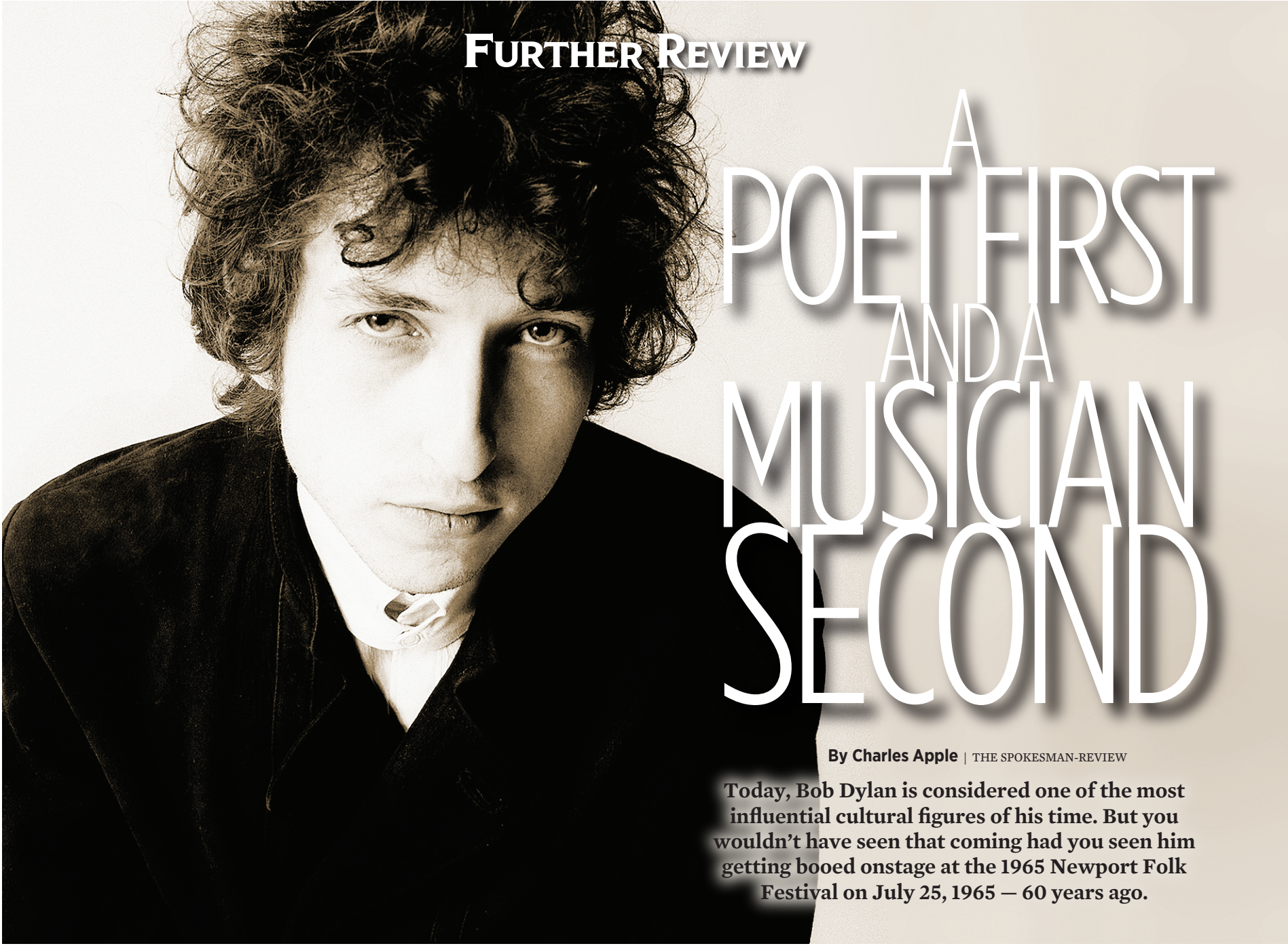




FURTHER REVIEW

A POET FIRST
AND A
MUSICIAN
SECOND

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Today, Bob Dylan is considered one of the most influential cultural figures of his time. But you wouldn't have seen that coming had you seen him getting booed onstage at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival on July 25, 1965 — 60 years ago.

COLUMBIA RECORDS

A FOLK SINGER CHANGES MUSICAL DIRECTION

"I consider myself a poet first and a musician second," Bob Dylan once said of his remarkable skill set. "I live like a poet and I'll die like a poet."

Dylan's first album — released in March 1962, when he was just 21 years old — didn't make much of a stir at the time. Only later would he become regarded as a gifted songwriter and performer and a revered icon of 1960s and 1970s

counterculture.

