

Stax Oral Histories: Dickinson on Dylan

Interviewee: Jim Dickinson

Interviewer: Jeff Kollath

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\*music playing\*

Dickinson: Dylan, Bob Dylan, he fills the room, he sat right there. He fills the room, the only thing I can compare it to is, I saw Miles Davis once walk into the green room at Ocean Way, and he used the telephone and that was comparable. Dylan enters the room, you don't see him come in, you don't see him go out. Bob Marley was the same way. They appear and disappear. On the "Time out of mind" session in Miami, which was the same studio where I had worked with Atlantic which was very real. Dylan was in unspoken control on 23 people where 12 musicians are before him.

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It was remarkable. I was amazed by his knowledge of this area, and musicians from this area, and apparently, he ,and I and I only believe this because I've heard it from 3 or 4, I finally read it in print, and when Watt himself said it, believe when Watt did not want me there. When they asked about me in Heart Magazine when Watt said, "Bob Dylan told me if you'll get me Jim Dickinson that's all I'll need"

Interviewer: Really?

Dickinson: Which, of course, couldn't be more flattering. He said the same thing about my group, you know Mud Boy and the Neutrons, which we played three times outside the city of Memphis. We had only made two records that were only released in Europe, but we were obscure on purpose. He asked about Sid Selvidge, one of my partners in Mud Boy. He said, " Whatever happened to that Sid guy? The guy who sings those folk songs."

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He just said, "Group with me." He said, "oh yeah, Mud Boy and the Neutrons, that's a great band nobody can find." In that moment, we succeeded. Because that's what we wanted. I can't tell you where he checks in. One night I said, "So what do you do?", he said, "I like to walk around", I said "Where do you walk around?", He said "I like to walk around in the park", the park, oh god \*laughing\*, I tend to say the wrong thing, I tend to just blurt things out, so to Bob Dylan I blurted out, "Oh god, man, don't walk around in the park! It's not safe", He said "It's okay, I'll pull up my hood" \*laughing\* I guess that's how he learned so much about Memphis, but he apparently does.

Interviewer: He's incognito \*mumbling\*

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Dickinson: And there is, of course, the very logical connection because of the protest aspect of what he calls his "Songs of Accusation" which he doesn't think of himself as a protest singer. He kind of resents the nailing with that, but that's the connection because, you know, if you want to paint, say, a handle on Stax it was Soul music. I mean that's what they call themselves, but there's a difference between Soul music and R&B. R&B was black; Soul music was Biracial, and it was, there was a protest element in what they did. So Mack Rice's songs were definitely protest songs. Not 'Mustang Sally', but certainly 'Money Talks', and the Staple's Singers, of course, were doing flat-out protest, political material

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which was itself folk rock which is what Dylan basically invented. I think there's a real... he would see a logical connection. In the 60's, we were all pretty much in it together, that was sort of the point. You know, certainly the point at Stax. I was a fan before the first record came out. I heard the tape

Interviewer: Before Dylan's first record

Dickinson: Yeah I heard the tape that a friend of mine had at the University of Texas, and it was a life changer

Interviewer: You went to school there?

Dickinson: I went to school at Baylor, 100 miles and I was studying Drama. There was quite a theater there in the early 60's. I had these two friends at the University of Texas who were taking the first folklore class that had ever been taught in America except at Harvard, and one of them had been a high school friend of Carolyn Ester's which is where Dylan was discovered,

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on the Carolyn Ester session. He called me up, he said " What're you doing Saturday?", I said "Nothing", he said "Come down here, there's something you need to hear." When I got to his house, he was very against it, he lived off campus. I got to his house and he lead me inside without saying anything which was not like him, you know, I could tell that something was going on. He sat me down between the two speakers of his stereo set and he turned on the tape, without saying a word, turned on the tape recorder.

Interviewer: Very dramatic

Dickinson: And here came this voice, and I was, the way I got to know this guy was by playing folk material, and he was, you know, like I said, in this folklore class. I was playing with the harmonica rig like Chilly Reid\*\*, and something was really close, I mean really close, but so far. He thought of this thing that I hadn't thought of. You know I sat there with tears running down my face, I thought to myself, "God", and his voice is actually worse than mine, you know.

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Interviewer: What was the thing?

Dickinson: To write your own folk songs. It was right there, and nobody thought of it. Of course, that's what folk songs are, you know, but in the early part of the..., and like Dylan, I played rock 'n' roll in high

school, and when I went to college I thought it was over, I thought music was over for me, and then folk music started to come along and it was so easy I had to do it. It was just a get drunk and sing kind of thing. Ramblin' Jack, you know, I was right there with him, but he was lightyears ahead of me because of that one idea which he talks about in the damn book, how he thought of it. And I like I said it was right there for anybody to write your own folk song, and nobody did it. Talking about Memphis, he said "Last time, I went to Hube's high school." Of course, he didn't tell me why, he didn't have to tell me why, but still he did it. He didn't say. He went to Hube's high school. He said, "School was going on, and they let me walk around in the halls,

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then I went up to the auditorium, and I found a lucky penny..." No, he said, "I went to the auditorium and I stood on the stage, and then I found a lucky penny." Well Heart, and the media just said, "You got me for a while." Bob Dylan is still in awe of Elvis Presley, as he should be, nonetheless

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah

\*Dylan playing\*

[7:48]