

= Blonde on Blonde =

Blonde on Blonde is the seventh studio album by American singer @-@ songwriter Bob Dylan , released on May 16 , 1966 , on Columbia Records . Recording sessions began in New York in October 1965 with numerous backing musicians , including members of Dylan 's live backing band , the Hawks . Though sessions continued until January 1966 , they yielded only one track that made it onto the final album ? " One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later) " . At producer Bob Johnston 's suggestion , Dylan , keyboardist Al Kooper , and guitarist Robbie Robertson moved to the CBS studios in Nashville , Tennessee . These sessions , augmented by some of Nashville 's top session musicians , were more fruitful , and in February and March all the remaining songs for the album were recorded .

Blonde on Blonde completed the trilogy of rock albums that Dylan recorded in 1965 and 1966 , starting with Bringing It All Back Home and Highway 61 Revisited . Critics often rank Blonde on Blonde as one of the greatest albums of all time . Combining the expertise of Nashville session musicians with a modernist literary sensibility , the album 's songs have been described as operating on a grand scale musically , while featuring lyrics one critic called " a unique mixture of the visionary and the colloquial " . It was one of the first double albums in rock music .

The album peaked at number nine on the Billboard 200 chart in the US , where it eventually was certified double platinum , and it reached number three in the UK . Blonde on Blonde spawned two singles that were top @-@ twenty hits in the US : " Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35 " and " I Want You " . Two additional songs , " Just Like a Woman " and " Visions of Johanna " , have been named as among Dylan 's greatest compositions and were featured in Rolling Stone 's 500 Greatest Songs of All Time list .

= = Recording sessions = =

= = = Background = = =

After the release of Highway 61 Revisited in August 1965 , Dylan set about hiring a touring band . Guitarist Mike Bloomfield and keyboard player Al Kooper had backed Dylan on his new album and at Dylan 's controversial electric debut at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival . Bloomfield chose not to tour with Dylan , preferring to remain with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band . After backing him at concerts in late August and early September , Kooper informed Dylan he did not wish to continue touring with him . Dylan 's manager , Albert Grossman , was in the process of setting up a grueling concert schedule that would keep Dylan on the road for the next nine months , touring the U.S. , Australia , and Europe . Dylan contacted a group who were performing as Levon and the Hawks , consisting of Levon Helm from Arkansas and four Canadian musicians : Robbie Robertson , Rick Danko , Richard Manuel and Garth Hudson . They had come together as a band in Canada , backing American rocker Ronnie Hawkins . Two people had strongly recommended the Hawks to Dylan : Mary Martin , the executive secretary of Albert Grossman , and blues singer John Hammond , Jr . , son of record producer John Hammond , who had signed Dylan to Columbia Records in 1961 ; the Hawks had backed the younger Hammond on his 1965 album So Many Roads .

Dylan rehearsed with the Hawks in Toronto on September 15 , where they were playing a hometown residency at Friar 's Club , and on September 24 , they made their debut in Austin , Texas . Two weeks later , encouraged by the success of their Texas performance , Dylan took the Hawks into Studio A of Columbia Records in New York City . Their immediate task was to record a hit single as the follow @-@ up to " Positively 4th Street " , but Dylan was already shaping his next album , the third one that year backed by rock musicians .

= = = New York sessions = = =

Producer Bob Johnston , who had overseen the recording of Highway 61 Revisited , started work

with Dylan and the Hawks at Columbia Studio A , 799 Seventh Avenue , New York , on October 5 . They concentrated on a new arrangement of " Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window ? " , a song recorded during the Highway 61 Revisited sessions but not included on that album . Three further numbers were attempted , but none progressed into completed songs . Both the fragmentary " Jet Pilot " and " I Wanna Be Your Lover " , a quasi @-@ parody of the Beatles ' " I Wanna Be Your Man " , finally appeared on the 1985 box set retrospective , Biograph . Also attempted were two takes of " Medicine Sunday " , a song that later evolved into " Temporary Like Achilles " .

On November 30 , the Hawks joined Dylan again at Studio A , but drummer Bobby Gregg replaced Levon Helm , who had tired of playing in a backing band and quit . They began work on a new composition , " Freeze Out " , which was later retitled " Visions of Johanna " , but Dylan wasn 't satisfied with the results . One of the November 30 recordings was eventually released on The Bootleg Series Vol . 7 : No Direction Home : The Soundtrack in 2005 . At this session , they completed " Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window ? " The song was released as a single in December , but only reached number 58 on the American charts .

