

# EVERY PIXEL TELLS A STORY

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## Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries: Drummer Winston Watson's Incredible Journey

[Highway 61 Entertainment]

### Winston Watson still

shudders at the memory of that night. Ordered to play drums behind Neil Young during a surprise encore at a Bob Dylan concert, he learned to his horror that the song was to be Dylan's "Leopard-Skin Pill Box Hat."

"I had never, ever, ever played that song," he recalls, "not in rehearsal, or onstage, ever."

Recruited out of the blue as a replacement drummer for Bob Dylan's stage band in September 1992, Watson (a veteran of Giant Sand and assorted Texas/Arizona bar bands) ended, up pounding the skins behind the living legend until late 1996, with a dizzying itinerary that included five full tours per year, both stateside and overseas. Astonished by his unlikely fate, he kept meticulous records of those experiences, both in a sprawling handwritten journal and via a tiny Video 8 home movie camera. Along with assorted calendars, set lists, ticket stubs, and foreign travel paperwork, these documents provide the literal background for *Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries: Drummer Winston Watson's Incredible Journey*, a 96 minute DVD in which Watson shares the often bizarre highlights of his adventures on the road.

The disc comes with two caveats. First, an early sequence quickly establishes that *this* Winston Watson is not the identically-named singer of the Jamaican reggae outfit The Meditations. (It's an easy mistake to make, but despite his dark skin and dreadlocks, drummer Watson is actually

of African/Indonesian/Scottish descent.) Second, the text on the back cover of the DVD case says, in *very* small print, "Contains no Bob Dylan songs, not affiliated with Bob Dylan."

So how can what is essentially a documentary about Dylan's tours manage to get by without including any Dylan songs?

The answer is by means of fast video editing and a soundtrack awash in faux-Dylan instrumentals performed by Highway 61 Revisited, a Dylan cover band in which Watson and various other touring band cast-offs have since found refuge.

Highway 61 front man Joel Gilbert, who vaguely resembles his musical idol, pieced the movie together from Watson's personal archives, serving as the director and on-screen interviewer. Superimposed on-screen and rarely making eye contact with Watson, Gilbert occasionally poses questions to goose his drummer's memory, while a flashy assortment of video clips and printed items unspools behind them at a pace as frantic as Watson's final-encore drum rolls.

This video-scrapbook style could easily collapse under the weight of its own clever intentions, if not for the consistently fascinating glimpses that Watson's memoirs provide into the little-illuminated mechanics of how a major touring artist signs, maintains, motivates, and moves around such a large musical ensemble.

"How can you hire a buncha strangers to act like they've been together for many, many years?" Watson asks at one point. Much of this DVD attempts to address his own skeptical question.

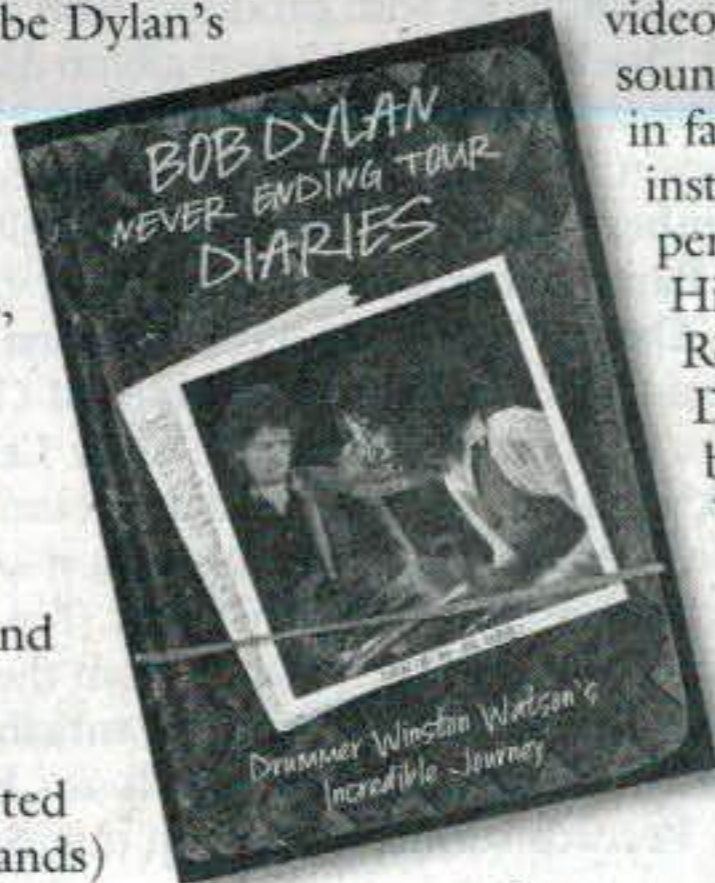
Watson is pleasantly frank about his initial jitters, his struggle to "blend in" musically with Dylan's standing band, and his alarm at eventually discovering that this was *not* what Dylan expected of him. He also addresses the etiquette of arriving for tour rehearsals, choosing stage costumes, and the difficulty of following Dylan's notorious mid-song key changes. At one point, Watson recalls, he required four metronomes behind his kit just to keep up.

*Never Ending Tour Diaries* is also rich with celebrity anecdotes. Levon Helm and Dickey Betts acquit themselves admirably, as does Lenny Kravitz, for whom Watson played drums during his rare days off during Dylan's 1993 tour. Chris Robinson comes off like a jerk for bumming Watson's stash of wacky weed, and Carole King sounds like a clumsy cougar for falling off Watson's road case and injuring her head while apparently on a date with youthful actor James Spader.

Watson is also honest about the rigors of touring and the strain it places on relationships back home. "You leave your house in summer; you come back and it's *winter*," he observes sadly. He also expresses frustration that, despite playing hundreds of concerts with wildly varying set lists, he was never able to perform his two favorite Dylan numbers, "Hurricane" and "Slow Train Coming."

This oversight was eventually rectified when Watson joined Highway 61 Revisited, a development which provides the story its much-needed happy ending after Dylan's mentor, Van Morrison, takes exception to Watson's "busy" drum style and gets him sacked. Indeed, Watson seems perfectly content to play in a Dylan cover band these days where, he notes slyly, "No one has to guess what song it is."

—Gregory Nicoll



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