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Music

No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan
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Few musicians and artists have had as much impact on America's popular culture as Bob Dylan.

Hundreds of books have been written about him, with his lyrics picked apart and analyzed by professors and Dylanologists, but since 1986 this volume has continued to stand out from the pack, arguably serving as the most definitive study of Dylan and the events that inspired him to pen his most memorable songs. The author, as a journalist, is credited for kick-starting the unknown folksinger's career with a favorable review. He then spent almost two decades as part of Dylan's inner circle, accompanying him on concert tours and watching the artist's creative process at work.

This new edition, revised and edited by Elizabeth Thomson and Patrick Humphries, includes large portions of text—about 20,000 words—that Shelton, who died in 1995, had been forced to leave out of the original edition due to space limitations. Modifying such an iconic landmark work was not to be left to just anyone: Thomson is the editor of *Conclusions on the Wall: New Essays on Bob Dylan* and a close friend of Shelton's family; Humphries authored two Dylan biographies, contributed sleeve notes to Dylan albums, and wrote the ten-part *Bob Dylan Story* for BBC.

The editors added material that provided more detail to the early Dylan years when his songwriting skills were forming, some more on the fertile Greenwich Village years, and a key interview. They say the restored text more closely resembles the spirit its author first intended: Dylan's connection to the common man through small moments and a closer examination of the era's culture.

Snapshot incidents, while seemingly minor, often carried profound messages. When Dylan converses with the mechanic of his private plane late one night, the mechanic explains that, yes, the job is lowly, but he works the hours he is given.

Dylan's response: "I know how that feels. I really do."

While Robert Shelton never saw Dylan after the late 1970s, his text gives the reader enough insight into the artist to track his career well into the twenty-first century—with a contemporary boost from the two editors.

Karl Kunkel