

= Highway 61 Revisited =

Highway 61 Revisited is the sixth studio album by the American singer @-@ songwriter Bob Dylan , released on August 30 , 1965 by Columbia Records . Having until then recorded mostly acoustic music , Dylan used rock musicians as his backing band on every track of the album , except for the closing 11 @-@ minute ballad , " Desolation Row " . Critics have focused on the innovative way in which Dylan combined driving , blues @-@ based music with the subtlety of poetry to create songs that captured the political and cultural chaos of contemporary America . Author Michael Gray has argued that in an important sense the 1960s " started " with this album .

Leading with the hit single " Like a Rolling Stone " , the album features songs that Dylan has continued to perform live over his long career , including " Ballad of a Thin Man " and " Highway 61 Revisited " . He named the album after the major American highway which connected his birthplace , Duluth , Minnesota , to southern cities famed for their musical heritage , including St. Louis , Memphis , New Orleans , and the Delta blues area of Mississippi .

Highway 61 Revisited peaked at No. 3 in the United States charts and No. 4 in the United Kingdom . The album was ranked No. 4 on Rolling Stone 's " 500 Greatest Albums of All Time " . " Like a Rolling Stone " was a top @-@ 10 hit in several countries , and was listed at No. 1 on Rolling Stone 's 500 Greatest Songs of All Time list . Two other songs , " Desolation Row " and " Highway 61 Revisited " , were listed at No. 187 and No. 373 respectively .

= = Dylan and Highway 61 = =

In his memoir Chronicles : Volume One , Dylan described the kinship he felt with the route that supplied the title of his sixth album : " Highway 61 , the main thoroughfare of the country blues , begins about where I began . I always felt like I 'd started on it , always had been on it and could go anywhere , even down in to the deep Delta country . It was the same road , full of the same contradictions , the same one @-@ horse towns , the same spiritual ancestors ... It was my place in the universe , always felt like it was in my blood . "

When he was growing up in the 1950s , Highway 61 stretched from the Canadian border through Duluth , where Dylan was born , and St. Paul all the way down to New Orleans . Along the way , the route passed near the birthplaces and homes of influential musicians such as Muddy Waters , Son House , Elvis Presley and Charley Patton . The " empress of the blues " , Bessie Smith , died after sustaining serious injuries in an automobile accident on Highway 61 . Critic Mark Polizzotti points out that blues legend Robert Johnson is alleged to have sold his soul to the devil at the highway 's crossroads with Route 49 . The highway had also been the subject of several blues recordings , notably Roosevelt Sykes ' " Highway 61 Blues " ( 1932 ) and Mississippi Fred McDowell 's " 61 Highway " ( 1964 ) .

Dylan has stated that he had to overcome considerable resistance at Columbia Records to give the album its title . He told biographer Robert Shelton : " I wanted to call that album Highway 61 Revisited . Nobody understood it . I had to go up the fucking ladder until finally the word came down and said : ' Let him call it what he wants to call it ' . " Michael Gray has suggested that the very title of the album represents Dylan 's insistence that his songs are rooted in the traditions of the blues : " Indeed the album title Highway 61 Revisited announces that we are in for a long revisit , since it is such a long , blues @-@ travelled highway . Many bluesmen had been there before [ Dylan ] , all recording versions of a blues called ' Highway 61 ' . "

= = Recording sessions = =

= = = Background = = =

In May 1965 , Dylan returned from his tour of England feeling exhausted and dissatisfied with his material . He told journalist Nat Hentoff : " I was going to quit singing . I was very drained . " The

singer added , " It 's very tiring having other people tell you how much they dig you if you yourself don 't dig you . "

As a consequence of his dissatisfaction , Dylan wrote 20 pages of verse he later described as a " long piece of vomit " . He reduced this to a song with four verses and a chorus ? " Like a Rolling Stone " . He told Hentoff that writing and recording the song washed away his dissatisfaction , and restored his enthusiasm for creating music . Describing the experience to Robert Hilburn in 2004 , nearly 40 years later , Dylan said : " It 's like a ghost is writing a song like that ... You don 't know what it means except the ghost picked me to write the song . "

Highway 61 Revisited was recorded in two blocks of recording sessions that took place in Studio A of Columbia Records , located in Midtown Manhattan . The first block , June 15 and June 16 , was produced by Tom Wilson and resulted in the single " Like a Rolling Stone " . On July 25 , Dylan performed his controversial electric set at the Newport Folk Festival , where some of the crowd booed his performance . Four days after Newport , Dylan returned to the recording studio . From July 29 to August 4 , he and his band completed recording Highway 61 Revisited , but under the supervision of a new producer , Bob Johnston .

