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## Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by lostchords - 2008/01/13 22:25

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"If Not For You" remains one of Dylan's most touching love songs, first recorded in a slow version (which is still unreleased) in March 1970 with only piano and bass (with violin and pedal steel overdubbed later).

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mp3

<http://www.sendspace.com/file/exv9r8>

Concert For Bangla Desh Outtake (with George Harrison)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdvjolfGViU>

Barb Jungr

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-9p3R13suY>  
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"If Not For You" reworks the classic topic "I can't live without you". Precursors were songs like Irving Berlin's "I Can't Do Without You" (1928) and "With You" (1929):

"With you, a sunny day;  
without you, clouds in the sky

With you, castles that fall  
With you, I can't go wrong

Without you, I'm just nothing at all"

Buddy DeSylva, Lew Brown and Ray Henderson said it in 1928 in a more humorous way:

"You're the cream in my coffee,  
You're the salt in my stew  
You will always be my necessity,  
I'd be lost without you"

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Ben Selvin's Orchestra, You're the Cream In My Coffee (1928)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5z93Zird4cA>

Marlene Dietrich, You're The Cream In My Coffee (live, 1972)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXUytDePoZs>  
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Another related song is "Never Let Me Go" (1956) by Jay Evans and Ray Livingstone, recorded for example by Nat King Cole:

Never let me go  
Love me much too much  
If you let me go  
Life will lose its touch  
What would I be without you?

There's no place for me without you  
Never let me go  
I'd be so lost if you went away  
There'd be a thousand hours in a day without you  
I know

Because of one caress my world was overturned  
at the very start  
All my bridges burned by my flaming heart  
You'd never leave me would you?  
You couldn't hurt me could you?

Never let me go  
Never let me go

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a recording by Nancy Wilson at YouTube:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8XomwNUByQ>  
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The best and most interesting song from this family is Cole Porter's "After You, Who" (1932), written for the show "The Gay Divorce" and first performed and recorded by Fred Astaire.

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Fred Astaire, "After You, Who?" (1932)  
<http://www.sendspace.com/file/hvr5ss>

Henry Hall & The BBC Dance Orchestra (1933)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1uZo5XpDzk>  
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verse:  
Though with joy I should be reeling  
That at last you came my way,  
There's no further use concealing  
That I'm feeling far from gay.  
For the rare allure about you  
Makes me all the plainer see  
How inane, how vain, how empty life  
Without you would be.

refrain:  
After you, who  
Could supply my sky of blue?  
After you, who  
Could I love?  
After you, why  
Should I take the time to try,  
For who else could qualify  
After you, who?  
Hold my hand and swear  
You'll never cease to care,  
For without you there what could I do?  
I could search years  
But who else could change my tears  
Into laughter after you?

I don't know if there's a direct relationship to the lyrics of "If Not For You" , but it's the same basic topic and Porter is using a similar rhetoric: "For without you what could I do" is very close to "Without your love I'd be nowhere at all/Oh what would I do". And this comment about "After You, Who?" would at least partly be appropriate for "If Not For You":

"The music to which this simple yet touching lyric is set aptly approximates the emotional state of one who is joyfully in love and simultaneously saddened by the threat of losing the beloved Porter allows us to experience (or perhaps experience again) the melancholy that even the putative loss of a lover entails. What if I never met and fell in love with her ? How inane life would be. But a more frightened feeling emerges from words and music, which suggest that love might yet disappear. So the lover emphasizes a list of losses he would suffer if he were to loose the beloved . The fragility of love; the rarity of finding it; its capacity to light up the landscape; but the deeper darkness its disappearance occasions".

Other songs from "New Morning" were also built on models from mainstream popular music. "The Man In Me" is among Dylan's most successful attempts at writing a timeless Pop song and one of his best love songs, too.

