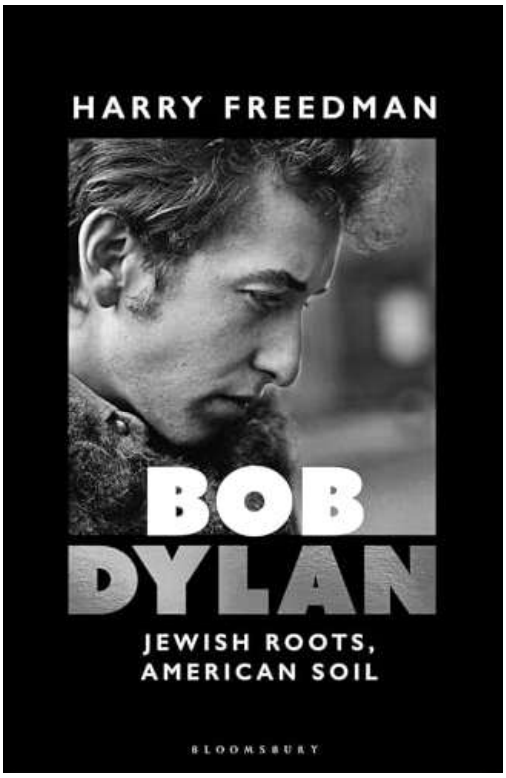


Bob Dylan: Jewish Roots, American Soil

Harry Freedman. Bloomsbury, $28 (256p) ISBN 978-1-39941-630-6

Biographer Freedman (*Leonard Cohen*) scrupulously dissects the historical and cultural influences that shaped Bob Dylan's music career. Born Robert Zimmerman to Jewish descendants of Eastern European immigrants, Dylan grew up in a small Midwestern mining town. He escaped at 18 for college in Minneapolis, where he honed his musical style at coffeehouses full of "dropouts, artists, [and] beatniks." Freedman sees Dylan as profoundly influenced by the Beats, folk musician Woody Guthrie, and—despite an overt apathy to his Jewish roots, illustrated by his adoption of the name Bob Dylan at 19—his religious heritage, which informed the strong social consciousness expressed in songs like "Blowin' In the Wind." Though some of the author's other parallels are more tenuous—as when he suggests that 1964's "The Times They Are A-Changin' " illustrates how Dylan's "Jewish psyche had been moulded by ancestors preternaturally sensitive to impending change, to disasters, persecutions"—Freedman effectively situates Dylan in the cultural milieu of the '60s, showing how he helped make music a common social thread "that bound young people to their peers and distanced them from their elders."

The result is a meticulous exploration of one of America's most influential musicians. *(June)*