

PERFORMING ARTS

Bob Dylan: Jewish Roots, American Soil

by Harry Freedman

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Although there might seem little left to say about Nobel laureate Bob Dylan (b. 1941), Jewish popular culture expert Freedman (*Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots of Genius*) presents a comprehensive traversal of the folk-rock singer/songwriter's early creative years from 1958 to 1967. Focusing on Dylan's influences (Woody Guthrie, Beat poets, and his Jewish ancestry) and encompassing almost every musical and political touchstone during that decade for context, this book presents the musician's progress from rebellious teenager eking out a living in obscure Greenwich Village clubs to world traveling superstar. Freedman details Dylan's songs, albums, and personal and professional relationships, highlighting some of the more notorious incidents such as the dust-up over electric amplification at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. This title approaches Dylan from an intriguing perspective and demonstrates what made him unique and how he stood out from the crowd. Chapter notes help support his thesis. Disappointingly, the notoriously reticent Dylan did not participate in any interviews with the author.

VERDICT This biography rewards Dylanists and those interested in the developing folk scene and cultural milieu of the 1960s.

Reviewed by Barry Zaslow , May 01, 2025