

Mountains of Madrid, Coasts of Barcelona -

Review of: **Francisco García**, *'Bob Dylan en España: Mapas de carretera para el alma'* [*'Bob Dylan in Spain: Road maps for the soul'*], Lleida/Lérida [Catalonia], Spain: Editorial Milenio, 2000, ISBN 84-89790-93-0, soft covers, 229 pp.

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The name of Francisco J. García Cubero will, I hope, already be known to some readers, at least to those who take an interest in the reception of Bob Dylan's work in non-Anglophone countries in general and the Spanish-speaking world in particular. Francisco has long enjoyed a deservedly high profile as a Dylan expert ('dylanita') in his native Spain: not only does he run the excellent Spanish-language website 'Kaw Liga's Shelter From The Storm' (www.geocities.com/kawligas/), but he is also, together with Antonio Iriarte, the co-translator and editor of 'Del Huracán a las Tierras Altas: Escritos y canciones 1975-1997' ('From Hurricane to the Highlands: Writings and songs 1975-1997'), the extremely fine volume of Spanish translations of Dylan's songs from 'Desire' onwards, issued in 1999 by Masked Tortilla Productions, which I reviewed on Bob Dylan Critical Corner in April 2000.

Francisco has now excelled himself by producing this new volume, which chronicles, in often minute yet always readable detail, several key aspects of the history of Bob Dylan in the homeland of the 'loving tongue'. The book is divided into three sections: the first and longest offers a blow-by-blow history of Dylan's performances in Spain, covering all five tours and amply illustrated with black-and-white photos; the second is an exhaustive discography of Dylan's official and unofficial Spanish releases, with full-colour illustrations showing every sleeve; and the last, entitled 'Once encuestas esbozadas' ('Eleven outlined questionnaires'), consists of brief Q & A sessions with eleven Spanish-speaking Dylan experts or aficionados (musicians, writers, rock journalists, etc).

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The first, historical section takes the reader on a long and winding journey across the length and breadth of the Spanish landscape. Pearls of information are strewn across the way. Early on and before the account of the tours proper, we learn that, well before a single Dylan album was available on the national market, the melody of 'Blowin' in the Wind' was appropriated for 'Saber que vendrás' ('To know that You will come'), a Christian hymn which achieved a great success as part of the Spanish Catholic liturgy. Francisco ironically comments: 'Toda una generación de españoles conoció, sin saberlo, el primer gran éxito de Dylan en los templos religiosos' ('A whole generation in Spain unwittingly made the acquaintance of Dylan's first big hit in church' - pp. 16-17).

No Dylan album was released in Spain until 'John Wesley Harding' in 1968: until then, those straining to catch the wind's message in General Franco's land of 'organic democracy' had to make do with occasional radio plays, a smattering of singles and EPs and a limited number of cover versions in Spanish, Catalan or Basque. Between 1969 and 1972 the existing albums were gradually made available on the Spanish market, and since then Dylan releases there have normally followed the standard European pattern.

Dylan's first Spanish concerts took place in 1984, on 26 June in the Rayo Vallecano football stadium in Madrid and 28 June in the Miniestadi in Barcelona. This first mini-tour has, to date, been followed by four more tours, in 1989, 1993, 1995 and 1999, plus two one-off performances (the 1991 'Guitar Legends' festival in Seville and a 1998 festival in Escalarre, a

small Catalan locality in the Pyrenees). Francisco's narrative invites the reader to live or relive the vibrations of every one of these concerts - the venue, the atmosphere, the songs performed. For the songs, he opts for a selective strategy, pointing up the highlights rather than offering 100% complete setlists (that material is in any case available elsewhere). He also details the coverage of each tour and/or concert in the Spanish press (national, regional and local, musical and general), with selected quotations in the body of the text and an extensive press bibliography at the end of each chapter. Any future student of reception theory who wants to know exactly what, for example, the newspaper 'Diario de Andalucía' said about Dylan's 17 April 1999 concert in Málaga now has only to turn to page 159 of this book and follow the trail which Francisco has laid down.