Dylan spent most of December in California , performing a dozen concerts with his band , and then took a break through the third week in January following the birth of his son Jesse . On January 21 , 1966 , he returned to Columbia 's Studio A to record another long composition , " She 's Your Lover Now " , accompanied by the Hawks (this time with Sandy Konikoff on drums) . Despite nineteen takes , the session failed to yield any complete recordings . Dylan did not attempt the song again , but one of the outtakes from the January 21 session finally appeared 25 years later on The Bootleg Series Volumes 1 ? 3 (Rare & Unreleased) 1961 ? 1991 . (Although the song breaks down at the start of the last verse , Columbia released it as the most complete take from the session .)

Around this time , Dylan became disillusioned about using the Hawks in the studio . He recorded more material at Studio A on January 25 , backed by drummer Bobby Gregg , bassist Rick Danko (or Bill Lee) , guitarist Robbie Robertson , pianist Paul Griffin , and organist Al Kooper . Two more new compositions were attempted : " Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " and " One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later) " . Dylan was satisfied with " One of Us Must Know " ; the January 25 take was released as a single a few weeks later and was subsequently selected for the album .

Another session took place on January 27 , this time with Robertson , Danko , Kooper and Gregg . Dylan and his band recorded " Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " and " One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later) " again , but Dylan was not satisfied with the recorded performance of either song . Also at this session Dylan attempted a rough performance of " I 'll Keep It With Mine " , a song which he had already recorded twice as a demo . The musicians added some tentative backing in a rendering biographer Clinton Heylin described as " cursory " . The recording was ultimately released on The Bootleg Series Volumes 1 ? 3 in 1991 .

A shortage of new material and the slow progress of the sessions contributed to Dylan 's decision to cancel three additional recording dates . Six weeks later Dylan confided to critic Robert Shelton , " Oh , I was really down . I mean , in ten recording sessions , man , we didn 't get one song ... It was the band . But you see , I didn 't know that . I didn 't want to think that " .

= = = Move to Nashville = = =

Recognizing Dylan 's dissatisfaction with the progress of the recordings , producer Bob Johnston suggested that they move the sessions to Nashville . Johnston lived there and had extensive experience working with Nashville session musicians . He recalled how Dylan manager Albert Grossman , was hostile to the idea : " Grossman came up to me and said ' If you ever mention Nashville to Dylan again , you 're gone . ' I said , ' What do you mean ? ' He said , ' You heard me . We got a thing going here ' " . Despite Grossman 's opposition , Dylan agreed to Johnston 's suggestion , and preparations were made to record the album at Columbia 's A Studio on Nashville 's Music Row in February 1966 .

In addition to Kooper and Robertson , who accompanied Dylan from New York , Johnston recruited harmonica player , guitarist and bassist Charlie McCoy , guitarist Wayne Moss , guitarist and bassist Joe South , and drummer Kenny Buttrey . At Dylan 's request , Johnston removed the baffles ?

partitions separating the musicians so that there was " an ambience fit for an ensemble " . Buttrey credited the distinctive sound of the album to Johnston 's re @-@ arrangement of the studio , " as if we were on a tight stage , as opposed to playing in a big hall where you 're ninety miles apart " . Dylan had a piano installed in his Nashville hotel room which Kooper would play to help Dylan write lyrics . Kooper would then teach the tunes to the musicians before Dylan arrived for the sessions .

On the first Nashville session , on February 14 , Dylan successfully recorded " Visions of Johanna " , which he had attempted several times in New York . Also recorded was a take of " 4th Time Around " which made it onto the album and a take of " Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " which did not .

On February 15 the session began at 6 p.m. but Dylan simply sat in the studio working on his lyrics while the musicians played cards , napped and chatted . Finally , at 4 a.m. , Dylan called the musicians in and outlined the structure of the song . Dylan counted off and the musicians fell in , as he attempted his epic composition " Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands " . Kenny Buttrey recalled , " If you notice that record , that thing after like the second chorus starts building and building like crazy , and everybody 's just peaking it up ' cause we thought , Man , this is it ... This is gonna be the last chorus and we 've gotta put everything into it we can . And he played another harmonica solo and went back down to another verse and the dynamics had to drop back down to a verse kind of feel ... After about ten minutes of this thing we 're cracking up at each other , at what we were doing . I mean , we peaked five minutes ago . Where do we go from here ? " The finished song clocked in at 11 minutes , 23 seconds , and would occupy the entire fourth side of the album .

The next session began similarly ? Dylan spent the afternoon writing lyrics , and the session continued into the early hours of February 17 , when the musicians began to record " Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again " . After several musical revisions and false starts , the fourteenth take was the version selected for the album .

= = = Recording sessions in Nashville = = =

Most accounts of recording *Blonde on Blonde* , including those by Dylan scholars Clinton Heylin and Michael Gray , agree that there were two blocks of recording sessions : February 14 ? 17 and March 8 ? 10 , 1966 . This chronology is based on the logs and files kept by Columbia Records .

