

## **The Bob Dylan Center: Overview and Experience Goals**

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Elements of The Bob Dylan Archive began arriving in Tulsa, Oklahoma a little over a year ago. It consists of more than 10,000 physical items alongside thousands of hours of audio, film and video encompassing nearly every stage of Dylan's career.

The permanent home for the archive is the Helmerich Center for American Research, which is the preservation and study center that's immediately adjacent to The Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa. Virtually all visiting researchers, scholars, students and writers interested in utilizing the archive will conduct their work at the Helmerich Center. Only credentialed individuals will have direct access to the archive. The Bob Dylan Center will be at a separate location from The Helmerich Center and will essentially act as the public face of the archive. Items from the collection will be borrowed and displayed there, but the balance of the materials will remain in the protective vaults of the Helmerich Center.

The Bob Dylan Archive is the world's most comprehensive source chronicling Bob Dylan's working life as a songwriter, recording artist and touring musician. It contains thousands of pages of his writing, including handwritten manuscripts of his most well-known songs, heavily annotated typescripts, recording contracts, correspondence, recording session logs, ephemera from each of his albums and tours and hundreds of photographs. In tandem with this material are thousands of hours of concert recordings, studio session tapes, films and videos, most of which has now been digitized.

Virtually every studio session from each of Bob Dylan's albums is present and accessible in the archive. With so much material available to us, we have the ability to closely explore the genesis of his recorded material, which includes numerous takes, alternate versions, and unreleased songs. The sessions are the equivalent of what you might call *audio verité*—essentially aural documentaries on the creation of Dylan's records. To extend that metaphor further, the master tapes afford us is the ability to deconstruct Dylan's recordings down to their constituent elements, or "stems." For instance, if we were to run an exhibit on the recording of "Like A Rolling Stone" we could isolate each track of that song in such a way that if someone only wanted to hear Dylan's vocal and harmonica part or Michael Bloomfield's guitar part, we have the ability to do that for virtually all of the artist's recorded output.

The live recordings date back to Dylan's earliest coffeehouse days and continue through his most recent tours. There are many instances in the archive where a song can be studied from its initial iteration on paper, to the moment Dylan first stepped to the microphone to record it, and through its reinvention in concert over several decades. A good example of this is the song "Tangled Up in Blue," from the 1975 album *Blood on the Tracks*; this song began on paper with the title "Dusty Sweatbox Blues," and its first studio take was a solo acoustic performance. The song

was ultimately released on record with a full band and has since had its lyrics and tempo altered in live performance, sometimes radically. The ability to chronicle this creative evolution, is among the archive's greatest strengths.

The archive also boasts a number of rare physical artifacts, including the leather jacket Dylan wore the night he went electric at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 or the actual tambourine played by Bruce Langhorne that inspired the song "Mr. Tambourine Man." It is our intention to make the Bob Dylan Center a place where one can come and engage with Dylan's work in an immersive and personal way. It's not our main intention to tell Dylan's story chronologically or create a narrative that historicizes him in any particular fashion. It is not our goal to build a shrine or museum to Bob Dylan in the traditional sense, but to create an environment that is animated by his work, its influence and its abiding sources. Our hope is to eliminate the barriers between the traditional categories of high and low culture and create a space where texts by the Symbolist poets can naturally reside alongside the music of Skip James and Robert Johnson or the pioneers of rockabilly and beyond. To that end, the Center will have a permanent collection culled from the archive alongside moving or changing exhibitions that relate, in some fashion, to Dylan's work or to the sources it both draws from and inspires.

Through the Center, we will conceive of innovative ways to bring the archive to life for all visitors, whether they have a passing or deep interest in Dylan's music. The fact that so much of the collection has been digitized opens numerous avenues for adapting technology into what we hope will be a timeless, open and inviting space.

In conclusion, our goal is to offer an immersive, interactive, experience for visitors, one in which all dimensions of Dylan's artistry are on display, speaking to the personal, nuanced, nature of his work as well as to the larger forces in American life that have given it shape and made it a touchstone for generations of artists both here and abroad.