

Cat Power Biography

Last November in London, Cat Power took the stage at Royal Albert Hall and delivered a song-for-song recreation of one of the most fabled and transformative live sets of all time. Held at the Manchester Free Trade Hall in May 1966—but long known as the “Royal Albert Hall Concert” due to a mislabeled bootleg—the original performance saw Bob Dylan switching from acoustic to electric midway through the show, drawing ire from an audience of folk purists and forever altering the course of rock-and-roll. In her own rendition of that historic night, the artist otherwise known as Chan Marshall inhabited each song with equal parts conviction and grace and a palpable sense of protectiveness, ultimately transposing the anarchic tension of Dylan’s set with a warm and luminous joy. Now captured on the live album *Cat Power Sings Dylan: The 1966 Royal Albert Hall Concert*, Marshall’s spellbinding performance both lovingly honors her hero’s imprint on history and brings a stunning new vitality to many of his most revered songs.

A singularly gifted song interpreter whose catalog includes three acclaimed covers albums (2000’s *The Covers Record*, 2008’s *Jukebox*, 2022’s *Covers*), Marshall holds an especially strong affinity for the songwriter-poet. “More than the work of any other songwriter, Dylan’s songs have spoken to me, and inspired me since I first began hearing them at 5 years old,” said Marshall. Like the original concert (and all of Dylan’s 1966 world tour), Marshall kept the first half of her set entirely acoustic, then went electric for the second half with the help of a full band: guitarist Arsun Sorrenti, bassist Erik Paparozzi, multi-instrumentalists Aaron Embry (harmonica, piano) and Jordan Summers (organ, Wurlitzer), and drummer Josh Adams. “I knew that when representing a performance that changed the rock-and-roll landscape forever, I needed to be very serious about it,” she says. “Although ‘serious’ feels like a small word for how deeply immersed I felt.”

As she prepared to recreate Dylan’s epochal concert—a 15-song set featuring classics like “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue” and “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues” as well as “Just Like A Woman,” and several other cuts from his seminal album *Blonde on Blonde*, released just the day before – Marshall deliberately avoided rehearsing her vocal parts. “Since I started making music, I’ve had this superstition about doing something more than one time, because I feel like the soul is so linked to the moment,” she explains. Along with relying on her preternatural instincts as a vocalist, Marshall drew from her extraordinary familiarity with the songs at hand. “I remember being nine years old and knowing all the lyrics to ‘Desolation Row,’ because it was on one of the many albums my young parents were listening to all the time,” she says. “I was always singing along to his songs; I’d harmonize and do my own background vocals. And the way I sang the songs back then is the same way I sing them now.”

All throughout *Cat Power Sings Dylan: The 1966 Royal Albert Hall Concert*, that rarefied intimacy with Dylan’s material illuminates every moment—from the very first seconds of the set-opening “She Belongs To Me,” Marshall creates the strangely charmed sensation of sharing songs that have lived in her heart for decades. “When singing ‘She Belongs To Me’ in the past, sometimes I turned it into a first-person narrative – ‘I am an artist, I don’t look back.’ I really identified with it like that,” said Marshall. “But for the show at Royal Albert Hall, I of course,

sang it the way it was originally written - with the respect for the composition...and the great composer.”

Another song indelibly transformed by Marshall’s feminine perspective, “Just Like a Woman” takes on a raw and lovely tenderness, heightening the expansive sense of empathy that imbues all of her performance. And for the final song in the acoustic set, Marshall offers up a hushed and unhurried version of “Mr. Tambourine Man,” infusing Dylan’s storytelling with an ineffable longing. “I was the most anxious for ‘Mr. Tambourine Man,’ because it comes from that moment when everybody became invested in Bob as some kind of hero,” she says. “There’s a real weight to that one as far as its place in history.”

Kicking off with “Tell Me, Momma” (a song played exclusively during Dylan’s 1966 world tour), the electric half of *Cat Power Sings Dylan: The 1966 Royal Albert Hall Concert* steadily builds to a sublime intensity that peaks with the band’s hypnotic and haunting performance of “Ballad of a Thin Man.” In a brilliant spin on one of the most scathing songs in Dylan’s catalog, Marshall’s vocal delivery skews toward soulful rather than sneering, yet still achieves a thrilling ferocity. “There’s a feeling to that song like putting a cigarette out on someone’s forehead, or like a journalist writing an important article about someone who needs to be ratted out,” she says. In a nod to the most storied moment from the original concert, an audience member cries out “Judas!” just before the song starts; Marshall then responds by serenely invoking the name of Jesus. “It was something impulsive. I wasn’t expecting the audience to recreate their part of the original show as well, but then I wanted to set the record straight – in a way, Dylan is a deity to all of us who write songs.” Next, on “Like a Rolling Stone,” *Cat Power Sings Dylan: The 1966 Royal Albert Hall Concert* closes out as Marshall brings a radiant compassion to Dylan’s epic tale of a woman fallen from grace, arriving at something undeniably glorious. “I couldn’t sing that one as high as I used to when I was younger, but it was still fun,” she points out. “There are definitely a few those moments throughout the show where you can hear that I didn’t hit the right register, or jumbled a word, or tried to push it out too fast. But I don’t care. I like those little accidents.”

As revealed on *Cat Power Sings Dylan: The 1966 Royal Albert Hall Concert*, Marshall approached every song in the setlist with both heartfelt reverence and a deep understanding of the delicate nature of song interpretation. “When someone covers a song you love, there’s the potential for them to give you something you can keep with you forever because of their way of performing it, their voice, the way they tap out or hum a particular line,” says Marshall. “A song changes when someone else sings it, whether they’re trying to stay faithful to the original version or not.” And while Marshall admits to a nervous anticipation prior to the show—“I was afraid to do the whole thing, but just because you’re afraid of something doesn’t mean it won’t be okay”—a certain sense of devotion helped to carry her through the night. “I had and still have such respect for the man who crafted so many songs that helped develop conscious thinking in millions of people, helped shape the way they see the world,” says Marshall. “So even though

my hands were shaking so much I had to keep them in my pockets, I felt real dignity for myself. It felt like a real honor for me to stand there.”