Dylan and the Hawks performed concerts in Ottawa , Montreal , and Philadelphia in February and March , and then Dylan resumed recording in Nashville on March 8 . On that date , Dylan and the musicians recorded the take of " Absolutely Sweet Marie " that Dylan selected for the album . Historian Sean Wilentz observed that " with the sound of ' Sweet Marie ' , *Blonde on Blonde* entered fully and sublimely into what is now considered classic rock and roll " . The same day saw the successful takes of " Just Like a Woman " , and " Pledging My Time " , the latter " driven by Robertson 's screaming guitar " .

According to Wilentz the final recording session , on March 9 ? 10 , produced six songs in 13 hours of studio time . The first number to be recorded to Dylan 's satisfaction was " Most Likely You Go Your Way And I 'll Go Mine " , when McCoy reinforced on trumpet a musical phrase Dylan played on his harmonica , changing the sound of the song radically . Dylan and his band then quickly recorded " Temporary Like Achilles " . The session atmosphere began to " get giddy " around midnight when Dylan roughed out " Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35 " on the piano . Johnston recalled commenting ; " That sounds like the damn Salvation Army band " . Dylan replied ; " Can you get one ? " Johnston then telephoned trombonist Wayne Butler , the only additional musician required , and Dylan and the band , with McCoy again on trumpet , played a high @-@ spirited version of the song .

In quick succession Dylan and the musicians then recorded " Obviously 5 Believers " and a final take of " Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " powered by Robertson 's lead guitar . The session concluded with " I Want You " on which , as Wilentz notes , " Wayne Moss 's rapid @-@ fire sixteenth notes on the guitar " are an impressive element of the recording .

= = = Disagreement over Nashville recording dates = = =

Al Kooper , who played keyboards on every track of *Blonde on Blonde* , has contested the conventional account that there were two blocks of recording sessions in Nashville . In comments on Michael Gray 's website , Kooper wrote : " There was only ONE trip to Nashville for Robbie and I , and ALL THE TRACKS were cut in that one visit " , stating that Dylan merely broke for an outstanding concert . Charlie McCoy agreed with Kooper 's version . Wilentz analyzed the recording of *Blonde on Blonde* in his book *Bob Dylan In America* , concluding that the " official " documented version fits Dylan 's known touring schedule , and notes that five of the eight songs first recorded after " *Stuck Inside of Mobile With The Memphis Blues Again* " , but none of those recorded earlier , include a middle @-@ eight section ? Dylan 's first extensive foray as a writer into that conventional structure " .

= = = Mixing and album title = = =

Dylan mixed the album in Los Angeles in early April , before he departed on the Australian leg of his 1966 world tour . Wilentz writes that it was at this point it became " obvious that the riches of the Nashville sessions could not fit onto a single LP " , and they had " produced enough solid material to demand an oddly configured double album , the first of its kind in contemporary popular music " . According to producer Steve Berkowitz , who supervised the reissue of Dylan 's LPs in mono as *The Original Mono Recordings* in 2010 , Johnston told him that they carefully worked on the mono mix for about three or four days whereas the stereo mix was finished in about four hours .

Al Kooper recalled that both the album title , *Blonde on Blonde* , and song titles arrived during the mixing sessions . " When they were mixing it , we were sitting around and Bob Johnston came in and said , ' What do you want to call this ? ' And [Bob] just like said them out one at a time ... Free association and silliness , I 'm sure , played a big role . " Another Dylan chronicler , Oliver Trager , notes that besides spelling out the initials of Dylan 's first name , the album title is also a riff on *Brecht on Brecht* , a stage production based on works by German playwright Bertolt Brecht that had influenced his early songwriting . Dylan himself has said of the title : " Well , I don 't even recall exactly how it came up , but I know it was all in good faith ... I don 't know who thought of that . I certainly didn 't . "

= = Songs = =

" *Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35* "

According to author Andy Gill , by starting his new album with what sounded like " a demented marching @-@ band ... staffed by crazy people out of their mind on loco @-@ weed " , Dylan delivered his biggest shock yet for his former folkie fans . The elaborate puns on getting stoned combine a sense of paranoid persecution with " nudge @-@ nudge wink @-@ wink bohemian hedonism " . Heylin points out that the Old Testament connotations of getting stoned made the Salvation Army @-@ style musical backing seem like a good joke . The enigmatic title came about , Heylin suggests , because Dylan knew a song entitled " everybody must get stoned " would be kept off the airwaves . Heylin links the title to the Book of Proverbs , chapter 27 , verse 15 : " A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike . " Released as a single on March 22 , 1966 , " *Rainy Day Women* " reached number two on the Billboard singles chart , and number seven in the UK .