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Bob Dylan, "The Man In Me" (San Remo, 1994)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvVq0Y0I6ec>  
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It's based on "On The Street Where You Live", written by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe for "My Fair Lady" (1956), and recorded in the 50s for example by Vic Damone and Nat King Cole. Especially the bridge owes a lot to Lerner and Loewe:

And oh, that towering feeling,  
Just to know somehow you are near  
The overpowering feeling  
That any second you may suddely appear

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Nat King Cole, On The Street Where You Live  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6A9Zdk4G4Jw>  
Vic Damone, On The Street Where You Live  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OileuQ7pie0>  
Ilse Huizinga, On The Street Where You Live (nice Jazz-version)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYeVgY66iMk>  
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Also the title track "New Morning" may be somehow related to Hoagy Carmichaels "Lazy River" (1939):

I like lazy weather, I like lazy days,  
Can't be blamed for having lazy ways.  
Some old lazy river sleeps beside my door,  
Whisp'ring to the sunlit shore.

Up a lazy river by the old mill run,  
That lazy, lazy river in the noon-day sun.  
Linger in the shad of a king old tree,  
Throw away your troubles, dream a dream with me.

Up a lazy river where the robin's song  
Awakes a bright new morning, we can loaf along.  
Blue skies up above, ev'ry one's in love,  
Up a lazy river, how happy you can be,  
Up a lazy river with me!

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Louis Armstrong, Lazy River  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdgaBSvfhf8>  
Dinah Shore & Gerry Mulligan, Lazy River  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpGOUcX\\_n\\_8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpGOUcX_n_8)  
Louis Prima, Lazy River  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8Qk4khPEEY>  
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All The key words of "New Morning" are there: Carmichael's "robin" has turned into a rooster (although the robin returns in "If Not For You"); the dream; the "new morning"; the "sky of blue"; "happy"; "the sun a-shining" ("noon-day sun"); and the river is also there (the "country stream" and the "bridge where the water flowed through"). The last verse looks like the starting point & inspiration for writing "New Morning":

"How happy can you be on a new morning (the robin sings) with me, blue skies up above, up a lazy river - dream a dream with me", and of course "everyone's in love" ("Lazy River")

"I'm so happy on a new morning (the rooster crows) with you, underneath that sky of blue, near the stream (or the bridge where the water flows through)- when all of my dreams come true", and Mr. Dylan is in love , too

By condensing "New Morning" down to its bare bones, one gets the basic outline of "Lazy River". Even the vocabulary is more or less identical. Dylan only shifts the emphasis from Hoagy's lazy mood to his enthusiasm of being in love (this enthusiasm is already in "Lazy River", but not as pronounced as in "New Morning"). It's as if Dylan deliberately set out to repaint an old black & white picture (that's exactly what Carmichael did: creating a black & white picture of a timeless scenery): let's relegate the river more into the background, turn the robin into the rooster & put some more animals in (the rabbit & groundhog) etc. Even the anachronism of "automobile comin' into style" fits perfectly, and refers back to the time when "Lazy River" was written.

"Lazy River" has been called a "classic of escapism" (William Zinsser). Escapism, the "innocent America" (Zinsser) and a longing for a more simple world are among the main topics of Hoagy Carmichael's songs. Richard Sudhalter has defined the concept behind many of them as "the idea of home, a place where wandering ceases and the heart comes to rest not any specific place but what thought and emotion perceive as home".

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Some songs on "New Morning" touch a similar ground. In "Day Of The Locusts" and "Went To See The Gypsy" Dylan paints himself as a refugee, seeking pastoral peace and beauty instead of university diplomas respectively depressing meetings in Las Vegas, the archtypical artificial town: "...so I watched that sun come rising/From that little Minnesota town" . Other songs sketch images of peaceful idyllic pastoralism, although (and that's the difference to songs like "Lazy River" or for example "Memphis In June") sometimes - in "Time Passes Slowly" and "Sign On The Window" - boredom, sadness and restlessness are lurking from underneath the surface.

Hoagy Carmichael, one of America's great songwriters of the pre-Rock era - "not a city boy who wrote scores for Broadway and Hollywood, but a country boy who wrote individual ballads that became huge hits on their own" (William Zinsser) - may have been at least partly something of a role model for the piano-playing Dylan on "New Morning".

