

BOB DYLAN AND CHANGING TIMES

Train A-Travelin'

WRITTEN BY: BOB DYLAN

There's an iron train a-travelin' that's been a-rollin' through the years
With a firebox of hatred and a furnace full of fears
If you ever heard its sound or seen its blood-red broken frame
Then you heard my voice a-singin' and you know my name

Did you ever stop to wonder 'bout the hatred that it holds?
Did you ever see its passengers, its crazy mixed-up souls?
Did you ever start a-thinkin' that you gotta stop that train?
Then you heard my voice a-singin' and you know my name

Do you ever get tired of the preachin' sounds of fear
When they're hammered at your head and pounded in your ear?
Have you ever asked about it and not been answered plain?
Then you heard my voice a-singin' and you know my name

I'm a-wonderin' if the leaders of the nations understand
This murder-minded world that they're leavin' in my hands
Have you ever laid awake at night and wondered 'bout the same?
Then you've heard my voice a-singin' and you know my name

Have you ever had it on your lips or said it in your head
That the person standin' next to you just might be misled?
Does the raving of the maniacs make your insides go insane?
Then you've heard my voice a-singin' and you know my name

Do the kill-crazy bandits and the haters get you down?
Does the preachin' and the politics spin your head around?
Does the burning of the buses give your heart a pain?
Then you've heard my voice a-singin' and you know my name

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When we decided that the Music Committee and Choir would sponsor a Bob Dylan music Sunday, I knew that he had been one of the most important voices of opposition to the Vietnam War and protest in the 1960s. I still remembered chords to Blowin' in the Wind and I remembered The Times They are a Changin' but I couldn't have listed any of his other songs, of which there are hundreds published in some 37 albums. The precipitating incident was the announcement that he had won the Nobel Prize, but the timing as it turns out for this inauguration weekend is more than fitting. As I read through some of his collected lyrics, it struck me again and again how much his words fit our own time. I couldn't bring myself to watch the inauguration of President Trump on Friday, and it is with profound sadness I said farewell to President Obama. Our times are changing, and almost certainly not for the better. The racism, sexism, and heterosexism of the 1960s has returned with a vengeance through the course of Trump's election campaign and we seem to be entering a very difficult time for the poor, the elderly, the sick, anyone who is different, and even the middle class.

In the 60s and early 70s I was afraid for myself and my friends, but now a half century later it is for my children and grandchildren and their generations that I fear. These are not rational times, not days in which we even dare hope that science and reason will prevail. No, we have entered a magical time driven by fear, denial, and escapism. Our nation has elected and now inaugurated a President whose promises are so full of lies and in such contrast to everything he has done throughout his life that we can only assume that a kind of magical thinking must have possessed his supporters. And of course the courts again stopped any recounts that might otherwise explain his electoral college win against Hillary's 3 million vote popular victory. Is Trump merely a clown and perhaps a puppet of Putin, or is he now the face of evil in our time?

Bob Dylan's songs of the 60s addressed times like these, another period in which corporate interests, insurance companies and big oil have a big hand in politics and healthcare, poverty and racism, and warfare and the military industrial and information complexes hold amazing power.

Bob Dylan spoke to the people, as did so many of his contemporaries, with warnings of the dangers of the path our nation had taken. Blowin' in the Wind questioned so much of the path taken by the leaders of that time, while Times They are a Changin' warned of the risks that we and our nation were taking. His were not comfortable reassuring melodies, but gritty gravelly songs for a time of fire and ice. Is it any wonder today that Game of Thrones is so popular in its portrayal of a time when men were men and dragons breathed fire, and the person most feared is a woman riding a dragon? But, I digress!

Bob Dylan brought an energy that spoke to his time, a time of the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, and the era that assassinated two Kennedys, Malcolm X, and King. The 1960s were a time of transition, a time when women and blacks were claiming their own rights, a time of protest and upheaval.

The election of Trump can easily be seen as backlash for the ravages of the modern oil wars, and the clash of civilizations, the gaping and widening chasm between rich and poor, the corporate funded opposition to the almost universal agreement in the scientific community about climate change. The thing that continues to amaze me is that so many people believed that Trump would actually "empty the swamp" and make things better. Perhaps they will be shocked back into reality as they give up healthcare, social security, and any hope of ever retiring. Oh yes, these will be challenging times and justice and compassion are already in short supply. The Times They are a Changing.

Bob Dylan is 75 and the world of the 1960s is half a century gone, but so many of the challenges of those times have come around again and we have even more need for prophets who will speak truth to the people. So many people are in for such a surprise as Trump and his cronies take over the government. So much that we have worked for is just Blowin' in the Wind and the Times they are a Changing!

What will it take to cut through all the fake news to get people's attention? Who can speak with a voice that younger generations will hear? This is a challenge for all of us today and it will not be going away soon with melting icecaps, rising seas, polluted air and climate change deniers in charge. Even if our hair has turned gray and we have to stop to take naps, even if we are tired and discouraged, it is up to us to get out of our easy chairs and stand up and make a difference. Life and our planet and our grandchildren are all too precious to not try to make a difference.

Millions of women of all ages, many wearing pink pussy hats, along with many men, marched in protest yesterday in Washington, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, and all over the country! We have a long walk ahead to justice. If there are new songs, wonderful, but if not, Bob Dylan's songs can still inspire us to speak, march, demonstrate, and change the world. Now is the time and we are the ones we've been waiting for!

Go out in Peace, go out and bring Hope! Amen!