" *Pledging My Time* "

Following the good @-@ time fun of " *Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35* " , the Chicago blues @-@ influenced " *Pledging My Time* " sets the somber tone that runs through the album . It draws on several traditional blues songs , including Elmore James ' recording of " *It Hurts Me Too* " . For critic Michael Gray , the lines " Somebody got lucky but it was an accident " echo the lines " Some joker got lucky , stole her back again " from Robert Johnson 's " *Come On in My Kitchen* " , which is itself an echo of the Skip James 1931 recording " *Devil Got My Woman* " . Gray suggests that " the gulping movements of the melodic phrases " derive from the melody of " *Sitting on Top of the World* " , recorded by the Mississippi Sheiks in 1930 . The couplet at the end of each verse expresses the

theme : a pledge made to a prospective lover in hopes she " will come through , too " . Besides Dylan 's vocals and improvised harmonica breaks , the song 's sound is defined by Robbie Robertson 's guitar , Hargus " Pig " Robbins 's blues piano and Ken Buttrey 's snare drum rolls . The song was released in edited form as the B @-@ side of " Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35 " in March .

" Visions of Johanna "

Considered by many critics as one of Dylan 's masterpieces , " Visions of Johanna " proved difficult to capture on tape . Heylin places the writing in the fall of 1965 , when Dylan was living in the Chelsea Hotel with his wife Sara . In the New York recording studio , on November 30 , Dylan announced his epic composition : " This is called ' Freeze Out ' " . Gill notes that this working title captures the " air of nocturnal suspension in which the verse tableaux are sketched ... full of whispering and muttering . " Wilentz relates how Dylan guided his backing musicians through fourteen takes , trying to sketch out how he wanted it played , saying at one point , " it 's not hard rock , The only thing in it that 's hard is Robbie . " Wilentz notes that , as Dylan quiets things down , he inches closer to what will appear on the album .

Ten weeks later , " Visions of Johanna " fell into place quickly in the Nashville studio . Kooper recalled that he and Robertson had become adept at responding to Dylan 's vocal and also singled out Joe South 's contribution of " this throbbing ... rhythmically amazing bass part " . Gill comments that the song begins by contrasting two lovers , the carnal Louise , and " the more spiritual but unattainable " Johanna . Ultimately , for Gill , the song seeks to convey how the artist is compelled to keep striving to pursue some elusive vision of perfection . For Heylin , the triumph of the song is in " the way Dylan manages to write about the most inchoate feelings in such a vivid , immediate way . "

" One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later) "

When Dylan arrived at the studio on January 25 , 1966 , he had yet to work out the lyrics and title for what was to become the closing track on *Blonde on Blonde* 's first side . With Dylan piecing together the song 's sections , and the chorus that gives the song its title only emerging on take five , the session stretched through the night and into the next morning . It was not until the fifteenth take that a full version was recorded . Dylan and the band persisted until they recorded take 24 which closed the session and made it onto the album four months later . Critic Jonathan Singer credits Griffin 's piano for binding the song together : " At the chorus , Griffin unleashes a symphony ; hammering his way up and down the keyboard , half Gershwin , half gospel , all heart . The follow @-@ up , a killer left hand figure that links the chorus to the verse , releases none of the song 's tension . "

" One of Us Must Know " is a straightforward account of a burned @-@ out relationship . Dissecting what went wrong , the narrator takes a defensive attitude in a one @-@ sided conversation with his former lover . As he presents his case in the opening verse , it appears he is incapable of either acknowledging his part or limiting the abuse : " I didn 't mean to treat you so bad . You don 't have to take it so personal . I didn 't mean to make you so sad . You just happened to be there , that 's all . "

" One of Us Must Know " was the first recording completed for *Blonde on Blonde* and the only one selected from the New York sessions . The song was released as the first single from the album on February 14 , the same day Dylan began to record in Nashville . It failed to appear on the American charts , but reached number 33 in the UK .

" I Want You "

Andy Gill notes that the song displays a tension between the very direct tone of the chorus , the repeated phrase " I want you " , and a weird and complex cast of characters , " too numerous to inhabit the song 's three minutes comfortably " , including a guilty undertaker , a lonesome organ grinder , weeping fathers , mothers , sleeping saviors , the Queen of Spades , and the " dancing child with his Chinese suit " . Analyzing the evolution of the lyrics through successive drafts , Wilentz writes that there are numerous failures , " about deputies asking him his name ... lines about fathers going down hugging one another and about their daughters putting him down because he isn 't their brother " . Finally Dylan arrives at the right formula .

