



Bob Dylan plays a Fender Stratocaster electric guitar while recording at Columbia's Studio A in New York City.

ELECTRIFYING

IN THE SUMMER OF 1965, **BOB DYLAN** SHOCKED AUDIENCES WITH “LIKE A ROLLING STONE,” A SONG THAT WOULD BECOME HIS SIGNATURE AND CHANGE THE COURSE OF POP MUSIC FOREVER. **BY DEBORAH L. MARTIN**

Fifty years ago, Bob Dylan, one of the primary catalysts in the 1960s American folk music revival, walked into Columbia Records' Studio A on Seventh Avenue in New York City to record an album that would change music forever. He had returned from a tour of the UK dissatisfied and disillusioned, and as he told journalist Nat Hentoff, “I was going to quit singing. It's very tiring having other people tell you how much they dig you if you yourself don't dig you.”

The album he was working on, *Highway 61 Revisited*, was released in August 1965 and opened with “Like a Rolling Stone.” A few weeks after recording the song, he performed it live at the venerable—and previously all-acoustic—Newport Folk Festival. “Like a Rolling Stone” would become a signature for the young troubadour, but for some fans, Dylan had committed blasphemy by infusing his new music with a rock 'n' roll electric edge. One critic wrote, “He electrified one half of his audience, and electrocuted the other.”

Like all good rock 'n' roll stories, controversy followed the debut of the

new Dylan. One scenario had folk icon Pete Seeger threatening to cut the microphone cable with an axe during Dylan's set at the festival. Another had the audience booing and shouting for Dylan to leave the stage. Dylan himself said that Seeger's disapproval was like a “dagger in his heart.” Seeger later stated that it was the sound quality that bothered him, because the Newport audience needed to hear Dylan's lyrics.

While the details of that day are disputed, one fact remains clear: *Highway 61 Revisited* changed the course of Dylan's career, and “Like a Rolling Stone” entered the discography of the most influential rock songs ever written. It is cynical, it sneers at the candy-coated pop version of love, and in spite of its length (6:13), it climbed to number two on the *Billboard* charts and got extensive radio play. *Rolling Stone* magazine named it number one on its list of the 500 greatest songs ever written and said, “No other pop song has so thoroughly challenged and transformed the commercial laws and artistic conventions of its time, for all time.” **G**