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Frischer Wind und 20 Grad

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PLAYBOY: 'Popular songs,' you told a reporter last year, "are the only art form that describes the temper of the times. The only place where it's happening is on the radio and records. That's where the people hang out. It's not in books; it's not on the stage; it's not in the galleries. All this art they've been talking about, it just remains on the shell. It doesn't make anyone happier." In view of the fact that more people than ever before are reading books and going to plays and art galleries, do you think that statement is borne out by the facts?

DYLAN: Statistics measure quantity, not quality. The people in the statistics are people who are very bored. Art, if there is such a thing, is in the bathrooms; everybody knows that. To go to an art gallery thing where you get free milk and doughnuts and where there is a rock-n-roll band playing: That's just a status affair. I'm not putting it down, mind you; but I spend a lot of time in the bathroom. I think museums are vulgar. They're all against sex. Anyhow, I didn't say that people "hang out" on the radio, I said they get "hung up" on the radio.

PLAYBOY: Why do you think rock n' roll has become such an international phenomenon?

DYLAN: I can't really think that there is any rock n' roll. Actually, when you think about it, anything that has no real existence is bound to become an international phenomenon. Anyway, what does it mean, rock n' roll? Does it mean Beatles, does it mean John Lee Hooker, Bobby Vinton, Jerry Lewis' kid? What about Lawrence Welk? He must play a few rock-n-roll songs. Are all these people the same? Is Ricky Nelson like Otis Redding? Is Mick Jagger really Ma Rainey? I can tell by the way people hold their cigarettes if they like Ricky Nelson. I think it's fine to like Ricky Nelson: I couldn't care less if somebody likes Ricky Nelson. But I think we're getting off the track here. There isn't any Ricky Nelson. There isn't any Beatles; oh, I take that back: there are a lot of beetles. But there isn't any Bobby Vinton. Anyway, the word is not "international phenomenon"; the word is "parental nightmare."

PLAYBOY: In recent years, according to some critics, jazz has lost much of its appeal to the younger generation. Do you agree?

DYLAN: I don't think jazz has ever appealed to the younger generation. Anyway, I don't really know who this younger generation is. I don't think they could get into a jazz club anyway. But jazz is hard to follow; I mean you actually have to like jazz to follow it: and my motto is, never follow anything. I don't know what the motto of the younger generation is, but I would think they'd have to follow their parents. I mean, what would some parent say to his kid if the kid came home with a glass eye, a Charlie Mingus record and a pocketful of feathers? He'd say, "Who are you following?" And the poor kid would have to stand there with water in his shoes, a bow tie on his ear and soot pouring out of his belly button and say, "Jazz, Father, I've been following jazz." And his father would probably say, "Get a broom and clean up all that soot before you go to sleep." Then the kid's mother would tell her friends, "Oh yes, our little Donald, he's part of the younger generation, you know."

PLAYBOY: You used to say that you wanted to perform as little as possible, that you wanted to keep most of your time to yourself. Yet you're doing more concerts and cutting more records every year. Why? Is it the money?

DYLAN: Everything is changed now from before. Last spring, I guess I was going to quit singing. I was very drained, and the way things were going, it was a very draggy situation - I mean, when you do "Everybody Loves You for Your Black Eye," and meanwhile the back of your head is caving in. Anyway, I was playing a lot of songs I didn't want to play. I was singing words I didn't really want to sing. I don't mean words like "God" and "mother" and "President" and "suicide" and "meat cleaver." I mean simple little words like "if" and "hope" and "you." But "Like a Rolling Stone" changed it all: I didn't care anymore after that about writing books or poems or whatever. I mean it was some thing that I myself could dig. It's very tiring having other people tell you how much they dig you if you yourself don't dig you. It's also very deadly entertainment wise. Contrary to what some scary people think, I don't play with a band now for any kind of propaganda-type or commercial-type reasons. It's just that my songs are pictures and the band makes the sound of the pictures.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel that acquiring a combo and switching from folk to folkrock has improved you as a performer?

