the grating first track, "Tweedle Dee & Tweedle Dum," each track masterfully borrows from the annals of American music history.

For all of its dynamics, however, the album possesses a relatively good balance.

Its simple instrumentation is well-mastered and very well-played. The musicality of the players and the strength of the music itself are what makes this mix of musical styles a plausible and effective one.

Dabbling with bluegrass in "High Water," experimenting with rockabilly in "Summer Days," each equally well-

crafted track is presented in a different style but introduced by a familiar voice.

Even the improvement of this familiar voice is well-documented throughout the album. Dylan, a notoriously rocky vocalist, now commands a voice on this album that has grown noticeably less harsh with age, something even the most avid Dylan fans can appreciate.

But make no mistake about *Love and Theft*. While his voice might have mellowed, this is not an album to be played softly in the background.

Deserving, if not requiring, the care of its listeners, the album is an involving survey course in American music from its most influential renegade.

By the sound of things, the infamous rebel spirit that has characterized Dylan throughout his career is still alive and well.

Who but Dylan would dare to record "Bye and Bye," a pop ballad in the style of 1940s-era Frank Sinatra, and have it play into a raunchy blues-based jam like

"Lonesome Day Blues"?

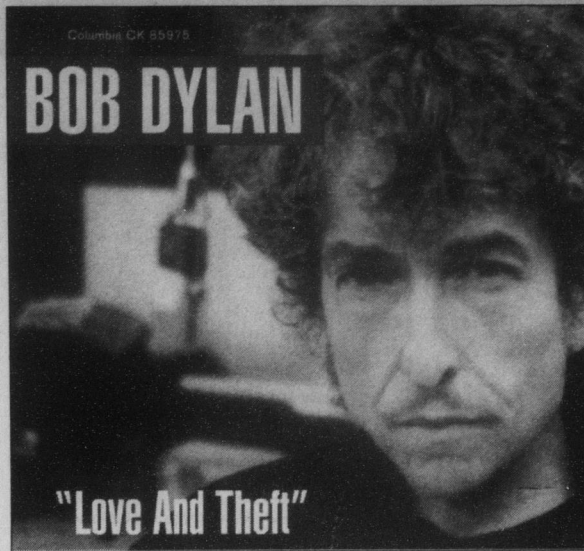
But that is what Dylan has always revealed in: the confounding of all expectations. It is his game, and he makes the rules.

As he says in "Floater," "Old, young/Age don't carry weight/ It doesn't matter in the end." With a voice that sounds like dirt being shoveled into an open grave, he is delivering a message to the younger generation that his time isn't up yet.

From the easygoing shuffle of "Mississippi" to the jazz flavors of "Moonlight," Dylan is affirming his timeless ability to lay his hands upon any genre and make magic from it.

Love and Theft isn't quite the black magic of *Time Out of Mind*, but it more than announces another victory for a man with a gravel voice, a guitar pick and an unmatched skill for sewing a musical tapestry four decades strong.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.



Bob Dylan mixes all manner of American music into his style on *Love and Theft*, the follow-up to the award-winning *Time Out of Mind*.

Remy Zero Continues to Rock Smarter, Not Harder; Amos Gives Birth to Strange Little Girls

Remy Zero
The Golden Hum
★★★★☆

Remy Zero's new album, *The Golden Hum*, marks the return of smart-rock.

Since Radiohead departed the world of rock for the artier prospects of navel-gazing electronica, anyone who has yearned for guitar-based rock has had to suffer through Creed's latest album or submit to the sugary fluff of Matchbox 20.

But Remy Zero, a five-piece band from Birmingham, Ala., is rescuing the concept of smart guitar-based rock from the inept but pious hands of Scott Stapp.

The Golden Hum is the sound of a band coming into its own. After a slow start involving two well-intentioned and occasionally brilliant albums, Remy Zero is proving that music can be bombastic and smart without being preachy or self-absorbed.

From the opening clatter of "Glorious #1" to the final suspended chord of "Impossibility," the album is an exercise in the destruction and rebirth of the human spirit.

Songs like the soaring "Save Me" and the album's highlight, "Bitter," are drenched in images of fire and darkness. While elsewhere, "Out In" and "Smile" affirm the idea that turmoil and strife breed strength and character.

But there are breaks in the dramatic chaos. "Perfect Memory" is perfect pop — it combines a killer lyric about nostalgia with a simple melody. The result is like the sun breaking through a cold November sky.

The colorful guitar work of Shelby Tate dances edgily around melodic corners, providing the music with unexpected shifts and turns in color. If you could imagine the grind of Stone Temple Pilots' best work set to the pretiness of David Bowie's *Aladin Sane*, you'd come up with something close to the sound of *The Golden Hum*.

But the real star of Remy Zero is lead-singer and chief-songwriter Cinjun Tate.