= = = Recording sessions , June 15 ? 16 = = =

Tom Wilson produced the initial recording sessions for Highway 61 Revisited on June 15 ? 16 , 1965 . Dylan was backed by Bobby Gregg on drums , Joe Macho , Jr. on bass , Paul Griffin on piano , and Frank Owens on guitar . For lead guitar , the singer recruited Michael Bloomfield of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band . The musicians began the June 15 session by recording a fast version of " It Takes a Lot to Laugh , It Takes a Train to Cry " and the song " Sitting on a Barbed Wire Fence " , which was omitted from the Highway 61 album . Dylan and his band next attempted to record " Like a Rolling Stone " ; at this early stage , Dylan 's piano dominated the backing , which was in 3 / 4 time . " Barbed Wire Fence " , the fast version of " It Takes a Lot to Laugh " , and an early take of " Like a Rolling Stone " were eventually released on The Bootleg Series Volumes 1 ? 3 ( Rare & Unreleased ) 1961 ? 1991 .

The musicians returned to Studio A the following day , when they devoted almost the entire session to recording " Like a Rolling Stone " . Present on this occasion was Al Kooper , a young musician invited by Wilson to observe , but who wanted to play on the session . Kooper managed to sit in on the session , and he improvised an organ riff that , critics Greil Marcus and Mark Polizzotti argue , became a crucial element of the recording . The fourth take was ultimately selected as the master , but Dylan and the band recorded eleven more takes .

= = = Recording sessions , July 29 ? August 4 = = =

To create the material for Highway 61 Revisited , Dylan spent a month writing in his new home in the Byrdcliffe artists ' colony of Woodstock in upstate New York . When he returned to Studio A on July 29 , he was backed by the same musicians with Harvey Brooks on bass replacing Joe Macho and his producer had changed from Tom Wilson to Bob Johnston .

Their first session together was devoted to three songs . After recording several takes each of " Tombstone Blues " , " It Takes a Lot to Laugh " and " Positively 4th Street " , masters were successfully recorded . " Tombstone Blues " and " It Takes a Lot to Laugh " were included in the final album , but " Positively 4th Street " was issued as a single @-@ only release . At the close of the July 29 session , Dylan attempted to record " Desolation Row " , accompanied by Al Kooper on electric guitar and Harvey Brooks on bass . There was no drummer , as the drummer had gone home . This electric version was eventually released in 2005 , on The Bootleg Series Vol . 7 .

On July 30 , Dylan and his band returned to Studio A and recorded three songs . A master take of " From a Buick 6 " was recorded and later included on the final album , but most of the session was devoted to " Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window ? " Dylan was unsatisfied with the results and set the song aside for a later date ; it was eventually re @-@ recorded with the Hawks in October .

After Dylan and Kooper spent the weekend in Woodstock writing chord charts for the songs ,

sessions resumed at Studio A on August 2 . " Highway 61 Revisited " , " Just Like Tom Thumb 's Blues " , " Queen Jane Approximately " , and " Ballad of a Thin Man " were recorded successfully and masters were selected for the album .

One final session was held on August 4 , again at Studio A. Most of the session was devoted to completing " Desolation Row " . Johnston has related that Nashville musician Charlie McCoy was visiting New York , and he invited McCoy to play guitar at the session . According to some sources , seven takes of " Desolation Row " were recorded , and takes six and seven were spliced together for the master recording .