DYLAN: I'm not interested in myself as a performer. Performers are people who perform for other people. Unlike actors, I know what I'm saying. It's very simple in my mind. It doesn't matter what kind of audience reaction this whole thing gets. What happens on the stage is straight. It doesn't expect any rewards or fines from any kind of outside agitators. It's ultra-simple, and would exist whether anybody was looking or not.

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PLAYBOY: Some of your old fans would agree with you - and not in a complimentary vein - since your debut with the rock-n-roll combo at last year's Newport Folk Festival, where many of them booed you loudly for "selling out" to commercial pop tastes. The early Bob Dylan, they felt, was the "pure" Bob Dylan. How do you feel about it?

DYLAN: I was kind of stunned. But I can't put anybody down for coming and boozing: after all, they paid to get in. They could have been maybe a little quieter and not so persistent, though. There were a lot of old people there, too; lots of whole families had driven down from Vermont, lots of nurses and their parents, and well, like they just came to hear some relaxing hoedowns, you know, maybe an Indian polka or two. And just when everything's going all right, here I come on, and the whole place turns into a beer factory. There were a lot of people there who were very pleased that I got booed. I saw them afterward. I do resent somewhat, though, that everybody that booed said they did it because they were old fans.

PLAYBOY: What about their charge that you vulgarized your natural gifts?

DYLAN: What can I say? I'd like to see one of these so-called fans. I'd like to have him blindfolded and brought to me. It's like going out to the desert and screaming and then having little kids throw their sandbox at you. I'm only 24. These people that said this - were they Americans?

PLAYBOY: Americans or not, there were a lot of people who didn't like your new sound. In view of this widespread negative reaction, do you think you may have made a mistake in changing your style?

DYLAN: A mistake is to commit a misunderstanding. There could be no such thing, anyway, as this action. Either people understand or they pretend to understand - or else they really don't understand. What you're speaking of here is doing wrong things for selfish reasons. I don't know the word for that, unless it's suicide. In any case, it has nothing to do with my music.

PLAYBOY: Mistake or not, what made you decide to go the rock-n-roll route?

DYLAN: Carelessness. I lost my one true love. I started drinking. The first thing I know, I'm in a card game. Then I'm in a crap game. I wake up in a pool hall. Then this big Mexican lady drags me off the table, takes me to Philadelphia. She leaves me alone in her house, and it burns down. I wind up in Phoenix. I get a job as a Chinaman. I start working in a dime store, and move in with a 13-year-old girl. Then this big Mexican lady from Philadelphia comes in and burns the house down. I go down to Dallas. I get a job as a "before" in a Charles Atlas "before and after" ad. I move in with a delivery boy who can cook fantastic chili and hot dogs. Then this 13-year-old girl from Phoenix comes and burns the house down. The delivery boy - he ain't so mild: He gives her the knife, and the next thing I know I'm in Omaha. It's so cold there, by this time I'm robbing my own bicycles and frying my own fish. I stumble onto some luck and get a job as a carburetor out at the hot-rod races every Thursday night. I move in with a high school teacher who also does a little plumbing on the side, who ain't much to look at, but who's built a special kind of refrigerator that can turn newspaper into lettuce. Everything's going good until that delivery boy shows up and tries to knife me. Needless to say, he burned the house down, and I hit the road. The first guy that picked me up asked me if I wanted to be a star. What could I say?

PLAYBOY: And that's how you became a rock-n-roll singer?

DYLAN: No, that's how I got tuberculosis.

PLAYBOY: You've said you think message songs are vulgar. Why?

DYLAN: Well, first of all, anybody that's got a message is going to learn from experience that they can't put it into a song. I mean it's just not going to come out the same message. After one or two of these unsuccessful attempts, one realizes that his resultant message, which is not even the same message he thought up and began with, he's now got to stick by it; because, after all, a song leaves your mouth just as soon as it leaves your hands. Are you following me?

PLAYBOY: Oh, perfectly.