Robert Allen Zimmerman of Duluth, Minnesota, changed his name after hitting the coffee house circuit during his freshman year at the University of Minnesota. An avowed lover of folk songs, Dylan traveled to New Jersey to see his hero Woody Guthrie, nearly immobile in a hospital, suffering from Huntington's disease.

After a few years playing small gigs and working as a session player in New York, Dylan signed a contract with Columbia Records. While his first album met with little success, he slowly built a following with his next few efforts. At one point, the label was so unsure how to market Dylan it considered dropping him.

With his "Bringing It All Back Home" album in March 1965, Dylan — already

lauded for his songwriting and his lyrics — converted from acoustic to electric instruments. This began a streak of seven consecutive Top-10 albums on the Billboard 200 album chart.

But that conversion to electric instruments led to his fan booing him off the stage at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival — an incident that was dramatized in the 2024 biopic "A Complete Unknown," starring Timothée Chalamet.

SEVEN CONSECUTIVE TOP-10 ALBUMS

1965 **Bringing It All Back Home**

1965 **Highway 61 Revisited**

1966 **Blonde on Blonde**

1967 **John Wesley Harding**

1969 **Nashville Skyline**

1970 **Self Portrait**

1970 **New Morning**

'I ELECTRIFIED HALF THE AUDIENCE AND ELECTROCUTED THE OTHER HALF'

Dylan had played Newport twice before: His 1963 appearance was well-received — especially his singing "Blowin' in the Wind" with Joan Baez, Peter Paul and Mary and others. In 1964, he was criticized for apparently being stoned.

He was brought back as the Newport Folk Festival's headline act on July 25, 1965. The audience should have known what to expect, given that Dylan's mostly electric album had been released four months before. His electrified new single, "Like A Rolling Stone," had been released five days before his appearance there.

But the audience and festival organizers said later they were stunned to see Dylan and his sidemen — including three members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, who he had recruited and rehearsed with the night before — set up heavy sound equipment before their set.

Just a few bars into Dylan's first song, "Maggie's Farm," the audience began to jeer loudly, nearly drowning out Dylan at times. He then launched into "Like A Rolling Stone" and "Phantom Engineer" before exiting the stage.

That night's master of ceremonies, Peter Yarrow, walked up to the mic and begged Dylan to return for more. Dylan did, switching to his old acoustic guitar for "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue."

The crowd roared its appreciation and begged for more. Dylan, clearly miffed, walked off the stage again having sung just six songs. Some observers, including Pete Seeger — who was backstage — have suggested the crowd booing was because of the poor sound quality that night or because Dylan's set was much shorter than expected.

"They certainly booed, I'll tell you that," Dylan said later. "You could hear it all over the place." He didn't return to Newport Folk Festival again until 2002.

Dylan switched musical styles so often over the years since that he's alienated fans and then won them back, time and time again, earning a reputation as one of modern music's most polarizing musicians.

Dylan went on to record 21 top-10 albums, to write 11 books — eight of those feature his drawings and paintings — and to win 10 Grammy Awards plus an Academy Award. Dylan was given a Pulitzer Prize in 2008 for making a "profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary power." President Barack Obama presented him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012. And in 2016, Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.



PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICE
Dylan at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival

BOB DYLAN'S ALBUM CHART HISTORY IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

RELEASED	PEAK ON THE BILLBOARD 200 ALBUM CHART
March 19, 1962	Bob Dylan DID NOT CHART
May 27, 1963	The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan #22
Jan. 13, 1964	The Times They Are a-Changin' #20
Aug. 8, 1964	Another Side of Bob Dylan #43
March 22, 1965	Bringing It All Back Home #6
Aug. 30, 1965	Highway 61 Revisited #3
June 20, 1966	Blonde on Blonde #9
Dec. 27, 1967	John Wesley Harding #2
April 9, 1969	Nashville Skyline #3
June 8, 1970	Self Portrait #4
Oct. 21, 1970	New Morning #7
July 13, 1973	Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid #16
Nov. 16, 1973	Dylan #17
Jan. 17, 1974	Planet Waves #1 4 weeks at No. 1
June 20, 1974	Before the Flood #3
Jan. 20, 1975	Blood on the Tracks #1 2 weeks at No. 1
June 26, 1975	The Basement Tapes #7
Jan. 5, 1976	Desire #1 5 weeks at No. 1
Sept. 13, 1976	Hard Rain #17
June 15, 1976	Street-Legal #11
April 23, 1979	Bob Dylan at the Budokan #13
Aug. 20, 1979	Slow Train Coming #3

Sources: "Dylan Goes Electric: Newport, Seeger, Dylan and the Night that Split the Sixties" by Elijah Wald, "The Definitive Illustrated Encyclopedia of Rock" edited by Michael Heatley, the New York Times, American Songwriter, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, PBS.org, Encyclopaedia Britannica, DenverFolklore.com, History.com