The resulting album , Highway 61 Revisited , has been described as " Dylan 's first purely ' rock ' album " , a realization of his wish to leave his old music format behind and move on from his all @-@ acoustic first four albums and half @-@ acoustic , half @-@ electric fifth album , Bringing It All Back Home . Documentary director D. A. Pennebaker , who filmed Dylan on his acoustic UK tour in May 1965 , has said : " I didn 't know that he was going to leave acoustic . I did know that he was getting a little dragged by it . "

= = Songs = =

= = = Side one = = =

Highway 61 Revisited opens with " Like a Rolling Stone " , which has been described as revolutionary in its combination of electric guitar licks , organ chords , and Dylan 's voice , " at once so young and so snarling ... and so cynical " . Michael Gray characterized " Like a Rolling Stone " as " a chaotic amalgam of blues , impressionism , allegory , and an intense directness : ' How does it feel ? ' " Polizzotti writes that the composition is notable for eschewing traditional themes of popular music , such as romance , and instead expresses resentment and a yearning for revenge . It has been suggested that Miss Lonely , the song 's central character , is based on Edie Sedgwick , a socialite and actress in the Factory scene of pop artist Andy Warhol . Critic Mike Marqusee has written that this composition is " surely a Dylan cameo " , and that its full poignancy becomes apparent upon the realization that " it is sung , at least in part , to the singer himself : he 's the one ' with no direction home ' . " " Like A Rolling Stone " reached number two in the Billboard Hot 100 in the summer of 1965 , and was a top @-@ 10 hit in Australia , Canada , the Netherlands , New Zealand , and the United Kingdom .

The fast @-@ paced , two @-@ chord blues song " Tombstone Blues " , driven by Michael Bloomfield 's lead guitar , uses a parade of historical characters ? outlaw Belle Starr , biblical temptress Delilah , Jack the Ripper ( represented in this song as a successful businessman ) , John the Baptist ( described here as a torturer ) , and blues singer Ma Rainey who Dylan humorously suggests shared a sleeping bag with composer Beethoven ? to sketch an absurdist account of contemporary America . For critics Mark Polizzotti and Andy Gill , the reality behind the song is the then @-@ escalating Vietnam War ; both writers hear the " king of the Philistines " who sends his slaves " out to the jungle " as a reference to President Lyndon B. Johnson .

On July 29 , 1965 , Dylan and his band resumed recording " It Takes a Lot to Laugh , It Takes a Train to Cry " . Tony Glover , who observed the recording session , has recalled that Dylan re @-@ worked the song at the piano while the other musicians took a lunch break . Critic Sean Egan writes that by slowing down the tempo , Dylan transformed the song from an " insufferably smart @-@ alec number into a slow , tender , sensual anthem " . Gill points out that the lyrics reveal the singer 's talent for borrowing from old blues numbers , adapting the lines " Don 't the clouds look lonesome shining across the sea / Don 't my gal look good when she 's coming after me " from " Solid Road " by bluesmen Brownie McGhee and Leroy Carr .

AllMusic critic Bill Janovitz describes " From a Buick 6 " as a " raucous , up @-@ tempo blues " , which is played " almost recklessly " . The song opens with a snare shot similar to the beginning of " Like a Rolling Stone " . Partially based on Sleepy John Estes ' 1930 song " Milk Cow Blues " , the guitar part is patterned after older blues riffs by Robert Johnson , Charlie Patton and Big Joe

Williams . Robert Shelton hears the song as " an earthy tribute to another funky earth @-@ mother " , while for Heylin it is close to filler material ; he argues that only through the musicians ' performance is Dylan able to " convince us he is doing more than just listing the number of ways in which this ' graveyard woman ' is both a lifesaver and a death @-@ giver " .

" Ballad of a Thin Man " is driven by Dylan 's piano , which contrasts with " the spooky organ riffs " played by Al Kooper . Marqusee describes the song as one of " the purest songs of protest ever sung " , as it looks at the media and its inability to understand both the singer and his work . He writes that the song became the anthem of an in @-@ group , " disgusted by the old , excited by the new ... elated by their discovery of others who shared their feelings " , with its refrain " Something is happening here / But you don 't know what it is / Do you , Mr Jones ? " epitomizing the " hip exclusivity " of the burgeoning counterculture . Robert Shelton describes the song 's central character , Mr Jones , as " one of Dylan 's greatest archetypes " , characterizing him as " a Philistine ... superficially educated and well bred but not very smart about the things that count " .

