

BACK IN THE STUDIO

Daybreak on a cold, rather snowy morning in New York City. Yesterday's coffee sat in a jug, filtered and unable to breathe any further. As it burped its last, its owner growled. Cigarette ends overflowed from discoloured 70s tall tower; and, handwritten lyric sheets sprawled across the carpet. Lyrics, several without song titles.

It was February 2006. Although the songwriter's routines had not changed, it had been nearly five years since Bob Dylan had stepped into a New York recording studio. The studio had changed during those intervening years – the digital age had arrived, and tape machines were now confined to the dustbin by Columbia Records. What started in 1962 with four track mixing desk, now numbered one hundred and four tracks or more, on a solitary screen. Knobs and faders had been replaced by a keyboard and mouse. This new system was an infinite as the very man who was now returning to the studio. Dylan who had built his reputation on fresh and folk rawness, was obliged to gather his credo and allow the production to signal his return. A tough call who, for the last 40 years possessed the touchstone of creativity in his very palms and had delivered his sermons consistently for others to follow.

One wonders whether Dylan muttered *The Times They Are A-Changin'* as he stepped up to the microphone, but to his surprise he noticed the microphone was an original from the old days. He smiled at sound engineer Chris Shaw. Chris smiled back. Bob removed his ten-gallon hat, replacing it with headphones, went to light a cigarette but then remembered even that rule had changed.

Chris spoke clearly through the intercom. 'The Deal is Done, Take One.'

Dylan sighed, looked at his band who were essentially his touring band, and stared out into the abyss of a nearby speaker.

'Follow me boys. The song is *When the Deal Goes Down*,' said Bob in his nicotine coated voice. 'You young-eons will wanna hoedown!'

Chris noticed a retro approach to the musicianship that would not have been out of place at some hayride, but worried for his artist. As each song mingled into each other over a period of three weeks, it was clear that whilst Dylan was emerging with a brand-new set of songs to strike at his older maturing fans of his "voice of a generation" era, there was the possibility that Dylan had borrowed too much and from others.

Upon release in August, the album *Modern Times* raced toward to the country charts as well as the US Billboard chart – these crossovers having been opened by the likes of Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton, and Garth Brooks. Could Dylan's rock fused moonshine minced with alleged occasional plagiarised lyrics dressing in new clothes, be for real? And the use of Ted Croner's photograph *Taxi, New York at Night* as the album cover continue the mirage of contemporary?

Modern Times won two Grammy Awards the following year: Best Contemporary Folk Album and Best Rock Vocal Performance for the album song, *Someday Baby*.