We learn from this book that Dylan has to date played 29 concerts in Spain, in a total of 19 cities or other localities, covering 11 of the country's autonomous regions and ranging all the way from rainswept Galicia in the north-west to sun-drenched Andalusia in the south. He has never played either of the island regions (the Canaries and the Balearic Islands), but as far as the mainland is concerned only four regions have never featured on the tour map, and it can reasonably be said that the vast majority of Spain's population has by now been given the opportunity to see Bob Dylan perform at a location reasonably close to home. The most unlikely venue was surely the bullring of the small city of Huesca in rural Aragon, on 6 July 1993; the most spectacular, six days later, the magnificent Roman amphitheatre of Mérida in Extremadura, which may have reminded Dylan of the Coliseum in Rome and his own 'When I Paint My Masterpiece'.

The reader following Dylan across the road-map of Spain painstakingly laid down by Francisco will discover some curious things on the way. It transpires that Bob's debut 1984 concert in Madrid was attended by no less than four ministers from the then socialist government of Felipe González, one of them none other than Javier Solana, who went on to achieve further fame as NATO's secretary-general and, latterly, foreign-policy supremo for the European Union (p. 37). The second and last concert of that same first tour, in Barcelona, was graced by the presence of Jordi Pujol, long-standing head of the Catalan regional government and uncrowned king of Catalonia (p. 42). These VIP presences make it clear that Dylan's first-ever professional visit to the land of Goya and Picasso was regarded as a major cultural and historical event. The press responses to these concerts, however, do not always seem to have been quite at the level of the occasion: the article titles quoted in the bibliography include all-to-predictable references of the type: 'Bob Dylan, el veterano de la canción protesta' ('Bob Dylan, the veteran of protest song' - 'Tiempo'), or 'Dylan: el profeta de los 60' ('Dylan, the prophet of the 60s' - 'El Gran Musical'); and, as Francisco wryly notes, the Spanish media's coverage of Dylan's visit typically repeated ad infinitum 'dos tópicos absolutamente agotados: el mito y la nostalgia' ('two hackneyed clichés: myth and nostalgia' - p. 31). The journalistic resort to cliché proves, indeed, to be a constant source of complaint right across the tale of Dylan's Spanish tours - although, as we all know, this is hardly a phenomenon unique to Spain ...

Elsewhere, we learn: that at the San Sebastian concert of 17 June 1989 Dylan and band rounded off 'In the Garden' with a riff borrowed straight from the Kinks' 'You Really Got Me' (p. 61); that in the Basque city of Vitoria on 2 July 1993 the performance of 'Simple Twist of Fate' lasted, according to Francisco's estimate, almost 20 minutes (p. 93); that the 24 July 1995 night in Barcelona was attended by a princess, the Infanta Cristina (p. 124; was she discussing 'what's real and what is not?'); that in Santiago de Compostela on 9 April 1999 Bob brought '4th Time Around' out of his performance hat for the first time since 1976; and that

nine days later in Granada he was offered Federico García Lorca's guitar to play on, by the poet's own great-niece Laura. The abundant detail which Francisco offers allows the reader to relive the warm and dusty atmosphere of Bob Dylan's Spanish peregrinations.

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The second, discographical section of the book is remarkably comprehensive, and seems, indeed, to merit Francisco's own description of it (p. 164) as 'complete'. Official releases and bootlegs both of course find their place, but perhaps most interesting is the borderline category of limited and special releases. Here we indeed find - on pages 199 and 200 - some unexpected revelations. With its 17 May 1993 issue, 'Cambio 16', a well-known political and general Madrid weekly which might be considered the Spanish equivalent of 'The Economist', offered its readers a free CD entitled 'Folk: Años 60, 11' ('Folk: The 60s, No 11'), which included a performance by Bob Dylan of the blues standard 'Baby, Please Don't Go', from the 'Minnesota Hotel Tape' of 22 December 1961. Francisco describes this as 'una edición absolutamente legal' ('a completely legal release'), despite the fact that this track has never been legally released by Columbia (!). A similar oddity is proffered by another giveaway CD, included with a 1995 issue (no exact date given) of the Navarre daily 'Diario de Noticias': this disc, 'Grandes de la Música: Mitos del Rock' ('Great Figures of Music: Myths of Rock'), featured Dylan performing 'California', a song generally considered an early version of 'Outlaw Blues' and which, again, has never been officially released by his record company. Even more strangely, some of the 'Albert Hall' (Manchester Free Trade Hall) live tracks that were finally released on the 'Live 1966' CD in 1998 had quasi-legal previews in Spain: the second CD in a collection-by-instalments (no dates given) issued by Ediciones Orbis-Fabbri under the general title 'Los Grandes del Rock (de la A a la Z)' ('Greats of Rock from A to Z') included the Manchester 1966 performance of 'Like A Rolling Stone', while No 27 in the same collection went one better and featured no less than five tracks from the same concert. In Francisco's words, these are 'misterios insondables' ('unfathomable mysteries', p. 200) ...

