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December 6th, 2013

Dylan Goes Electric to the Tune of

\$965,000

by Jeanne Schinto

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Christie's, New York City

Somebody's mother heard one of his records in the early 1960's and said she thought he sounded like a "hog caller." She wasn't far off, but it didn't matter. He was and is Bob Dylan, one of our nation's most significant songwriter-poets. One of his guitars has sold for \$965,000 (including buyer's premium).

"It's bittersweet to see it go," consigner Dawn Peterson told a reporter directly after the 1964 Fender Stratocaster solid-body electric guitar, with its original sunburst finish, went to an anonymous absentee bidder at Christie's in New York City on December 6, 2013. The buyer was described only as a "private individual" in a press release issued by the auction house.

Dylan played the instrument at a seminal moment early in his musical career. It's the guitar he went electric with at the Newport Folk Festival in Newport, Rhode Island, on July 25, 1965. The date also marks the first time he played with a band in front of a live audience. It was famously the wrong audience for such a debut. There was booing. It's audible on Martin Scorsese's 2005 documentary film *No Direction Home*. As Dylan pointedly shrieked, "I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more," Pete Seeger asked somebody to pull the plug. Nobody did, and after Dylan left the stage, he was implored to return for a traditional set. There were fears of a folk music lovers' riot otherwise. He did return with an acoustic guitar borrowed from Johnny Cash, but it was too late. The corner had been turned. The times not only were a-changin', they were changed, and there was nothing anybody could do to hold back the burst dam.

Within a few months of that concert, the instrument and multiple pages of lyrics by Dylan were left aboard a private plane that was piloted by consigner Peterson's father, Victor Quinto (1936-1977). Based in New Jersey, he was often employed by manager Albert Grossman to fly musical groups to and from their gigs. According to the family, Quinto tried without success to contact Dylan's representatives to return the property. Decades passed. Then, Peterson said, she watched a documentary (it must have been *No Direction Home*) that showed Dylan on that Newport stage playing a guitar just like the one handed down to her when her father died. Until that time, she hadn't put much stock in the story that it was Dylan's. She had been too young to have her own recollection of the day the instrument had entered the household.

Peterson decided to contact the hosts of the PBS television show *History Detectives* to get their help in finding out the truth. They in turn consulted experts, one for the guitar, another for the lyrics. The guitar expert was Andy Babiuk (www.andybabiukfabgear.com) of Fairport, New York. Babiuk compared the wood grain of the guitar with closeups of photos from that night in Newport. He also noted the evidence of Dylan's touring company name, Ashes & Sand, Inc., stenciled in green on the guitar's black carrying case. Few people knew the name, and it had rarely if ever been published. The lyrics expert was Jeff Gold (www.recordmecca.com) of Los Angeles, a collector and dealer in collectible records and music memorabilia for over 40 years. He recognized not only Dylan's handwriting but his song-drafting style, a combination of longhand and typewriting.

After everything was pronounced real, PBS tried to contact Dylan. There was no response. Only after the show aired in March 2012 and reporters started asking questions did Dylan's spokespeople finally issue a statement. It claimed that in their opinion *History Detectives* had got it wrong. Wes Cowan and Elyse Luray didn't back down, however. As a result, Peterson and Dylan reportedly reached a legal agreement of some kind, and the guitar and the lyrics went to Christie's.

The auction house published a 54-page sale catalog. It discussed and pictured the guitar in detail. There were photos of Dylan (b. 1941) with it at Newport, in Forest Hills, New York, and at a recording session for the 1965 Dylan album *Bringing It All Back Home*. The catalog also described the lyrics, but the illustrations were deliberately blurred, making it impossible to read them. They can be read, however, on the *History Detectives* Web site (www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/bob-dylan-guitar).

They could also be read at the previews, where in a lobby alcove they were on display inside Plexiglas cases. The guitar was on a pedestal.

A great deal of original Bob Dylan material, including lyrics, had been bought by collector George Hecksher, who, in the late 1990's, gave it to Morgan Library & Museum, New York City. According to some sources, working drafts for more than 90 songs, including most tracks recorded between 1962 and 1966, are in the collection. But more material continues to surface. On December 10, 2010, the manuscript lyrics for "The Times They Are a-Changin'" sold at Sotheby's for \$422,500. It's one of Dylan's greatest songs, to be sure, and the price is commensurate, but even a few scraps of his student poetry had sold at Christie's in November 2005 for \$78,000.

