

Uncle Bob in Lund



Of all our family members, it is really only Uncle Bob who regularly comes to visit. He visited us when we lived in Shanghai, in north London and now in Lund. Yes, he was in Lund last night, our little medieval university town in southern Sweden. I brought Diane and two daughters. Blood is thicker than water.

Bob has once again reinvented himself. “Why change me now?” he asks in a borrowed Sinatra lyric, but it is not us trying to change him as much as he continuously changing himself. At the age of 75 that’s pretty remarkable. Those who are not busy being born are a-busy dying. And Bob Dylan is not dying.

He has, however, gotten quite a bit older since we saw him in Helsingborg three years ago. He moves more slowly on stage. He dances – yes, dances – but it’s all a bit awkward. And he has to leave the keyboard and stand in the middle of the stage with his legs wide apart in order to be able to belt out the

jazz standards which now feature as a regular part of his repertoire.

The jazz standards are not bad. Dylan's raspy voice works well in combination with the silky smooth arrangements. And yet, I can't help thinking that he is doing karaoke. Dylan karaoke is better than most kinds of karaoke, and I respect him deeply for doing what he wants to do, but it does sound to me like a hobby project rather than something to take with him around the world.

The real reinvention, however, concerns his transformation from a blues and rock 'n roll artist into a sort of vaudeville performer. He and the band are playing circus music, in a Sergeant Pepper vein, or in the style of [Bertold Brecht](#) and [Kurt Weill](#). You fully expect acrobats, jugglers and bearded ladies to come on stage. Yet it is not festive as much as grimy – “After Midnight” – grim – “Paying in Blood” – and sad – “Long and Wasted Years.” The furrows in the face of the clown have grown deep, the make-up of the septuagenarian prostitute is running. It's a remarkable world into which Bob inserts the songs from his 1960s song-book as well as the new Sinatra classics. Yes, they all fit, and thanks to the tight accompaniment of the band and the imaginative arrangements of the songs it's always interesting.

But how good is it? I like my blues rock and the Dylan who stopped by here in Sweden only a few years ago was a first-rate blues and rock man. I liked his harmonica playing, for one thing, but there was no harmonica in sight last night and he made no pretense at playing guitar. The clothes are the same as before – that riverboat gambler outfit – but the band members should really be wearing jester's costumes. I must confess, the vaudeville musician Bob Dylan is all in all less interesting to me than the bluesman, but OMG, he remains endlessly creative, enigmatic and remarkable. We are lucky that he still comes to visit. Come back soon uncle Bob, we already miss you.

