

Bob Dylan's Ode to Frank Sinatra

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The Times They Are A-Changin' – Back in 1964 and 1965, who besides Bob Dylan and Frank Sinatra were more polar opposites in defining America's generation gap and pop culture, especially with respect to the music and dress of the times? Dylan, whether he sought this distinction or not, was certainly viewed as one of the leading kingpins of the anti-establishment movement by nature of his protest songs, cryptic lyrics, long hair and unusual voice. This versus the "swinging" and "hip" Sinatra with his classic fedora, tux, pocket handkerchief, cuff links, silk tie, perfectly shined black shoes, and of course, "The Voice." Frank Sinatra, even dating back to the 1950s, was never publicly shy about expressing his disdain for rock 'n' roll, (although his opinion did soften somewhat in later years). In a 1957 article for the Los Angeles Mirror News, the Hoboken crooner said: "My only deep sorrow is the unrelenting insistence of recording and motion picture companies upon purveying the most brutal, ugly, degenerate, vicious form of expression it has been my displeasure to hear - naturally I refer to the bulk of rock 'n' roll... It fosters almost totally negative and destructive reactions in young people. It smells phony and false. It is sung, played and written for the most part by cretinous goons and by means of its almost imbecilic reiterations and sly, lewd-in plain fact, dirty-lyrics, and as I said before, it manages to be martial music of every sideburned delinquent on the face of the earth...this rancid-smelling aphrodisiac I deplore."

So now we find ourselves in this current year 2015 when Frank Sinatra would have turned 100, and it appears that Bob Dylan has either mellowed from his younger days and come to appreciate the importance of popular music ('The Great American Songbook' – 1920s to 1950s), or perhaps he always did have a closet affection for Frank Sinatra's music. And even if he was never completely enamored with Sinatra's approach or his style of singing, Dylan the poet, fosters a genuine love for the incredibly rich lyrics expressed in those torch songs, of which most Dylan fans may have been completely unaware, that is, until now.

One month ago, Dylan released his new album, 'Shadows in the Night.' It is a collection of Sinatra ballads (hand-picked by Dylan himself), which 'Old Blue Eyes' recorded from the 1940s through the 1960s. Dylan has also released an accompanying video, 'The Night We Called it a Day,' to coincide with the album. He plays a lover who spars with another man for the affection of a beautiful blonde. This 3 minute plus video (which can be viewed on YouTube) is right out of the black and white noir films from the 1940s and 1950s. (As a side note, his rival in the video is

the actor and singer, Robert Davi, who in 2011 released his own Sinatra tribute album, 'Davi Sings Sinatra – On the Road to Romance.' Davi has a strong, powerful voice and does an admirable job on a number of the Sinatra classics.)

I never thought I would see this day, but Dylan's new album clearly demonstrates that no one can ever hang a label on him, and more so, that great music, no matter the era, is timeless. The 'Shadows in the Night' album has since gone to # 1 on the British charts with rumored speculation that Dylan will release a second album of Sinatra's music. Stay tuned.

I bought the new Dylan CD and it's excellent, not so much for the quality of Bob Dylan's voice, which is actually stronger and more layered than on his more recent records, but for the beautiful, intense lyrics, haunting melodies, and excellent band accompaniment. The video is also quite good. I have been a fan of both Dylan and Sinatra most of my life, and for more reasons than I can articulate here. But it has never really been about style or a singer's approach. It is all about the music.

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