



The Dylanologists: Adventures in the Land of Bob

David Kinney

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Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist David Kinney enters into the world of obsessive Bob Dylan followers (aka the “Dylanologists”) to deliver an immersive work on the artist’s singular impact on American culture.

FAN: “You don’t know who I am, but I know who you are.”

BOB DYLAN: “Let’s keep it that way.”

Bob Dylan is the most influential songwriter of our time and, after a half century, he remains a cultural touchstone, an enigma, and the subject of endless fascination. From the moment he arrived on the music scene, he attracted an intensely fanatical cult following, and in *The Dylanologists*, Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist David Kinney ventures deep into this eccentric subculture to answer a question: What can Dylan’s grip on his most enthusiastic listeners tell us about his towering place in American culture?

Kinney introduces us to a vibrant underground: diggers searching for unheard tapes and lost manuscripts, researchers obsessing over the facts of Dylan’s life and career, writers working to decode unyieldingly mysterious songs, road warriors who meticulously record and dissect every concert. It’s an affectionate mania, but as far as Dylan is concerned, a mania nonetheless. Over the years, the intensely private and fiercely combative musician has been frightened, annoyed, and perplexed by fans who try to peel back his layers. He has made at least one thing crystal clear: He does not wish to be known.

The story of Dylan’s followers is also a revealing portrait of the artist himself. Here, reflected in the fans he inspired and the cultural movements he helped create, is every twist and turn in a career that has swerved from lefty activist to ultra-hip spokesman for a generation to woodsy recluse, from secular storyteller to fire-breathing Christian evangelist, from punch line to elder statesman. Dylan may refuse to explain himself to his followers, but their lives have become mirrors of his, so profoundly are their stories intertwined.

Told with tremendous insight, intelligence, and warmth, by turns funny and affecting, *The Dylanologists* is ultimately a book about our universal quest for meaning. It is populated by characters both legendary and obscure, from aging hippies to idealistic twentysomethings and everyone in between—a young woman who, stirred by Dylan, attends law school and becomes a public defender; a man who crams his New York City apartment with memorabilia, transforming it into a pilgrimage spot for Dylan fanatics; a woman inspired by her hero’s redemptive music to go clean after years of drug use. Here is a joyous, soulful, and poignant exploration of the origins and meaning of fandom, the healing power of art, and the importance of embracing what moves you, whatever that may be.

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