= = = Side two = = =

Polizzotti , in his study of Highway 61 Revisited , writes that the opening track of Side Two , " Queen Jane Approximately " is in a similar vein to " Like a Rolling Stone " , but the song offers " a touch of sympathy and even comfort in place of relentless mockery " . The song is structured as a series of ABAB quatrain verses , with each verse followed by a chorus that is simply a repeat of the last line of each verse : " Won 't you come see me Queen Jane ? " . Gill calls this song " the least interesting track " on Highway 61 , but praises the piano ascending the scale during the harmonica break as an evocation of " the stifling nature of an upper class existence " . " Queen Jane Approximately " was released as the B @-@ side of Dylan 's " One of Us Must Know ( Sooner or Later ) " single in early 1966 .

Dylan commences the title song of his album , " Highway 61 Revisited " , with the words " Oh God said to Abraham , ' Kill me a son ' / Abe says , ' Man , you must be puttin ' me on ' " . As Gill has pointed out , Abraham was the name of Dylan 's father , which makes the singer the son whom God wants killed . Gill comments that it is befitting that this song , celebrating a highway central to the history of the blues , is a " raucous blues boogie " . He notes that the scope of the song broadens to make the highway a road of endless possibilities , peopled by dubious characters and culminating in a promoter who " seriously considers staging World War III out on Highway 61 " . The song is punctuated by the sound of a " Siren Whistle " , credited as " Police Car " to Dylan in the album liner notes . " Highway 61 Revisited " was released as the B @-@ side of his " Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window ? " single on November 30 , 1965 .

" Just Like Tom Thumb 's Blues " has six verses and no chorus . The lyrics describe a nightmarish experience in Juarez , Mexico , where , in Shelton 's words , " our anti @-@ hero stumbles amid sickness , despair , whores and saints . " He battles with corrupt authorities , alcohol and drugs before resolving to return to New York City . In this song , critics have heard literary references to Malcolm Lowry 's Under the Volcano , Edgar Allan Poe 's " The Murders in the Rue Morgue " and Jack Kerouac 's Desolation Angels . The backing musicians , Bobby Gregg on drums , Mike Bloomfield on electric guitar , and two pianists , Paul Griffin on tack piano and Al Kooper on Hohner Pianet , produce a mood that , for Gill , perfectly complements the " enervated tone " of the lyrics . Heylin notes that Dylan took great care ? sixteen takes ? to get the effect he was after , with lyrics that subtly " [ skirt ] the edge of reason " .

Dylan concludes Highway 61 Revisited with the sole acoustic exception to his rock album . Gill has characterized " Desolation Row " as " an 11 @-@ minute epic of entropy , which takes the form of a Fellini @-@ esque parade of grotesques and oddities featuring a huge cast of iconic characters " . These include historical celebrities such as Einstein and Nero , the biblical characters Noah and Cain and Abel , the Shakespearian figures of Ophelia and Romeo , ending with literary titans T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound . The song opens with a report that " they 're selling postcards of the hanging " , and adds " the circus is in town " . Polizzotti connects this song with the lynching of three black circus workers in Duluth , Minnesota , which was Dylan 's birthplace , and describes " Desolation

Row " as a cowboy song , " the ' Home On The Range ' of the frightening territory that was mid @-@ sixties America " . In the penultimate verse , the passengers on the Titanic are shouting " Which side are you on ? " . Shelton suggests Dylan is asking , " What difference which side you 're on if you 're sailing on the Titanic ? " and is thus satirizing " simpleminded political commitment " .

