

Songs that changed the world

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Alex Clark reviews Dylan Tribute at the Barbican

"I hate to tell you this, folks, but you're missing a wonderful television show tonight," joked veteran folk musician Liam Clancy, alluding to that evening's BBC screening of *No Direction Home*, presumably being zealously videotaped by the Bobcats gathered in the Barbican to witness the latest instalment in the current Dylan extravaganza.

Exactly why Dylan needed "a tribute night" was not explained by compere Billy Bragg; maybe an evening of music by those who'd been influenced by him, and indeed those who, nearly half a century ago, had themselves fired the imagination of the then young singer was excuse enough. Thus we were treated to an ever-changing cast bringing their own stamp to assorted Dylan standards, as well as occasionally essaying one of their own songs which, they hoped, bore at least some vague trace of the master.

Bragg himself kicked off with the earnest imprecation that the evening would be like a hootenanny club. The plan seemed not to have reached cabaret singer Barb Jungr, who appeared in a formal cocktail dress, sat on a stool and torched out *Ring Them Bells* and a warbly, impassioned *Like a Rolling Stone*.

Nor was young Willie Mason entirely on hoe-down message, as prior to lovely-voiced versions of *Only a Pawn in Their Game* and *To Ramona*, he faltered while trying to describe his devotion to the concert's presiding genius.

Ex-Soft Boy Robyn Hitchcock took things more in his stride with a wonderfully assured, rocky rendition of *Visions of Johanna*. Meanwhile, old folkies Martin Carthy and Roy Harper were less successful; indeed, the latter's evocative *When an Old Cricketer Leaves the Crease* definitely lacked something - specifically the 48-piece brass band of the original.

The evening's highlights, however, came from wildly contrasting sources. Songstress du jour K T Tunstall barnstormed her way through an ebullient *Tangled Up in Blue* and a duet, with a clearly enthused Bragg, of *Wheels on Fire*.

But the biggest ovations were reserved for the legendary blueswoman and Dylan inspiration Odetta, whose gentle yet soul-drenched *Mr Tambourine Man* enraptured the house, and Dylan's early-'60s New York confrère Clancy, whose reminiscences were the most personal and warmly received of the night. The venerable pair joined hands for the encore, a heartfelt unfolding of the song that Liam assured us had changed the world, *Blowin' in the Wind*.

It was a fitting climax to an event that, despite occasional longueurs, amply and enjoyably demonstrated the apparently inextinguishable esteem in which Dylan is held by his fellow musicians.

- To be shown on BBC 4 on Friday.

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Bob Dylan: held in apparently inextinguishable esteem