Heylin points out that the gorgeous tune illustrates what Dylan explained to a reporter in 1966 : " It 's not just pretty words to a tune or putting tunes to words ... [It 's] the words and the music [

together] ? I can hear the sound of what I want to say . " Al Kooper has said that of all the songs that Dylan had outlined to him in his hotel , this was his favorite , so Dylan delayed recording it to the very end of the Nashville sessions , " just to bug him " . Released as a single in June 1966 , shortly before the album *Blonde on Blonde* , " I Want You " reached number 20 in the USA , and number 16 in the UK .

" Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again "

Recorded at the third Nashville session , this song was the culmination of another epic of simultaneous writing and recording in the studio . Wilentz describes how the lyrics evolved through a surviving part @-@ typed , part @-@ handwritten manuscript page , " which begins ' honey but it 's just too hard ' (a line that had survived from the very first New York session with the Hawks) . Then the words meander through random combinations and disconnected fragments and images (' people just get uglier ' ; ' banjo eyes ' ; ' he was carrying a 22 but it was only a single shot ') , before , in Dylan 's own hand , amid many crossings @-@ out , there appears ' Oh MAMA you 're here IN MOBILE ALABAMA with the Memphis blues again ' . "

Inside the studio , the song evolved through several musical revisions . Heylin writes , " It is the song 's arrangement , and not its lyrics , that occupies the musicians through the wee small hours . " On the fifth take , released in 2005 on the *No Direction Home* Soundtrack , midtake Dylan stumbles on the formula " Stuck inside of Mobile " on the fourth verse , and never goes back . The song contains two oft @-@ quoted pieces of Dylan 's philosophy : " Your debutante just knows what you need / But I know what you want " and " here I sit so patiently / Waiting to find out what price / You have to pay to get out of / Going through all these things twice " .

" Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat "

" Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " is a sarcastic satire on materialism , fashion and faddism . Done in Chicago @-@ blues style , the song derives its melody and part of its lyrics from Lightnin ' Hopkins 's " Automobile (Blues) " . Paul Williams writes that its misogynistic attitude is " moderated slightly when one realizes that jealous pique is the underlying emotion " . In the lyrics , the narrator observes his former lover in various situations wearing her " brand new leopard @-@ skin pill @-@ box hat " , at one point finding his doctor with her and later spying her making love with a new boyfriend because she " forgot to close the garage door " . In the closing lines , the narrator says he knows what her boyfriend really loves her for ? her hat .

The song evolved over the course of six takes in New York , 13 in the first Nashville session , and then one try on March 10 , the take used for the album . Dylan , who gets credit on the liner notes as lead guitarist , opens the song playing lead (on the center @-@ right stereo channel) ; however , Robertson handles the solos with a " searing " performance (on the left stereo channel) . A year following the recording , " Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " became the fifth single released from *Blonde on Blonde* , making it to number 81 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 .

" Just Like a Woman "

According to Wilentz 's analysis of the session 's tapes , Dylan felt his way into the lyrics of one of his most popular songs , singing " disconnected lines and semi @-@ gibberish " during the earlier takes . He was unsure what the person described in the song does that is just like a woman , rejecting " shakes " , " wakes " , and " makes mistakes " . This exploration of female wiles and feminine vulnerability was widely rumored ? " not least by her acquaintances among Andy Warhol 's *Factory* retinue " ? to be about Edie Sedgwick . The reference to Baby 's penchant for " fog ... amphetamine and ... pearls " suggests Sedgwick or some similar debutante , according to Heylin .

Discussing the lyrics , literary critic Christopher Ricks detects a " note of social exclusion " in the line " I was hungry and it was your world " . In response to the accusation that Dylan 's depiction of female strategies is misogynistic , Ricks asks , " Could there ever be any challenging art about men and women where the accusation just didn 't arise ? " The song reached number 33 in the US .

" Most Likely You Go Your Way And I 'll Go Mine "

A bright blues " stomper " about lovers parting , " Most Likely You Go Your Way And I 'll Go Mine " is one of the more literal songs Dylan recorded in his 1965 ? 66 period . The narrator has tired of carrying his lover and is going to let her " pass " . As in " Just Like a Woman " and " Absolutely Sweet Marie " , he waits until the end of each verse to deliver the punch line , which in this case

comes from the title . " Most Likely You Go Your Way " was issued as a single a year later , in March 1967 , on the B @-@ side of " Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " .

" Temporary Like Achilles "

This slow @-@ moving blues number is highlighted by Hargus " Pig " Robbins 's " dusky barrelhouse piano " and Dylan 's " brief wheeze of harmonica " . In the song , the narrator has been spurned by his lover , who has already taken up with her latest boyfriend . Referring to his rival as " Achilles " , the narrator senses the new suitor may end up being discarded as quickly as he was . The refrain that ends each of the main verses ? " Honey , why are you so hard ? " ? is a double entendre Dylan had been wanting to work into a song .

