He Told Me One Time: I’m A Poet, Not A Singer.

This collection contains Bob Dylan’s lyrics, from his first album, Bob Dylan, to 2001’s Love and Theft.

My Personal Review:
I became a Dylan fan in the early 60s. While in Junior College and working for the student newspaper, I was assigned the task of interviewing him - without an appointment - when he came to perform in the town where that JC was. I grabbed a tape recorder, sat with some friends to create a short list of questions we thought would be fun for him to respond to - and on the assigned evening, I set out to interview him.

I made it to the security gate where I was summarily turned away. Thinking myself clever, I argued, joked and tried to talk my way in - and failed. So, I sat outside (I had no ticket to the show itself) until it was over - then, some three hours after I first arrived, I recognized Dylan, surrounded by a small army of devotees and sycophants, coming out of the stage door. Bravely, I approached him - tape recorder turned on and microphone in hand - trying to remember just one of the many clever questions my friends and I had concocted. All I could get to come out was, Hi! I’m from the local J.C. Would you please say something about yourself? He actually stopped, looked at me (I think) through VERY dark glasses and said, clear as a bell, I’m a poet - not a singer. I believe this volume demonstrates that rather nicely.

On first hearing me play a Dylan album, my dad, who had never - so far as I know - spent one day on a farm, said That sounds like a lamb with his gonads caught in a barbed wire fence. Maybe he was right. The beauty of this volume is that it is unfettered with music - either written or sung. Just as the title says, it is Lyrics.... words .... poems ..... stories told in certain rhythm and meter. As such, they read purely - without the attempt to convey them as song or himself as a singer. I read the book from cover to cover and actually use it as a lyric book to create my own versions of the lyrical tales he told that are recorded here.
Some are simple: some complex: some perhaps deliberately confusing, inconsistent and mind-twisting. Others are basic - a few even sweet and naively young. Some angry, some narrative, more than a few visionary. But whatever else they are or are not, they are poems - each and every one of them - and, as such, I believe they stand on their own ... without the music he gave them - mostly, as I understand it, after the fact.

Read this way, as a poetic autobiography, I think those interested - or even enamored- with Bob Dylan and his work, will find this volume to be a real treasure trove of pure expressiveness. It has already achieved a special place - in my library, in front of me while I have a guitar in hand - or simply in my lap, as I read and try to appreciate the purist Dylan we have to remember the times, and perhaps ourselves, with.

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