

## Ravi Velloor

Associate Editor

And so Robert Redford, at age 81, is calling it a day. Well-earned retirement for a great journalist!

Journalist? This is the Oscar-winning male lead known for movie classics like *The Sting* (1973), *All The President's Men* (1976) and *Out Of Africa* (1985). Founder of the Sundance Institute and Film Festival.

But, why not?

In 1976, the featured piece in one monthly edition of *National Geographic* magazine was Redford's article, *Riding The Outlaw Trail*. It was a classic piece of writing, bringing in the man's love of the great outdoors, the kinship between man and beast as you ride the open spaces, and admiration for the American way of life.

I blinked. Did I read that right? Then the cleverness and audacity of the sentence struck me and I was hooked – on writing, journalism, places with no piped water and, in a sense, Redford.

And so, from age 21, it has been mostly that way. From the steppes of Afghanistan and the killing fields of Sri Lanka to the Maoist-infested badlands of Central India and the tsunami-struck Andaman islands, I travelled with the many pockets of my Banana Republic jacket stuffed with notebooks, film rolls, biscuits, water and, sometimes, a thin blanket.

And every time, I would mentally shake the city dust off my clothes.

In a sense, my admiration for Redford is because I sense that, underneath the successful actor, he really thinks like a journalist.

Certainly, he has been truer to himself than many of his peers and – as any good journalist ought to be – his self-image has not been affected by the vanity that fame

genuine and, once, nearly took his life. Out on a mountain range on his Sundance farm, his horse reared up and nearly toppled him over a cliff after it saw a herd of elk deer. The

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co-stars with Michelle Pfeiffer. There, as fading news director Warren Justice, he dies on a dangerous news assignment, turning the camera on himself as a hail of bullets hits his body.

In a sense, the developments, known as the Watergate scandal, marked journalism's heyday. That nostalgia continues, as witnessed in the recent success of *The Post* (2017), the story of Washington Post publisher Kay Graham and the Pentagon Papers, played to near-perfection by Meryl Streep, with Tom Hanks supporting as the Post's executive editor Ben Bradlee.

Five years ago, Redford appeared in a Discovery Channel documentary on Watergate's 40th anniversary, along with the real Watergate heroes, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

But age mellows and the news industry is under threat. And while Redford recently insisted that "there has got to be journalists, there has to be", his views on their mission

Redford's first big hit was as the playfully violent Sundance Kid, alongside Paul Newman in *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid* (1969), that would inspire his *National Geographic* article years later.

He was 33 at the time and would go on to do classics such as the fated role of Jay Gatsby (*The Great Gatsby*, 1974), vain and yet painfully innocent in the way he desperately tries to live a lie to catch the attention of his upper-class love interest across the water.

In the closing pages of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, the raconteur Nick Carraway turns to wave to his neighbour and friend.

"They are a rotten crowd, Jay," he shouts across the lawn. "You are worth the whole damn bunch put together."

You could say pretty much the same for Redford. Thank you, Mr Redford, for your journalism.

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## Master of reinvention lives up to reputation

### REVIEW / CONCERT

BOB DYLAN AND HIS BAND LIVE IN SINGAPORE 2018

The Star Theatre  
Monday

Eddino Abdul Hadi



Here is the thing about watching American music icon Bob Dylan (left) live in 2018 – you do not go to his concert expecting to hear faithful renditions of songs from the

past five decades that have become part of the rock 'n' roll canon.

If you did, and wandered into his show at The Star Theatre on Monday blissfully unaware of this important fact, you would have been sorely disappointed.

The 77-year-old, playing his third concert in Singapore, was not so much inclined to simply play his hits straight, but more to live up to

his reputation as a master of reinvention.

Take *Blowin' In The Wind*, a certified Dylan classic dating back to 1962, played as the first encore after his main set ended. It is stripped of its distinctive melody and, because Dylan's voice these days is famously gruff and gravelly, it takes a couple of lines in the first verse to pass before you realise it is that famous song.

Highway 61 Revisited, the title track of his 1965 album, went through a similar treatment, although the song retained its rollicking tempo.

Then there is his take on *Ballad Of A Thin Man*, from the same album. Despite the rough crooning, the song still shines with an almost spiritual quality and was certainly one of the highlights of the show.

For close to two hours, Dylan, dressed in a dark suit with red trimmings, sang and tickled the ivories on a black grand piano. He did not play any guitars, unlike in his last appearance here at the Timbre Rock & Roots music festival in 2011, but would occasionally blow a few full-blooded notes on the harmonica.

The stage was bare, save for him, his band and their instruments, as well as several warm-hued lights which were always kept fairly dim.

There was no photography allowed, not even for the media. Prior to the show's start at about 8.30pm, the audience, estimated to be about 4,500-strong, was reminded not to do any kind of recording.

He did not speak a word to the audience, not even to introduce the songs or his band members. The only time he acknowledged the fans was when he walked to the centre of the stage and faced them, before making his exit at the end of the main set and the encore.

It did not really matter because the songs spoke for themselves.

Dylan, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016, packed his setlist with songs that represented the various musical transformations that he went through in his long and prolific discography.

His last three albums might comprise covers of Great American Songbook tunes and traditional pop songs, but his setlist focused more on tracks such as *Pay In Blood* from *Tempest* (2012), his last album of original songs.

The live take is a lot more faithful to the album version, perhaps because it was a relatively recently recording. But make no mistake, give him enough time and he would surely have found a way to re-imagine the song live, just like he has done with his classics.

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