= = = Outtakes and The Cutting Edge = = =

The first non @-@ album outtake from the Highway 61 Revisited sessions to be released was the single " Positively 4th Street " , although on an early pressing of the single Columbia used another Highway 61 outtake , " Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window ? " , by mistake . " Crawl Out Your Window " was subsequently re @-@ recorded with the Hawks in October , and released as a single in November 1965 . Columbia accidentally released an alternate take of " From a Buick 6 " on an early pressing of Highway 61 Revisited , and this version continued to appear on the Japanese release for several years . Other outtakes officially released between 1991 and 2005 include alternate takes of " Like a Rolling Stone " and " It Takes a Lot to Laugh , It Takes a Train to Cry " , and a previously unreleased song , " Sitting on a Barbed Wire Fence " , on The Bootleg Series Volumes 1 ? 3 ( Rare & Unreleased ) 1961 ? 1991 , as well as alternate takes of " Desolation Row " , " Highway 61 Revisited " , " Just Like Tom Thumb 's Blues " , " Tombstone Blues " , and " It Takes a Lot to Laugh , It Takes a Train to Cry " on The Bootleg Series Volume 7 . Excerpts from several different takes of " Like a Rolling Stone " appeared on the Highway 61 Interactive CD @-@ ROM , released in February 1995 .

In 2015 , Dylan released Volume 12 of his Bootleg Series , The Cutting Edge , in three different formats . The 18 @-@ disc Collector 's Edition was described as including " every note recorded during the 1965 ? 1966 sessions , every alternate take and alternate lyric " . The 18 CDs contain every take of every song recorded in the studio during the Highway 61 Revisited sessions , from June 15 to August 4 , 1965 .

The Highway 61 Revisited out @-@ takes from the first recording session in New York , June 15 and 16 , 1965 comprise : ten takes of " It Takes A Lot To Laugh , It Takes A Train To Cry " , six takes of " Sitting On A Barbed @-@ Wire Fence " , and fifteen takes of " Like A Rolling Stone " . Additionally , The Cutting Edge contains four instrumental " stem " tracks , lifted from Take Four which was the released " Master take " of " Like A Rolling Stone " : Guitar ( Mike Bloomfield ) ; vocal , guitar ( Bob Dylan ) , piano and bass ; drums and organ .

The tracks from the second recording session in New York , July 29 to August 4 , 1965 , comprise seven takes of " It Takes A Lot To Laugh , It Takes A Train To Cry " , sixteen takes of " Tombstone Blues " , twelve takes of " Positively Fourth Street " , five takes of " From A Buick 6 " , seventeen takes of " Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window ? " , nine takes of " Highway 61 Revisited " , sixteen takes of " Just Like Tom Thumb 's Blues " , seven takes of Queen Jane Approximately " , and eight takes of " Desolation Row " .

Describing the process of listening to these many alternative versions , Chris Gerard wrote in PopMatters : " The fact that these versions do not approach the greatness of the final recordings is exactly the point . These are works in progress . It ? s a guided tour through the creative process that led to these landmark albums . "

= = Packaging = =

The cover artwork was photographed by Daniel Kramer several weeks before the recording sessions . Kramer captured Dylan sitting on the stoop of the apartment of his manager , Albert Grossman , located in Gramercy Park , New York , placing Dylan 's friend Bob Neuwirth behind Dylan " to give it extra color " . Dylan wears a Triumph motorcycle T @-@ shirt under a blue and purple silk shirt , holding his Ray @-@ Ban sunglasses in his right hand . Photographer Kramer commented in 2010 on the singer 's expression : " He 's hostile , or it 's a hostile moodiness . He 's almost challenging me or you or whoever 's looking at it : ' What are you gonna do about it , buster ? ' " .

As he had on his previous three albums , Dylan contributed his own writing to the back cover of Highway 61 Revisited , in the shape of freeform , surrealist prose : " On the slow train time does not interfere & at the Arabian crossing waits White Heap , the man from the newspaper & behind him the hundred inevitables made of solid rock & stone . " One critic has pointed out the close similarity of these notes to the stream of consciousness , experimental novel Tarantula , which Dylan was writing during 1965 and 1966 .

