

EP REVIEW - MASKED & SEPARATED

Written by Maria D'Alessandro – Melbourne Australia, May 2021

As a tribute to commemorate Bob Dylan's 80th birthday on 24th May, 2021, the newly released EP *Masked and Separated*, features five Dylan covers performed by two prominent European musicians, Jacques Mees, from The Netherlands and Luigi Catuogno, from Italy.

Technically, the selected songs range in ethnic to classical styles and have a unique sound which allowed Jacques and Luigi to utilize their respective musical experiences. At a deeper level, these songs are rich in wisdom and important messages from which we can draw parallels.

Father of Night – Released on *New Morning* (1970)

Dylan wrote this song eight years before he became a born again Christian. It was his interpretation of the Jewish prayer Amidah and can be viewed as a communal chant in a "Bachian" wordy style. At 1 minute 32 seconds, it is Dylan's shortest song from a studio-released album. It truly sets the mood for this EP as it is a touching song about eternity, inner peace and relief.

Many of us have recently experienced challenging times and this song of prayer conveys a message of understanding, compassion and hope. There is still much to be grateful for and so much to appreciate in this troubled but healing world.

Queen Jane Approximately - Released on *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965)

This gem was performed live in 1987 with the Grateful Dead and appeared on the live album *Dylan & The Dead*.

It is an interesting choice of song about a falling from grace, and widely thought to be about Joan Baez (Queen of the folkies). It may be said that it reflects how Dylan's relationship with Baez and his connection with the folk movement, were growing cold around the time this song was written.

That you're tired of yourself and all of your creations

The song expresses that there is help out there for anyone who is ready to break away from superficial diversions and engage in an honest, authentic experience.

It's a song about reassessing relationships with people or connections to ideals that were once close to our heart and have been tested during hard times.

And all of your children start to resent you

Typically, this line may express how Dylan's children (fans or folk singers) he had once inspired, became resentful because he was moving away from his earlier work that was somewhat repetitive, and based in political protest.

And you're sick of all the repetition

If the song is about someone who has grown distasteful to those around them, I can find a parallel here relevant to the pandemic with; relationship breakdowns, job losses, evictions and foreclosures and numerous worldwide protests.

Dirge - Released on *Planet Waves* (1974)

This is Jacques and Luigi's favourite song with its beautiful melody matched to equally powerful lyrics. The rhythm Dylan uses here is a tango, a style used only a few times but with great effectiveness in the 1978 live arrangement of *Simple Twist of Fate* (at Budokan). Jacques and Luigi wanted to accentuate even more the proximity to this musical genre by making an arrangement in the style of the Argentine tango composer, Astor Piazzolla.

The official BobDylan.com site lists about 629 Dylan songs in its index, of which 287 (including *Dirge*) have never been performed live.

In my opinion, *Dirge*, a mournful song with a depressing opening is, the antithesis to the beautiful and romantic *Wedding Song*. Could *Dirge* be one of the cruellest, meanest, darkest songs that Dylan ever wrote? Perhaps. But I'm sure we can draw a parallel to Dylan's sentiments here when we acknowledge that the world has recently gone through a once in a century pandemic that could

reasonably and appropriately be referred to as cruel, mean and dark in nature.

What does the word 'dirge' mean? By definition it can mean a lament for the dead or it may refer to just a mournful song or a song that is too slow, miserable or boring. Indeed, the lyrics somewhat describe a life gone wrong - a befitting song that sums up strong negative emotions, feelings of loss and lockdown blues experienced by so many, in recent times.

We can all relate to this human condition, but the positive message in the song may be that we must not waste time with meaningless relationships or pursuits. Dylan wants us to be confident enough to keep searching for someone or something better - a gem. Once the dust settles, this advice can be most useful as we begin to rebuild our lives.

In this world of fibreglass, I'm looking for a gem

Tell Me – From the Infidels Outtakes (1983)

The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3 (Rare and Unreleased) (1961-1991)

Jacques and Luigi were inspired with the melody of this song and so they included it as a demonstration of the often under estimated melodist Dylan. They tried to enhance its Texan-Mexican flavour by imagining it passing through space and time only to find itself on the soundtrack of Pat Garret and Billy the Kid.

This song has never been played live, and was originally just Dylan's idea or sketch for a song.

Does that fire still burn

Does that flame still glow

Or has it died out and melted like the snow?

We could easily apply the message in these lyrics to our life. For instance, we could ask ourselves, does our fire still burn for the goals and dreams put on hold during this last troubled year? Or, has that flame simply died and melted like the snow? This song not only gives us a nudge to re-evaluate the state of our life presently, but also to make some restorative plans for when the world returns to an acceptable standard of normality.

Not Dark Yet – Released on Time Out of Mind (1997)

Dylan played this song live 191 times on the Never Ending Tour between 1997 and 2019.

The cover graphics of the EP depict a sense of hope for the impending restoration of community.

This is the true message that Jacques and Luigi want to convey through their interpretation of the five Dylan songs on this EP. It is not dark yet for we shall one day come together again, united with loved ones and friends and just like the sketched faces, we will be unmasked and not separated.

In this song, one of the causes of failed relationships is the narrator's self-centeredness. Could there be a parallel here between the declining relationship between man and the environment as a result of human selfishness and greed? For all the pain and suffering that lockdown caused, it did give us a surprising preview of how quickly our Earth was capable of healing.

Could this be a song of warning to us that it may not be dark yet, but it could be getting there if we do not take responsible precautions to protect our environment.

Behind every beautiful thing there's been some kind of pain.

This is an insightful line. There has been a surge of beautiful music that has surfaced online from musicians around the world albeit not without some professional, personal or financial pain.

I hope everyone will join Jacques and Luigi in celebrating Bob Dylan's 80th birthday. To all the Dylan fans around the world, this special tribute EP, Masked and Separated, is for you.