" Absolutely Sweet Marie "

This song , described as " up @-@ tempo blues shuffle , pure Memphis " and an example of " obvious pop sensibility and compulsive melody " , was recorded in four takes on March 7 , 1966 . Gill sees the lyrics as a series of sexual metaphors , including " beating on my trumpet " and keys to locked gates , many deriving from traditional blues . Nonetheless , the song contains what has been termed " one of the most oft @-@ repeated of Dylan 's life lessons " , the thought that " to live outside the law you must be honest " , which was later invoked in many bohemian and counter @-@ cultural contexts .

" 4th Time Around "

When The Beatles released their sixth studio album , Rubber Soul , in December 1965 , John Lennon 's song " Norwegian Wood " attracted attention for the way in which Lennon disguised his account of an illicit affair in cryptic , Dylanesque language . Dylan sketched out a response to the song , also in 3 / 4 time , copying the tune and circular structure , but taking Lennon 's tale in a darker direction . Wilentz describes the result as sounding " like Bob Dylan impersonating John Lennon impersonating Bob Dylan " .

" Obviously 5 Believers "

" Obviously 5 Believers " , Blonde on Blonde 's second @-@ to @-@ last track , is a roadhouse blues love song similar in melody and structure to Memphis Minnie 's " Me and My Chauffeur Blues " , and was described by Robert Shelton as " the best R & B song on the album " . Recorded in the early morning hours of the March 9 ? 10 Nashville session under the working title " Black Dog Blues " , the song is driven by Robertson 's guitar , Charley McCoy 's harmonica and Ken Buttrey 's drumming . After an initial breakdown , Dylan complained to the band that the song was " very easy , man " and that he didn 't want to spend much time on it . Within four takes , the recording was done .

" Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands "

Written in the CBS recording studio in Nashville over the space of eight hours on the night of February 15 ? 16 , " Sad Eyed Lady " eventually occupied the whole of side four of Blonde On Blonde . Critics have observed that " Lowlands " hints at " Lownds " , and Dylan biographer Robert Shelton wrote that this was a " wedding song " for Sara Lownds , whom Dylan had married just three months earlier . In his paean to his wife , " Sara " , written in 1975 , Dylan amends history slightly to claim that he stayed " up for days in the Chelsea Hotel / Writin ' ' Sad @-@ Eyed Lady of the Lowlands ' for you " .

When Dylan played Shelton the song , shortly after recording it , he claimed , " This is the best song I 've ever written . " Around the same time , Dylan enthused to journalist Jules Siegel , " Just listen to that ! That 's old @-@ time religious carnival music ! " However , in 1969 , Dylan confessed to Rolling Stone 's editor , Jann Wenner , " I just sat down at a table and started writing ... And I just got carried away with the whole thing ... I just started writing and I couldn 't stop . After a period of time , I forgot what it was all about , and I started trying to get back to the beginning [laughs] . "

Heard by some listeners as a hymn to an other @-@ worldly woman , for Shelton " her travails seem beyond endurance , yet she radiates an inner strength , an ability to be reborn . This is Dylan at his most romantic . " Wilentz comments that Dylan 's writing had shifted from the days when he asked questions and supplied answers . Like the verses of William Blake 's " Tyger " , Dylan asks a series of questions about the " Sad Eyed Lady " but never supplies any answers .

= = = Outtakes and The Cutting Edge = = =

The following outtakes were recorded during the Blonde on Blonde sessions .

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 Blonde on Blonde sessions , from October 5 , 1965 , to March 10 , 1966 .

The New York sessions comprise : two takes of " Medicine Sunday " , one take of " Jet Pilot " , twelve takes of " Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window ? " , seven takes of " I Wanna Be Your Lover " , fourteen takes of " Visions of Johanna " , sixteen takes of " She 's Your Lover Now " , four takes of " Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " , twenty @-@ four takes of " One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later) " , one take of " I 'll Keep It with Mine " , and one take of " Lunatic Princess " .

The Nashville sessions comprise : twenty takes of " Fourth Time Around " , four takes of " Visions of Johanna " , fourteen takes of " Leopard @-@ Skin Pill @-@ Box Hat " , four takes of " Sad @-@ Eyed Lady of the Lowlands " , fifteen takes of " Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again " , three takes of " Absolutely Sweet Marie " , eighteen takes of " Just Like a Woman " , three takes of " Pledging My Time " , six takes of " Most Likely You Go Your Way (And I 'll Go Mine) " , four takes of " Temporary Like Achilles " , four takes of " Obviously Five Believers " , five takes of " I Want You " , and one take of " Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35 " . The 18 CDs also contain brief recordings of guitar and keyboard inserts .