= = Reception and legacy = =

In the British music press , initial reviews of Highway 61 expressed both bafflement and admiration for the record . New Musical Express critic Allen Evans wrote : " Another set of message songs and story songs sung in that monotonous and tuneless way by Dylan which becomes quite arresting as you listen . " The Melody Maker LP review section , by an anonymous critic , commented : " Bob Dylan 's sixth LP , like all others , is fairly incomprehensible but nevertheless an absolute knock @-@ out . " The English poet Philip Larkin , reviewing the album for The Daily Telegraph , wrote that he found himself " well rewarded " by the record : " Dylan 's cawing , derisive voice is probably well suited to his material ... and his guitar adapts itself to rock ( ' Highway 61 ' ) and ballad ( ' Queen Jane ' ) . There is a marathon ' Desolation Row ' which has an enchanting tune and mysterious , possibly half @-@ baked words . "

In September 1965 , the US trade journal Billboard also praised the album , and predicted big sales for it : " Based upon his singles hit ' Like a Rolling Stone ' , Dylan has a top @-@ of @-@ the @-@ chart @-@ winner in this package of his off @-@ beat , commercial material . " The album peaked at number three on the US Billboard 200 chart of top albums , and number four on the UK albums charts . In the US , Highway 61 was certificated as a gold record in August 1967 , and platinum in August 1997 .

Highway 61 Revisited has remained among the most highly acclaimed of Dylan 's works . Biographer Anthony Scaduto praises its rich imagery , and describes it as " one of the most brilliant pop records ever made . As rock , it cuts through to the core of the music ? a hard driving beat without frills , without self @-@ consciousness . " Michael Gray calls Highway 61 " revolutionary and stunning , not just for its energy and panache but in its vision : fusing radical , electrical music ... with lyrics that were light years ahead of anyone else 's ; Dylan here unites the force of blues @-@ based rock 'n'roll with the power of poetry . The whole rock culture , the whole post @-@ Beatle pop @-@ rock world , and so in an important sense the 1960s started here . "

Among Dylan 's contemporaries , Phil Ochs was impressed by Highway 61 , explaining : " It 's the kind of music that plants a seed in your mind and then you have to hear it several times . And as you go over it you start to hear more and more things . He 's done something that 's left the whole field ridiculously in the back of him . " In 2003 , Rolling Stone magazine described Highway 61 as " one of those albums that changed everything " , and placed it at number four in its list of " The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time " . The Rolling Stone list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " ranked " Highway 61 Revisited " , " Desolation Row " and " Like a Rolling Stone " at number 373 , number 187 , and number one , respectively . In 2012 , The Best 100 Albums of All Time book ranked Highway 61 Revisited as the greatest album of all time . The album was also included in Robert Dimery 's 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die .

Most of the songs on Highway 61 Revisited have remained important , in varying degrees , to Dylan 's live performances since 1965 . According to his website , he has played " Like a Rolling Stone " over 2 @,@ 000 times , " Highway 61 Revisited " more than 1 @,@ 700 times , " Ballad of a Thin Man " over 1 @,@ 000 times , and most of the other songs between 150 and 500 times .

The influence of the songs on Highway 61 Revisited can be heard in many cover versions . " Like a Rolling Stone " has been recorded by artists including the Rolling Stones , on their live album Stripped , David Bowie and Mick Ronson on Heaven and Hell , Johnny Winter on Raising Cain , and Jimi Hendrix at the Monterey Pop Festival . My Chemical Romance 's version of " Desolation Row " was featured in the film Watchmen in 2009 . The song has also been covered by the Grateful Dead on their album Postcards of the Hanging . " Just Like Tom Thumb 's Blues " has been recorded by

Judy Collins , Linda Ronstadt , Nina Simone and Neil Young . The title track was covered by artists such as PJ Harvey , Karen O and Billy Joel .

= = Track listing = =

The track listing of Highway 61 Revisited is as follows : All songs written and composed by Bob Dylan .

= = Personnel = =

The musical personnel on Highway 61 Revisited were as follows :

Bob Dylan ? vocals , guitar , harmonica , piano , police car

Mike Bloomfield ? electric guitar

Charlie McCoy ? guitar

Paul Griffin , Al Kooper ? piano , organ

Frank Owens ? piano

Harvey Brooks , Russ Savakus , Joe Macho , Jr . ? bass guitar

Bobby Gregg , Sam Lay ? drums

Production personnel

Bob Johnston ? producer

Tom Wilson ? producer on " Like a Rolling Stone "

Daniel Kramer , Don Hunstein ? photography

Steve Berkowitz ? Hybrid SACD reissue production

Greg Calbi ? Hybrid SACD reissue remastering

= = Charts = =

= = = Chart positions = = =

= = Certifications = =