

Published June 03 2010

CD review: ‘Different’ does Dylan well

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By: **John Ziegler**, Duluth News Tribune

Bob Dylan just turned 69 years young last week, on May 24.

I think of the countless cover versions of his material, some of which sound so reverential that I wonder if the artist is actually worried that Bob’s going to write them a poison-pen letter about what they’ve done to his song when he hears it.

Ben Sidran, on his new release “Dylan Different,” sounds refreshingly unafraid of Zimmy the Great, and launches into many of his classics with inspiration, irreverence and spontaneity that oddly, I think, Dylan (being Dylan) would dig. I think nothing would bore him more than a note-perfect reproduction of something he’s already done.

“Tangled Up In Blue” has an almost Brian Wilson (of “Pet Sounds” era) intro and relaxed feel with drum sticks on rims, smooth female backing vocals, a very cool Fender Rhodes solo. ... It’s nothing like acoustic guitar strummy original from “Blood On The Tracks.”

“Rainy Day Woman #12 & 35” (what did the title of this mid-’60s classic have to do with the lyrics??) in Sidran’s hands has an almost Sergio Mendes pop-bossa flavor and has Georgie Fame helping on vocals and organ. There isn’t the hilarity of the originals vocal, it’s a bit more serious business with pan flutes and lots of animated percussion, but it gets the spirit of the tune across.

A condensed “Ballad of a Thin Man” features a great bass clarinet solo from Bob Malach that lends an elegance vastly different from the dark, dirgy original.

“Highway 61 Revisited” is set up over standard blues changes and simmers with electricity as Sidran’s Wurlitzer and Burger’s slide guitar talk back and forth. Sidran’s hushed vocals contrast markedly with the way Bob spit it out

in 1965.

“Knockin’ On Heaven’s Door” features trumpeter Michael Leonhart’s tasty ride, while Sidran seems to be in Bob Marley mode with the text.

“On The Road Again” (one of those unheralded blues gems from the “Bringing It All Back Home” disc) is smokin’ here with Rodolphe Burger’s guitar solo and Sidran’s funkified keys kicked along by Alberto Malo’s driving percussion.

“All I Really want To Do” (which was piano-y on “Another Side”) is taken to church on “Different” with gospel-y piano chords and great horn arrangements that would have done the right Rev. James Cleveland proud. The overall effect seems like something that Randy Newman would have done with the tune if asked to contribute to one of the many Dylan cover compilations.

Imagine no acoustic guitar on “Blowin’ in the Wind”; it’s easy if you try. Sidran makes the tune sound like he was listening to John Lennon’s classic “Imagine” then recorded “Blowin’” using that stately, elegant acoustic grand piano style. It’s a great mixture of two iconic tunes.

The back cover of the disc is a photo of a contemplative Dylan by Barry Feinstein from the “Don’t Look back” era. Were he to spend a few moments reflecting on “Dylan Different,” I think Bob would give Ben a thumbs-up for imagination and musicianship on his treatment of a dozen of his creations and probably croak out a “nice job.”

Ben Sidran / “Dylan Different”

Genre: Americana

Label: Nardis Records

Produced by: Leo Sidran

Recorded at: Studio Klein Leberau (Sainte-Marie Aux Mines, France)

Website: www.bensidran.com

Personnel: Ben Sidran (vocals, keyboards), Alberto Malo (drums, percussion), Marcello Giuliani (bass), Rodolphe Burger (guitar, vocals), Bob Malach (reeds), Michael Leonhart (trumpet), Amy Helm (backing vocals), Georgie Fame (vocals, organ), Jorge Drexler (vocals), Leo Sidran (keyboards, horn arrangements)