Describing the process of listening to all these alternative versions , Neil McCormick wrote : " The Cutting Edge allows fans to bear witness to perhaps the most astonishing explosion of language and sound in rock history , a new approach to song being forged before our very ears . "

= = Cover photo = =

The cover photo of Blonde on Blonde shows a 12 @-@ by @-@ 12 inch close @-@ up portrait of Dylan . The double album gatefold sleeve opens to form a 12 @-@ by @-@ 26 inch photo of the artist , at three quarter length . The artist 's name and the album 's title only appear on the spine . A sticker was applied to the shrink wrap to promote the release 's two hit singles , " I Want You " and " Rainy Day Women # 12 & 35 " .

The cover shows Dylan in front of a brick building , wearing a suede jacket and a black and white checkered scarf . The jacket is the same one he wore on his next two albums , John Wesley Harding and Nashville Skyline . The photographer , Jerry Schatzberg , described how the photo was taken :

I wanted to find an interesting location outside of the studio . We went to the west side , where the Chelsea art galleries are now . At the time it was the meat packing district of New York and I liked the look of it . It was freezing and we were very cold . The frame he chose for the cover is blurred and out of focus . Of course everyone was trying to interpret the meaning , saying it must represent getting high on an LSD trip . It was none of the above ; we were just cold and the two of us were shivering . There were other images that were sharp and in focus but , to his credit , Dylan liked that photograph .

Research by rock historian Bob Egan suggests the location of the cover photo was at 375 West Street , at the extreme west of Greenwich Village . The original inside gatefold featured nine black @-@ and @-@ white photos , all taken by Schatzberg and selected for the sleeve by Dylan himself . A shot of actress Claudia Cardinale from Schatzberg 's portfolio was included but later withdrawn because it had been used without her authorization and Cardinale 's representatives threatened to sue , making the original record sleeve a collector 's item . Dylan included a self @-@ portrait by Schatzberg as a credit to the photographer . The photos , for Gill , added up to " a shadowy glimpse of [Dylan 's] life , including an enigmatic posed shot of Dylan holding a small portrait of a woman in one hand and a pair of pliers in the other : they all contributed to the album 's air of reclusive yet

sybaritic genius . "

= = Release = =

Blonde on Blonde reached the Top 10 in both the US and UK album charts , and also spawned a number of hits that restored Dylan to the upper echelons of the singles charts . In August 1967 , the album was certified as a gold disc .

Pete Johnson in the Los Angeles Times wrote , " Dylan is a superbly eloquent writer of pop and folk songs with an unmatched ability to press complex ideas and iconoclastic philosophy into brief poetic lines and startling images . " The editor of Crawdaddy ! , Paul Williams , reviewed Blonde on Blonde in July 1966 : " It is a cache of emotion , a well handled package of excellent music and better poetry , blended and meshed and ready to become part of your reality . Here is a man who will speak to you , a 1960s bard with electric lyre and color slides , but a truthful man with x @-@ ray eyes you can look through if you want . All you have to do is listen . "

To accompany the songbook of Blonde on Blonde , Paul Nelson wrote an introduction stating , " The very title suggests the singularity and the duality we expect from Dylan . For Dylan 's music of illusion and delusion ? with the tramp as explorer and the clown as happy victim , where the greatest crimes are lifelessness and the inability to see oneself as a circus performer in the show of life ? has always carried within it its own inherent tensions ... Dylan in the end truly UNDERSTANDS situations , and once one truly understands anything , there can no longer be anger , no longer be moralizing , but only humor and compassion , only pity . "

= = = Date uncertainty = = =

The dating of the album 's release is uncertain . May 16 , 1966 , has been widely accepted as the official release date ; however , Michael Gray , author of The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia , disputes this . Gray maintains the earliest Blonde on Blonde was available was late June or early July . This coincides with the album 's promotion in Billboard , which carried a full @-@ page Columbia advertisement on June 25 , selected the album as a " New Action LP " on July 9 , and ran a review and article on July 16 . The album debuted on Billboard 's Top LP 's chart on July 23 at # 101 ? just six days before Dylan 's motorcycle accident in Woodstock removed him from public view . Roger Ford posits it highly unlikely that a new Bob Dylan album in the mid @-@ 1960s would take a full two months to finally rack up enough weekly sales to appear on the album chart ; another iconic contemporary LP which also has an official 1966 release date of May 16 , Pet Sounds by The Beach Boys , entered the Billboard LP chart less than two weeks after release on May 28 at # 105 . Clinton Heylin argues that early July is the probable release date , stating that an overdub on " Fourth Time Around " was recorded in June . Blonde on Blonde has been described as rock 's first studio double LP by a major artist .

