

Dylan Returns to Garden With Rolling Thunder Revue in Benefit for Carter

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Late on Jan. 31, 1974, at the end of his last show at Madison Square Garden during his tour with the Band, Bob Dylan made a promise. Dressed in a blue and white Toronto Maple Leafs jersey, he leaned into the microphone just before he dashed offstage and said, "See ya next year."

For a while, it didn't look as if he would keep that promise. And then even after news of his furtive Rolling Thunder Revue tour of the Northeast leaked out, the word from the Dylan camp was that New York wasn't on the itinerary.

But last night Mr. Dylan, the entire Rolling Thunder Revue and a host of celebrities—some onstage and some in the audience—did indeed give a concert at the Garden.

A benefit for Rubin (Hurricane) Carter, the imprisoned former boxer, it simultaneously called attention to Mr. Carter's plight, rekindled the links between artists and politics that had been shaky since the 1960's and made a notable climax to one of the most significant tours in Mr. Dylan's extraordinary career.

What the concert lacked in consistency it made up as a broadly inclusive compendium of musicians united in a cause. For all of the inevitable slow moments when guests shunt in and out of the spotlight, it made for a long, relaxed yet—in Mr. Dylan's parts, at least—zany, high-energy, high-intensity good time.

Achieved Its Purpose

Mr. Carter had said last week from his prison in Clinton, N.J., that the prime purpose of the event was to attract attention, and to judge from the number of celebrities and press on hand, the concert achieved attention in full measure.

Prominent political figures on the guest list included Representatives Edward I. Koch, Herman Badillo and Charles B. Rangel; Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson of Newark; Percy Sutton, Borough President of Manhattan; Comptroller Harrison J. Goldin, Paul O'Dwyer, President of the City Council. Coretta King was a last-minute addition to the list.

Athletes on the guest list included several New York Knicks—Earl Monroe, Walt Frazier, Bill Bradley—and Joe Frazier, the boxer. Among the show-business personalities were Candice Bergen, Ellen Burstyn, Dyan Cannon and Melba Moore.

The concert itself had been anticipated with a rare interest by Mr. Dylan's many admirers. Tickets were sold out within half a day, even with minimal publicity, a limit of two a person and sales only at the Garden box office. Scalping was reported active through brokers and yesterday in the vicinity of the Garden, with \$12.50 tickets going for as high as \$75.

Inside, the tension was high, although as in all pop concerts, the audience filed in late and the Garden wasn't full when



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Muhammad Ali talking on telephone with Rubin Carter during benefit at Madison Square Garden. At the left is Mrs. Carter.

the concert began at 8:18 P.M. One had the impression that the vast bulk of the young crowd had come to see and hear a concert with a lot of big names, not out of any particular belief in Mr. Carter's cause.

The concert fell roughly into the same pattern as all the shows on the tour from the very first, in Plymouth, Mass., on Oct. 30, although nearly everything sounded tighter and more purposeful than it had been, with really good sound, at least from this observer's seat.

There was an hour of songs by the various members of the back-up band led by Bob Neuwirth and joined successively by Ronnie Blakley and Joni Mitchell, who had canceled another engagement in Los Angeles in order to be there. Miss Mitchell sang three songs on her own and one with the band.

The overtly political portion of the bill took up the next 20 minutes. Muhammad Ali spoke briefly and cheerfully, commending the predominantly white crowd and saying that it had "the connections and the complexion to get the protection" for Mr. Carter.

Mr. Ali then spoke with Mr. Carter by telephone, the prisoner's voice amplified for the audience to hear. There was a brief round of introductions of other figures in the Carter cause, including his wife and daughter, and the musical show continued with Jack Elliott, the sweet-voiced country cowboy from Brooklyn. (Roger McGuinn, the ex-Byrd, had joined the band on banjo.)

Mr. Dylan himself, in white face and a lavishly flowered, feathered Pat Garrett hat, shirt out and weaving playfully about the stage, came on at 9:57 o'clock. He joined Mr. Neuwirth

in a duet of "When I Paint My Masterpiece" and continued with six more of his own songs before the intermission. Robbie Robertson joined in for one of them on guitar.

After the break, Joan Baez and Mr. Dylan did some duets, followed by Miss Baez on her own, more confident than five weeks ago but still oddly out of place. And then Roberta Flack—hardly an artist one associates with Mr. Dylan—and her musicians offered three songs. The original band returned, first with Mr. McGuinn as lead singer, then with Miss Baez again. Mr. Dylan then took the stage for another long, final set of his own, ending with a communal rendition of Woody Guthrie's "This Is Your Land," as all these shows have done.

Rolling Thunder Revue shows in previous cities have lasted up to five hours, but last night's concert lasted four and one half hours exactly. Rumored appearances by John Lennon, George Harrison, Ray Charles and Marvin Gaye did not materialize, although Richie Havens did show up for the finale. Mr. Carter was imprisoned along with John Artis in 1967 for the slaying of three men in Paterson, N.J. in 1966. The principal witnesses in the case have since recanted their testimony, but Mr. Carter has been denied a new trial. George Lois, executive director of the Hurricane Fund, said that Mr. Carter's defense hoped to net \$100,000 from last night's concert.

The real gain for Mr. Carter's friends was publicity, however, and that had been achieved even before the concert. "We already had good New York and New Jersey press," Mr. Lois said. "But this concert has given

us national and international coverage." The Carter people's desire for publicity and the Dylan people's characteristic secretiveness, inspired by the singer himself, have caused some unusual clashes, with the press being encouraged by the other.

"I think it goes against Bob's grain," Mr. Lois said. "He doesn't want that kind of attention, but he wants attention for Rubin. It has been a little weird, but I love him for doing it at all."

When word about the Rolling Thunder Revue first came out, it seemed as if it would play mostly in clubs and small halls. In fact, it has played 30 performances in 22 cities in all (counting last night but not counting the Clinton prison date), split fairly evenly between halls seating around 3,000 and arenas seating between 10,000 and 20,000. The tour's size has provoked some cynicism and charges of hypocrisy, especially since Mr. Dylan's friends and tour members have been more enthusiastic than usual with their populist rhetoric and assertions of Mr. Dylan's selflessness. There are reportedly three films being made, at least some which may well make money, and Mr. Dylan is apparently thinking of renewing the tour in Europe two months from now. The stories of warm good feelings among tour members have been partially purchased by a skulking, in-crowd exclusivism, and there have been persistent tales of dissension and ego clashes, too. That shouldn't obscure the tour's virtues, both musical and symbolic. Like the Bangladesh benefit in 1974, this concert

kept the flames of artistic involvement in political causes alive for the 1970's. And the whole tour and Mr. Dylan's "Hurricane" single have indicated a resurgence of his own interest in such questions, long eclipsed by more personal private matters.

Similarly the tour was an affirmation of the old Dylan rootlessness, and an indication that he hadn't allowed the tenuous, pranks, hippie side of his nature to be squashed by himself.

the pressures of fame. And the several new Dylan songs are the most promising indication yet that Mr. Dylan has more to give as a writer.

With this tour and with last night's marathon concert, Mr. Dylan has reinvigorated the flagging New York folk-rock scene, and he may well have reinvigorated the fashion of political commitment among artists. Most important of all, however, he has reinvigorated