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by stewART - 2008/01/14 06:30

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Interesting stuff !

New Morning was really the first album where jazz influences show up in the writing & arrangements, although I guess the Basement tapes sessions show this emerging too.

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by PlainJane - 2008/01/14 10:40

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Thanks, lostchords. Very interesting indeed.

Irving Berlin and Hoagy Carmichael and Cole Porter didn't write jazz. Porter actually hated the the way jazz musicians screwed around with his songs. And Bob Dylan was using classic pop song structures way back on Blonde on Blonde. And he continued that on "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" and Nashville Skyline. Hoagy Carmichael could have written lines like "That big fat moon is gonna shine like a spoon."

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by Warren - 2008/01/16 18:28

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Nice work, lostchords. Informative, as always. Thank you.

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by door knob - 2008/01/18 15:14

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Roots of Bob, well let me see....first there was Echo... then Suze ...Joannie .... and a whole lot more besides.....too many to list here thats for sure....

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by stewART - 2008/01/18 15:21

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I was meaning 'jazz' in it's widest sense and in particular as applying mainly to some of the musical arrangements on NM which are really unlike anything done before on albums - eg If Dogs Run Free

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by PlainJane - 2008/01/19 03:11

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"If Dogs Run Free" was a one-off. I don't know what you mean by jazz in its widest sense. You mean so wide that it includes things that aren't jazz at all?

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by raggedclown - 2008/01/23 09:51

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Thanks, LC!

Christopher Ricks has a useful analysis of "If Not for You", as I'm sure you know. He describes how neatly Bob solves the problem of how to end this list song satisfactorily rather than just arbitrarily breaking off the list of things that wouldn't be "if not for you." He does this by changing the rhyming pattern so that in the last verse, for the first time the penultimate and antepenultimate lines both rhyme with the final line, which is of course, "if not for you." This gives the song a satisfying closure, as things "ringing true" do.

In fact, every single verse has a different rhyme-scheme!

In 'New Morning' the line "automobile coming into style" is one of Bob's deftest attempts to turn the clock back, in this case at least half a century.

I suppose that "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome" on Blood on the Tracks can be seen both as Bob's final work in this style, and an explicit farewell to the genre. Those magnificent lines "Flowers on the hillside, bloomin' crazy/Crickets talkin' back and forth in rhyme/Blue river runnin' slow and lazy..." take us right back to the world of New Morning, evoking as they do even more clearly Hoagy Carmichael's idyllic, rural America (Bob's river is lazy just like Hoagy's), while deftly alluding to Eric Andersen's masterpiece Blue River (Bob is on record as admiring Andersen's ballads) and back to his own 'Tangled Up in Blue.' The inevitable rhyme of 'rhyme' with 'time' recalls time even while claiming to forget it, since rhyme itself depends on memory, which in turn reminds us that the present, however idyllic, cannot be eternal. Earlier in the same song, Bob recalls another pop classic: W.C. Handy's "Careless Love", which he sang with Johnny Cash in his Nashville Skyline days: another look back to the shattered idyll.

The mood of "If Not for You" has moved from the remoter conditional ("if...") to the more imminent future ("when..."). But the final lines suggest that maybe what was imagined as an all-encompassing disaster ("If not for you my sky would fall...") will not be quite so devastating. He will be "lonesome", but

But I'll see you in the sky above,  
In the tall grass, in the ones I love

As another song puts it, "She still lives inside of me, we've never been apart." Time will not always be an enemy. The loved one becomes part of the landscape, part even of other loved ones. Both sides (I'm talking vinyl here) of Blood on the Tracks show this same movement from rage ('Idiot Wind') and anguish ("If You See Her, Say Hello") to patience and stoicism (YGMMLWYG, "Buckets of Rain").

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by Warren - 2008/01/23 10:27

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Interesting post, raggedclown. Thanks.

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## Re:Roots of Bob No. 13: If Not For You & more

Posted by T.H.MONK - 2008/01/23 10:38

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Thank you L.C. for the "If Not For You" post..I had not heard that one before now..Very fine..Peace..B)

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