= = Retrospective assessment and legacy = =

Twelve years after its release , Dylan said : " The closest I ever got to the sound I hear in my mind was on individual bands in the Blonde on Blonde album . It 's that thin , that wild mercury sound . It 's metallic and bright gold , with whatever that conjures up . " For critics , the double album was seen as the last installment in Dylan 's trilogy of mid @-@ 1960s rock albums . As Janet Maslin wrote , " The three albums of this period ? Bringing It All Back Home and Highway 61 Revisited both released in 1965 , and Blonde on Blonde from 1966 ? used their electric instrumentation and rock arrangements to achieve a crashing exuberance Dylan hadn 't approached before . " Mike Marqusee has described Dylan 's output between late 1964 and the summer of 1966 , when he recorded these three albums , as " a body of work that remains unique in popular music . " For Patrick Humphries , " Dylan 's body of work during the 14 @-@ months period ... stands unequalled in rock 's 30 @-@ year history . In substance , style , ambition and achievement , no one has even come close to matching Bringing It All Back Home , Highway 61 Revisited and Blonde on Blonde . "

Dylan scholar Michael Gray wrote : " To have followed up one masterpiece with another was Dylan 's history making achievement here ... Where Highway 61 Revisited has Dylan exposing and confronting like a laser beam in surgery , descending from outside the sickness , Blonde on Blonde offers a persona awash inside the chaos ... We 're tossed from song to song ... The feel and the music are on a grand scale , and the language and delivery are a unique mixture of the visionary and the colloquial . " Critic Tim Riley wrote : " A sprawling abstraction of eccentric blues revisionism , Blonde on Blonde confirms Dylan 's stature as the greatest American rock presence since Elvis Presley . " Biographer Robert Shelton saw the album as " a hallmark collection that completes his first major rock cycle , which began with Bringing It All Back Home " . Summing up the album 's achievement , Shelton wrote that Blonde on Blonde " begins with a joke and ends with a hymn ; in between wit alternates with a dominant theme of entrapment by circumstances , love , society , and unrealized hope ... There 's a remarkable marriage of funky , bluesy rock expressionism , and Rimbaud @-@ like visions of discontinuity , chaos , emptiness , loss , being ' stuck ' . "

That sense of crossing cultural boundaries was , for Al Kooper , at the heart of Blonde on Blonde : " [Bob Dylan] was the quintessential New York hipster ? what was he doing in Nashville ? It didn 't make any sense whatsoever . But you take those two elements , pour them into a test tube , and it just exploded . " For Mike Marqusee , Dylan had succeeded in combining traditional blues material with modernist literary techniques : " [Dylan] took inherited idioms and boosted them into a modernist stratosphere . ' Pledging My Time ' and ' Obviously 5 Believers ' adhered to blues patterns that were venerable when Dylan first encountered them in the mid @-@ fifties (both begin with the ritual Delta invocation of " early in the mornin ") . Yet like ' Visions of Johanna ' or ' Memphis Blues Again ' , these songs are beyond category . They are allusive , repetitive , jaggedly abstract compositions that defy reduction . "

Blonde on Blonde has been consistently highly placed in polls of the greatest albums of all time . In 1974 , the writers of NME voted Blonde on Blonde the number @-@ two album of all time . Demonstrating the transitory nature of such polls , in 1997 the album was placed at number 16 in a " Music of the Millennium " poll conducted by HMV , Channel 4 , The Guardian and Classic FM . In 2006 , TIME magazine included the record on their 100 All @-@ TIME Albums list . In 2003 , the album was ranked number nine on Rolling Stone magazine 's list of " The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time " . In 2004 , two songs from the album also appeared on the magazine 's list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " : " Just Like a Woman " ranked number 230 and " Visions of Johanna " number 404 . (When Rolling Stone updated this list in 2010 , " Just Like a Woman " dropped to number 232 and " Visions of Johanna " to number 413 .) The album was additionally included in critic Robert Dimery 's book 1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die .

= = Track listing = =

All songs written by Bob Dylan .

= = Personnel = =

The personnel involved in making Blonde on Blonde is subject to some discrepancy :

Bob Dylan ? vocals , guitar , harmonica , piano

Additional musicians

Bill Aikins ? keyboards

Wayne Butler ? trombone

Kenneth Buttrey ? drums

Rick Danko or Bill Lee ? bass guitar (New York)

Bobby Gregg ? drums (New York)

Paul Griffin ? piano (New York)

Jerry Kennedy ? guitar

Al Kooper ? organ , guitar

Charlie McCoy ? bass guitar , guitar , harmonica , trumpet

Wayne Moss ? guitar , vocals
Hargus " Pig " Robbins ? piano , keyboards
Robbie Robertson ? guitar , vocals
Henry Strzelecki ? bass guitar
Joe South ? bass guitar , guitar
Technical personnel
Bob Johnston ? production
Jerry Schatzberg ? cover photographer

= = Charts = =

Singles