DYLAN: All right, now, look. It's not all that deep. It's not a complicated thing. My motives, or whatever they are, were never commercial in the money sense of the word. It was more in the don't die-by-the-hacksaw sense of the word. I never did it for money. It happened, and I let it happen to me. There was no reason not to let it happen to me. I couldn't have written before what I write now, anyway. The songs used to be about what I felt and saw. Nothing of my own rhythmic vomit ever entered into it. Vomit is not romantic. I used to think songs are supposed to be romantic. And I didn't want to sing anything that was unspecific. Unspecific things have no sense of time. All of us people have no sense of time; it's a dimensional hangup. Anybody can be specific and obvious. That's always been the easy way. The leaders of the world take the easy way. It's not that it's so difficult to be unspecific and less obvious; it's just that there's nothing, absolutely nothing, to be specific and obvious about. My older songs, to say the least, were about nothing. The newer ones are about the same nothing - only as seen

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inside a bigger thing, perhaps called the now here. But this is all very constipated. I do know what my songs are about.

PLAYBOY: All right. Let's change the subject. As you know, it's the age group from about 16 to 25 that listens to your songs. Why, in your opinion?

DYLAN: I don't see what's so strange about an age group like that listening to my songs. I'm hip enough to know that it ain't going to be the 85-to-90-year-olds. If the 85-to-90-year-olds were listening to me, they'd know that I can't tell them anything. The 16-to-25-year-olds, they probably know that I can't tell them anything either - and they know that I know it. It's a funny business. Obviously, I'm not an IBM computer any more than I'm an ashtray. I mean it's obvious to anyone who's ever slept in the back seat of a car that I'm just not a schoolteacher.

PLAYBOY: Even though you're not a schoolteacher, wouldn't you like to help the young people who dig you from turning into what some of their parents have become?

DYLAN: Well, I must say that I really don't know their parents. I really don't know if anybody's parents are so bad. Now, I hate to come on like a weakling or a coward, and I realize it might seem kind of irreligious, but I'm really not the right person to tramp around the country saving souls. I wouldn't run over anybody that was laying in the street, and I certainly wouldn't become a hangman. I wouldn't think twice about giving a starving man a cigarette. But I'm not a shepherd. And I'm not about to save anybody from fate, which I know nothing about.

"Parents" is not the key word here. The key word is "destiny." I can't save them from that.

PLAYBOY: As a college dropout in your freshman year, you seem to take a dim view of schooling in general, whatever the subject.

DYLAN: I really don't think about it.

PLAYBOY: Well, have you ever had any regrets about not completing college?

DYLAN: That would be ridiculous. Colleges are like old-age homes; except for the fact that more people die in colleges than in old-age homes, there's really no difference. People have one great blessing - obscurity - and not really too many people are thankful for it. Everybody is always taught to be thankful for their food and clothes and things like that, but not to be thankful for their obscurity. Schools don't teach that; they teach people to be rebels and lawyers. I'm not going to put down the teaching system; that would be too silly. It's just that it really doesn't have too much to teach. Colleges are part of the American institution; everybody respects them. They're very rich and influential, but they have nothing to do with survival. Everybody knows that.

PLAYBOY: Would you advise young people to skip college, then?

DYLAN: I wouldn't advise anybody to do anything. I certainly wouldn't advise somebody not to go to college; I just wouldn't pay his way through college.

PLAYBOY: Don't you think the things one learns in college can help enrich one's life?

DYLAN: I don't think anything like that is going to enrich my life, no - not my life, anyway. Things are going to happen whether I know why they happen or not. It just gets more complicated when you stick yourself into it. You don't find out why things move. You let them move; you watch them move; you stop them from moving; you start them moving. But you don't sit around and try to figure out why there's movement - unless, of course, you're just an innocent moron, or some wise old Japanese man. Out of all the people who just lay around and ask "Why?", how many do you figure really want to know?

PLAYBOY: Can you suggest a better use for the four years that would otherwise be spent in college?

DYLAN: Well, you could hang around in Italy; you could go to Mexico; you could become a dishwasher; you could even go to Arkansas. I don't know; there are thousands of things to do and places to go. Everybody thinks that you have to bang your head against the wall, but it's silly when you really think about it. I mean, here you have fantastic scientists working on ways to prolong human living, and then you have other people who take it for granted that you have to beat your head against the wall in order to be happy. You can't take everything you don't like as a personal insult. I guess you should go where your wants are bare, where you're invisible and not needed.

PLAYBOY: Would you classify sex among your wants, wherever you go?

