

Untold Dylan

The meaning behind the music and words of Bob Dylan

Bob Dylan: The Lost Bar Mitzvah Tapes

Posted on [November 29, 2020](#) by [TonyAttwood](#)

By Gabriel Emanuel

Pastor Wendell Helgason of the Wesley United Methodist Church, in Hibbing, Minnesota discovered a rare artifact in the basement of the Church last Easter Sunday. It was an audio tape recording from the days before the Church moved in and took over the mortgage from the former owners, the Agudath Achim Synagogue which closed its doors in 1964 due to a dwindling local Jewish population.

When Pastor Helgason dusted off and activated the old Sony reel to reel he was intrigued at first by the melodic chanting which he assumed to be the young men's Hebrew choir. It turned out to be the Synagogue Cantor's own recording of each boy's Bar Mitzvah rehearsal. He was about to turn off the tape when he heard a distinct voice that he immediately recognized. "I would know that nasal sound anywhere," Pastor Wendell said, bursting with hometown pride. "No mistaking that voice belonged to the prodigal son of Hibbing."

What Pastor Helgason had uncovered in the basement of the old Synagogue turned Church was none other than the original audio tape from the Bar Mitzvah rehearsal of one Robert Alan Zimmerman.

The date inscribed in faded ink on the inside of the old Sony reel, May 22, 1954, indeed coincides with the actual date of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony that was held at the Agudath Achim Synagogue on 2nd Avenue. Nearly the entire Jewish community that inhabited Hibbing and surrounding Iron Range, (consisting of some several dozen members at its peak), had gathered to mark the auspicious occasion. Abe and Beatty Zimmerman's son had reached his thirteenth birthday, which according to the tenets of the faith marks the day that a Jewish boy becomes a man. Little did anyone present know that this would also mark the first public performance ever to be given by the future world famous singer and Nobel Prize laureate for literature.

"It's been a challenge to authenticate the tape since most of the Jewish community of Hibbing has migrated to the twin cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) and places beyond," says the Pastor, himself a third generation native of Hibbing of Scandinavian heritage. But at least one old time resident, Isadore Goldfine, of Goldfine & Sons Fine Furniture on Main Street, swears by the tape. "That's him alright", says the seventy-seven year old Goldfine after the Pastor plays a sample from the tape, the warbling shrill resembling more the high notes of the famous singer's harmonica than his gravely voice today.

"I was at Bobby's bar mitzvah and let me tell you he was no Pavarotti and no Sinatra either," recounts Goldfine who still bides his days puttering around the furniture shop now run by his son, Stan. "He was just like the rest of us Jewish kids who took lessons after school from an old, itinerant Rabbi with a white beard and black hat who lived above the juke box joint. Abe and Beatty – Bobby's parents – had promised Bobby a transistor radio and a guitar for his

never kept

in touch with anyone after he left, at least not as far as I know. They say he's been back once or twice but never let anyone know."

"Well, he sure put Hibbing on the map, wouldn't you say, Izzy?"

"Him and Roger Maris of the Yankees," said Goldfine, pointing to a framed black and white photograph of the baseball star hanging on the wall above the Living Room sofa display. "See, I'm more of baseball fan, myself. Roger was only a few years older than us and born just around the corner from here. He went on to beat Babe Ruth's home run record for a single season." Not missing a beat, the elderly gentlemen gave a thumb's up to the picture, beamed and announced proudly, "Sixty-One in Sixty-One."

"Quite an accomplishment, alright," said the Pastor, nodding his chin in agreement. "But you know, Izzy, that record has been broken years ago whereas the songs that Dylan has written I suspect will be around for a lot longer than even the iron ore in the mines. Why your old friend is just about as close to a national treasure as you can find anywhere in this country," the Pastor said with a flourish.

"I suppose," said Goldfine, polishing a wood cabinet, "nice family, too".

And so what is the Pastor planning to do with the lost Bar Mitzvah tapes of Robert Alan Zimmerman, circa 1954? "I've already had a surprising number of lucrative offers from private individuals, from top executives in the music industry and I've just been contacted by the new Bob Dylan Archive in Tulsa, Oklahoma," he says with obvious pride. "But I'm going to do my best to see that these blessed Bar Mitzvah tapes stay put right here in Hibbing, Minnesota where they belong. "

"We may have found a home for them," he continues after a pause, "in Bob's alma mater, the old Hibbing High School where he graduated from in 1959. Only problem is, we need to store them in a secure vault or the insurance won't cover it," he laments.