Much like Bono of U2, his searing voice has the ability to lift the most simple line from merely filling space, to possessing universal emotional appeal. Raspy in its lower range, and powerfully raw in its upper ranges, Tate's voice provides an alluring front for Remy Zero's passionate performance.

While *The Golden Hum* might not change the history of music in the way that Radiohead so desperately want to, it's refreshing enough to hear a great guitar-based band play songs that mean something without being overly self-conscious about it.

So if Remy Zero saves rock, it will do

so by accident.

By Michael Abernethy

Jay Farrar
Sebastopol
★★★★☆

Sebastopol might be Jay Farrar's first solo album, but its style doesn't stray far from what defined the work of his previous bands.

As he did in Uncle Tupelo and Son Volt, Farrar keeps his music's roots intact — firmly grounded country and folk peppered with an alternative flair — and combines interesting instrumentation and tempo changes with the process.

The themes of Farrar's songs vary little during the course of *Sebastopol* and are reminiscent of his older work. His primary subject is and has always been down-on-its-luck America, the blue collar people who still contend with hard times and rural wastelands.

"Feel Free," the opening track, introduces their situation with the ironic lines, "Breathin' all the diesel fumes that mar the concrete landscaping/Doesn't it feel free?"

This subject ties the songs together into a true collection of similar sounds and themes. None of the album's 14 tracks are particularly catchy individually but become subtly powerful when combined as a whole. While this feeling of sameness is the album's only real flaw, what's here is beautiful.

Many of the melodies soar, even as Farrar sings his familiar, moody subject matter. Stripped down in its use of acoustic and slide guitars, "Outside the Door" alludes to past, rarely-mentioned events that took a toll on the average American, such as Prohibition and the Great Depression.

Such songs are made all the more

powerful thanks to the exemplary production (by Farrar and John Agnello) and musicianship. And his various guest stars — Gillian Welch and Superchunk drummer Jon Wurster among them — certainly don't hurt.

But Farrar himself, of course, defines the album; his unique voice and complex lyrics are always at the forefront. He hasn't really changed his sound and songwriting, but then he doesn't need to. *Sebastopol* performs admirably by just driving familiar points a little closer to home.

By Elliott Dube

Tori Amos

Strange Little Girls
★★★★☆

When people discuss feminism or sexual politics, one thing often gets overlooked: If women's identity needs redefinition, the identity of men is in need of a drastic makeover as well.

This point is sorely overlooked in popular music's "feminist" leanings, and until *Strange Little Girls*, Tori Amos was the worst of them all. Her music was all femme, all the time, and men's place in Amos' numerous critiques was fuzzy at best.

On the fiery and often polarizing singer/songwriter's sixth solo album, men and their relationship with women (as opposed to the other way around) is the central focus. The result is one of the

most unnerving and damning critiques of masculinity ever released on record.

Taking the 12 songs away from some of the most renown male songwriters in recent memory (Neil Young, the Beatles, Lou Reed and even Slayer and Eminem) Amos rewrites the men out of their own songs without changing a word. Amos sings each track from the perspective of the women who haunted each song in their original versions but who were denied a voice.

By changing the perspective of these songs, Amos reveals the violence and immorality inherent in them, and in the process raises two questions — why did these men write these songs in the first place, and why did the public adore and applaud so many of these works that are so intrinsically violent?

In other words, as Amos wonders aloud in the last track, "What's a man

now/What's a man mean?"

Make no mistake — *Strange Little Girls* is Amos' most demanding work and her gothic, delicate and sparse arrangements don't make the songs any easier to digest. She's backed by all manner of instruments, but the polish of *From the Choirgirl Hotel* and *To Venus and Back* is gone. Compared to her past efforts, each song sounds raw, wounded and very, very angry.

It's the anger of someone with no answers but many questions. The most extreme of which is Amos' reading of "97 Bonnie & Clyde."

The Eminem track about the murder of his wife and kidnapping of his daughter has garnered the most attention, and deservedly so.

While Amos' vocal delivery is removed and shocked, as she is "acting" the part of the song's victim, underneath

the muted horns, string ensemble and whispered lyrics is Amos' undeniable rage that a song such as this would be written in the first place.

In the process of recasting the Eminem rap in a new light, the basic inhumanity of the song is both devastating and overwhelming. You'll never listen to Slim Shady quite the same way again.

The album's intensity and dark subject have few breathers placed in — the lilting melody of "Rattlesnakes" and the classic Amos balladry of her reading of Tom Wait's "Time" provide the only breaks.

But Amos doesn't want her audience to catch their breath while listening to this album. This isn't the album to make you feel good after a bad breakup. This isn't background music. These *Strange Little Girls* demand nothing less than your full attention.

By Russ Lane

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