DYLAN: Sex is a temporary thing; sex isn't love. You can get sex anywhere. If you're looking for someone to love you, now that's different. I guess you have to stay in college for that.

PLAYBOY: Since you didn't stay in college, does that mean you haven't found someone to love you?

DYLAN: Let's go on to the next question.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any difficulty relating to people - or vice versa?

DYLAN: Well, sometimes I have the feeling that other people want my soul. If I say to them, "I don't have a soul," they say, "I know that. You don't have to tell me that. Not me. How dumb

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do you think I am? I'm your friend." What can I say except that I'm sorry and I feel bad? I guess maybe feeling bad and paranoia are the same thing.

PLAYBOY: Paranoia is said to be one of the mental states sometimes induced by such hallucinogenic drugs as peyote and LSD. Considering the risks involved, do you think that experimentation with such drugs should be part of the growing up experience for a young person?

DYLAN: I wouldn't advise anybody to use drugs - certainly not the hard drugs; drugs are medicine. But opium and hash and pot - now, those things aren't drugs; they just bend your mind a little. I think everybody's mind should be bent once in a while. Not by LSD, though. LSD is medicine - a different kind of medicine. It makes you aware of the universe, so to speak; you realize how foolish objects are. But LSD is not for groovy people; it's for mad, hateful people who want revenge. It's for people who usually have heart attacks. They ought to use it at the Geneva Convention.

PLAYBOY: Are you concerned, as you approach 30, that you may begin to "go square," lose some of your openness to experience, become leery of change and new experiment?

DYLAN: No. But if it happens, then it happens. What can I say? There doesn't seem to be any tomorrow. Every time I wake up, no matter in what position, it's always been today. To look ahead and start worrying about trivial little things I can't really say has any more importance than looking back and remembering trivial little things. I'm not going to become any poetry instructor at any girls' school; I know that for sure. But that's about all I know for sure. I'll just keep doing these different things, I guess.

PLAYBOY: Such as?

DYLAN: Waking up in different positions.

PLAYBOY: What else?

DYLAN: I'm just like anybody else; I'll try anything once.

PLAYBOY: Including theft and murder?

DYLAN: I can't really say I wouldn't commit theft or murder and expect anybody to really believe me. I wouldn't believe anybody if they told me that.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever think about marrying, settling down, having a home, maybe living abroad? Are there any luxuries you'd like to have, say, a yacht or a Rolls-Royce?

DYLAN: No, I don't think about those things. If I felt like buying anything, I'd buy it. What you're asking me about is the future, my future. I'm the last person in the world to ask about my future.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying you're going to be passive and just let things happen to you?

DYLAN: Well, that's being very philosophical about it, but I guess it's true.

PLAYBOY: You once planned to write a novel. Do you still?

DYLAN: I don't think so. All my writing goes into the songs now. Other forms don't interest me anymore.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any unfulfilled ambitions?

DYLAN: Well, I guess I've always wanted to be Anthony Quinn in "La Strada". Not always - only for about six years now; it's not one of those childhood-dream things. Oh, and come to think of it, I guess I've always wanted to be Brigitte Bardot, too; but I don't really want to think about that too much.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever have the standard boyhood dream of growing up to be President?

DYLAN: No. When I was a boy, Harry Truman was President; who'd want to be Harry Truman?

PLAYBOY: Well, let's suppose that you were the President. What would you accomplish during your first thousand days?

DYLAN: Well, just for laughs, so long as you insist, the first thing I'd do is probably move the White House. Instead of being in Texas, it'd be on the East Side in New York. McGeorge Bundy would definitely have to change his name, and General McNamara would be forced to wear a coonskin cap and shades. I would immediately rewrite "The Star-Spangled Banner," and little school children, instead of memorizing "America the Beautiful," would have to memorize "Desolation Row" [one of Dylan's latest songs]. And I would immediately call for a show down with Mao Tse-tung; I would fight him personally - and I'd get somebody to film it.

PLAYBOY: One final question: Even though you've more or less retired from political and social protest, can you conceive of any circumstance that might persuade you to reinvoke yourself?

DYLAN: No, not unless all the people in the world disappeared.

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