Three of the five lots of lyrics offered at this sale could qualify as scraps. Only one of the other two lots was substantial. It was four pages on two sheets in manuscript and typescript, characterized in the catalog as the draft lyrics for "I Wanna Be Your Lover." The song never made it onto a Dylan album but can be heard on Dylan's 1985 box set *Biograph*. (For more information about this and every other song written and recorded by Dylan from 1957 through 2008, see Clinton Heylin's two volumes, *Revolution in the Air* and *Still on the Road*.)

After Christie's morning sale, Thomas Lecky, head of the department of fine printed books and manuscripts, announced with a smile, "Dylan goes electric at one p.m." Since he already had a strong order bid for the guitar, he knew it would at least sell for its reserve. The estimate was \$300,000/500,000.

As the time drew near, the guitar was put on display up front, right next to a Plexiglas case where that morning's top lot (King James II's copy of Isaac Newton's *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*) had been when it sold for \$2,517,000. As people entered the gallery, "Maggie's Farm" began to play over the sound system, then "Like a Rolling Stone," another of the electric numbers that Dylan had played on that fateful night in Newport.

The lyrics went up first. Unfortunately, they landed with a thud. Only the "I Wanna Be Your Lover" lyrics sold, going to a phone bidder for the low estimate, \$20,000. None of the others elicited any interest at all. Asked by e-mail after the sale why he thought that had happened, Jeff Gold replied, "I have a simple answer. For some reason Christie's blurred the photos of the lyric sheets in their catalog and on their website, so potential buyers couldn't see what they were describing."

In any event, without skipping a beat, literally, Lecky said, "[This] then leads us to the reason we're all here," the guitar. He opened bidding for it from the desk at \$200,000. Two minutes did battle with his order bidder to no avail. It took only a few minutes for bidding to end with \$800,000 on the hammer, followed by applause.

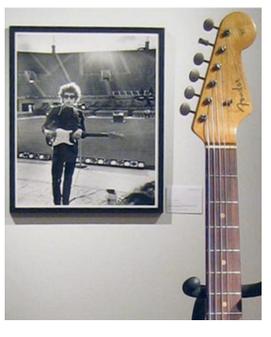
"A tremendous amount of international interest was generated at the time of the sale's announcement, and today's result justifies the mythic status of this guitar in the annals of music history," Lecky said in a prepared statement. He also announced that the price was the new record for any guitar sold at auction. If there was any doubt left that Dylan made rock history in Newport, it has now been erased by that price.

For more information, phone Christie's at (212) 636-2000 or see the Web site (www.christies.com).

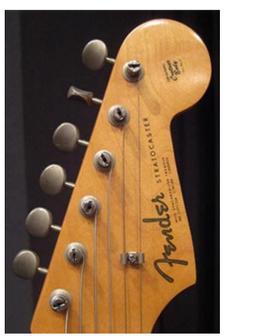
Originally published in the March 2014 issue of *Maine Antique Digest*. © 2014 Maine Antique Digest



On display at Christie's were Dylan's Fender Stratocaster, its case, and some of his lyrics. The guitar, which is dated May 2, 1964, still has its original flat-wound strings. On the wall is a photo of Dylan holding the guitar at a concert at Forest Hills Stadium, Queens, New York, on August 28, 1965, a little more than a month after his appearance in Newport. Only one of five lots of lyrics sold; it went for \$20,000 (est. \$20,000/30,000). The guitar sold to an unnamed individual, bidding as an absentee, for \$965,000 (est. \$300,000/500,000).



In the gallery on the afternoon of the sale, a Christie's handler opened one of the compartments inside the guitar's case to show the packet of extra strings that were stored there. Also present was the guitar's original black leather guitar strap.



Examining and photographing the guitar just before it went on the block, a young man said it looked "unplayed." There are only three documented instances of Dylan's having played it—at Newport, at Forest Hills, and at recording sessions for the 1965 Dylan album *Bringing It All Back Home*.



In the moments before the sale, an audience of Dylan fans and others gathered.



The consigner, Dawn Peterson, is on the right.

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