

Film review

NO DIRECTION HOME DIRECTED BY MARTIN SCORSESE

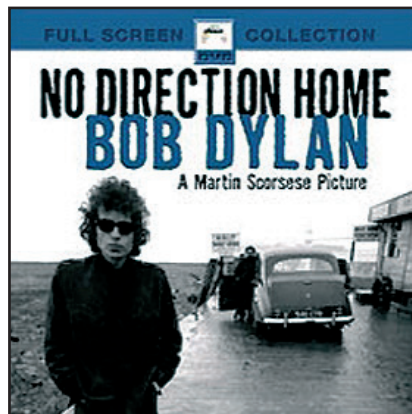
BBC 2: 26, 27 September 2005

Something was happening and we didn't know what it was — did we, Mr Jones? But it was something astonishing — something we've never seen before or since. Let me explain.

Once upon a time, I was a timid schoolboy at a boarding school tucked away in the depths of the Somerset countryside. I don't know what my parents paid for my education, but the school certainly didn't spend it on food. Late one night, my hunger unrelieved by a meal of sardines on toast, I crept back into the kitchens. There in a back corridor where no boy was allowed to go, I found a nuclear air raid alarm, linked through to the local civil defence network. To this day, I have never seen anything that terrified me more.

And a few days later the Cuban missile crisis hit the headlines. I was certain I was going to die. And at exactly that time the school chaplain played a track from Bob Dylan's second album in our divinity class. At last! Someone understood how I was feeling, shared my anger and my fear. This was 1962, and I was so much older then — I hope I'm younger than that now.

Since then, Bob Dylan's music has been a central part of my life. He couldn't sing — but whenever anyone with a technically proficient voice tackled the



songs, the meaning, the passion, the vision evaporated like dust in the wind. His words were breathtaking. Even today I listen to the lyrics of *Visions of Johanna* or *It's All Over Now, Baby Blue*, and am astonished at the mastery of language, the complexity of the images, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

And the world is even now divided into believers and non-believers, those who are simply delighted to have lived at the same time as this genius, and those — maybe you — who are mystified that someone like me can be impressed by a pretentious tone-free vagabond.

Who better to explain some of the mystery than Martin Scorsese? The director of the greatest rock film ever — *The Last Waltz* — Dylan chose Scorsese to direct the two part Arena Special featured on BBC 2 on two nights in September. And what a treasure trove it turned out to be.

What I find entirely astonishing was the remarkable speed of Dylan's development. From the young strummer from Hibbing, playing Woody Guthrie impersonations, within 3 years Dylan had developed into an entirely unique talent, going to places that no musician had been before. The past is a different country, they sing things differently there — and Scorsese included magical clips of Hank Williams, Johnny Ray, Muddy Waters, Odetta, and Woody Guthrie, along with the black and white photographs of an early Dylan that spoke volumes of the era which seems such a lifetime away.

From Greenwich Village Coffee Shops to *Desolation Row* in just 3 years is an inexplicable journey. What have you learnt, or done, or achieved in the past three years? Where does such talent come from, and does it lie hidden deep in many people who never have the luck, opportunities, or energy to release it? How would Ritalin have treated such a hyper-imaginative young rebel?

Here was Suze Rotolo, pictured on Dylan's arm on the iconic *The Freewheelin'* cover from 1962, being interviewed for Scorsese's film. And here was Dylan himself, getting as close as he ever will to being open about his feelings and his experiences.

I have never understood where spinal tingles come from, but Scorsese delivered plenty — from Allen Ginsberg saying that he wept when he first heard *Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall* as he knew the

torch had been passed to a new generation, to the anger of the Manchester Free Trade Hall. They might mean little to you, or they might mean as much as they do to me. Why do we differ so? What explains our passions and our enthusiasms? I hope our scientists never find out.

Liam Clancy put it beautifully:

'Dylan articulated what the rest of us wanted to say, but couldn't.'

But Dylan put it even better, describing himself as being constantly in a state of becoming. The journey is more important than anything else, described in one of his songs as, 'he not busy being born is busy dying'.

The relevance to the *BJGP*? Heaven knows, although it is perhaps an opportunity to own up to the deeply immature fact that I included at least one Dylan quote in every single speech and lecture I gave as RCGP Chairman. Pointless? Absolutely. But many great artists give us clues to unravelling the great puzzle of life, and as GPs we face more life and more lives than almost anyone else.

And my son (age 27 and equally besotted) bet me that I couldn't write this review without mentioning the words protest, Judas, or poet. Well, I nearly made it.

David Haslam

Repeat prescriptions

The time has come to summon up the strength.
Collect the bundle of green paper slips;
sit in front of the computer, fingers poised,
deep breath, it's time for repeat prescriptions.

The first lists six different drugs
for blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol.
But he's only asked for three; what does it mean?
Is it ignorance, or side effects he's getting,
or ambivalence from being made
a patient when he wasn't feeling ill.

The next one's for citalopram; it's many months
since she told me the deep sadness of her life.
She doesn't come back but wants more pills.
Does it mean that she's better or she's worse,
she finds me difficult to talk to,
or just the distress and the tears.

So what do I do, turn a blind eye, reissue,
postpone decision till next month.
Or scrawl a curt response
"Must see doctor first".
It's hard enough to know what you need
when we meet for 10 minutes face to face.
And I can look into your doleful eyes
and see the wringing of your hands.
But these green computer generated slips alone
are impenetrable to me.
And there are so many today ...

David Memel