We also learn that many, though not all, of Dylan's official albums first appeared in Spain with lyric-sheet inserts (in English), a practice notably -not- adopted for the US and UK markets for any album of new songs prior to 'Empire Burlesque'. Official releases of collectors' interest include the first issue of 'The Times They Are A-Changin'', which included specially written sleevenotes, unique to Spain, from the pen of Diego A. Manrique (p. 187); the first issue of 'Bringing It All Back Home', which featured three back-cover photos by Daniel Kramer, different from the six that appeared on the US release (p. 188); and an issue of 'Street-Legal' including an insert with a 'poetic reflection on the figure of Bob Dylan', also by Manrique (p. 190). Here, though, the surprises effectively cease, as Francisco tells us that from 'Shot of Love' on 'las ediciones españolas son prácticamente idénticas a las del resto de Europa' ('the Spanish editions have been virtually identical to those for the rest of Europe' - p. 191).

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The book's final section consists of a set of brief interviews in which Francisco puts the same seven questions in turn ('What is your favourite Dylan song?', etc) to eleven personalities from in and around the Spanish-speaking musical world. These include: the above-mentioned Diego A. Manrique, veteran DJ and musical commentator; Jesús Ordovás, author of the first original book on Dylan ever published in Spain ('Bob Dylan', 1972); Mariano Antolín Rato, novelist and author of another Dylan book ('Bob Dylan 2', 1975); Benjamín Prado, another novelist and confirmed 'dylanita' who, since Francisco's book came out, has published an interesting article on Dylan fans in the land of Cervantes, in the local edition of 'Rolling

Stone' ('Locos por Dylan' ['Crazy about Dylan'], RS, Spanish edition, May 2001, pp. 70-74); Fernando Garcín, a poet from Valencia who wrote sleevenotes for a 1996 various-artists CD of Dylan covers in Spanish, 'Bob Dylan Revisited: Un Tributo en la Lengua del Amor' ('Bob Dylan Revisited: A Tribute in the Loving Tongue'), masterminded by none other than Francisco García (who also plays on it); and - presumably the only non-Spanish contributor - the Argentinian singer-songwriter and 'rockero' Andrés Calamaro, who was opening act for the master himself on the 1999 tour and has contributed an eloquent foreword to the García/Iriarte volume of Dylan translations mentioned above, 'Del Huracán a las Tierras Altas'. Inevitably, some respondents, notably Ordovás, privilege Bob's mid-60s work to near-exclusivity, but the balance is redressed by others, such as Calamaro and Garcín, who stress the merits of later albums like 'Infidels' or 'Oh Mercy'. The contributions are invariably enthusiastic, and indeed some verge on the adulatory: Prado even declares (p. 227): 'No se me ocurre ninguna frase en la que puedan estar al mismo tiempo las palabras "Bob", "Dylan" y "peor"' ('I can't think of a single sentence that might contain the words "Bob", "Dylan" and "worst"'.)

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 With this book, Francisco García has accomplished a remarkable labour of love. To some Dylan fans in the English-speaking world, the subject-matter might seem a shade obscure or marginal, and, obviously, one has to know Spanish to read this volume. However, if we recall the strong presence of Spanish/Latin American elements in Dylan's work - in songs like 'Boots of Spanish Leather', 'Romance in Durango' or 'Señor', or in the numerous Spanish words scattered across 'Tarantula' - we may wish to conclude that the record of his concerts in Spain, and the Spanish reception of his work, are matters of more than local interest. In any case, self-reflexive Anglocentrism is no more a merit in the Dylan world than in any other milieu. I myself certainly hope that this review of Francisco García's excellent study will contribute its mite to furthering awareness of the multiple, complex and appreciative reverberations of Bob Dylan's songs and performances across time - not just on monolingual Anglophone shores, but under many a 'foreign sun' too, as the echo of the poet's words dissolves into the bells of the lightning, all across this shadowy world ...

Chris Rollason
 June 2001