"The Governor has promised to get involved," says the Pastor while continuing to ruminate aloud. "After all," he says in earnestness, almost pleading, "We may have ten thousand lakes in Minnesota, but this is the only tape of its kind in existence. Lord only knows if we will ever see another Bar Mitzvah like this one again."

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As we approach 2000 articles on this site, indexing is important, but sadly chaotic. You can find indexes to series linked under the image of Dylan at the top of the page and some relating to recent series [on the home page](#).

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As for the writing, Untold Dylan is written by people who want to write for Untold Dylan. We welcome articles, contributions and ideas from all our readers. Although no one gets paid, if you are published here, your work will be read by a fairly large number of people across the world, ranging from fans to academics. If you have an idea,

or a finished piece send it as a Word file to Tony@schools.co.uk with a note saying that it is for publication on Untold Dylan.

We also have a very lively discussion group “Untold Dylan” on Facebook with around 8500 active members. Just type the phrase “Untold Dylan” in, on your Facebook page or [follow this link](#). And because we don’t do political debates on our Facebook group there is a separate group for debating Bob Dylan’s politics – [Icicles Hanging Down](#)

From the Web

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8 Responses to *Bob Dylan: The Lost Bar Mitzvah Tapes*



Jeff says:

November 30, 2020 at 6:49 pm

This sounds fake. Who are your sources for this story?



EDLIS Café says:

December 1, 2020 at 2:38 am

Spoof?

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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/edlis.cafe/permalink/3768722363166268/>



TonyAttwood says:

December 1, 2020 at 8:18 am

Jeff, the source is the author; I can't verify it.



TonyAttwood says:

December 1, 2020 at 8:24 am

I think the use of the word “reliable” is rather unreasonable here. The secret of Untold is rather obviously in the name “untold” – we are not in the business of reporting what others have done – unless those reports or commentaries are liable to become unavailable and seem worth preserving.

Some commentaries do only have one source, and of course that can be invented, and if by publishing such a story it is revealed to be invented, or eventually has no further backup of evidence, then I'd say we have still done a good job.

In many cases we've looked at Dylan situations and worked through surrounding events and been able to show that something is or is not, likely to be true. There is self-evidently no evidence here beyond that in the article, and if it none turns up in the future then one can believe it or not. If however the dates don't fit, or there is contrary evidence from a source, the article becomes untrue.



EDLIS Café says:

December 1, 2020 at 4:05 pm

Very ofdd for anyone to believe it.

It was exposed as a hoax by the EDLIS Café soon afte it went up.

It reads like a hoax. The Pastor has never existed. Sony did not exist at that date. The synagogue and the church are not near each other. The synagogue is now private housing in flats. There is no Goldfine & Sons Fine Furniture on Main Street Hibbing. And no Isadore Goldfine. No Stan.

No one familiar with Bob Dylan's work thought it was true.

A glance at a reference book would show it was a piece of fiction:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/109178289X/>

Bob Dylan's Hibbing. Hibbing : EDLIS Café Press, 2019. ISBN: 9781091782891

1. Dylan, Bob, — 1941- — Childhood and youth. 2. Dylan, Bob, — 1941- — Homes and haunts — Minnesota — Hibbing.



TonyAttwood says:

December 2, 2020 at 7:39 am

Always worth waiting to see if there is a follow up which might make things a little clearer

<https://bob-dylan.org.uk/archives/17881>

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Walter Zuk says:

December 3, 2020 at 8:23 am

Hi Tony, I'm curious where you got this piece? Also, any idea who wrote the piece now we know Gabriel Emanuel did not?



[TonyAttwood](#) says:

December 3, 2020 at 8:57 am

It was sent to me, by email. I won't reveal the details of who sent it, because I always respect the writers' privacy but if the writer wants to talk about it then she or he certainly can. I don't know anything about the author.

But the piece gave me an idea, which if you look at what has followed, including today's piece, will give you an understanding of what I thought.

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