

postcards of the hanging

driving through the countryside listening to the geriatric soundtrack of the re-doubtable 2ST - Nowra's AM radio station that seems to bring all that 70s crackle and atmosphere and which never plays songs later than 1985 – it occurred to me that I never hear him in the mainstream music media. I like to think that they still haven't worked him out but that is just a dream from a past life - no its not that. it is sometimes a delight to hear an hour or so of him, breathlessly introduced by some devotee on the local community radio station. when I was 19 I listened to him on my girl friends record player. June's sister Bonnie had a sacred collection of folk records. he was there amongst Dave Van Ronk. Pete Seeger, Woody and Arlo, Buffie Saint Marie, Joan Baez, Mimi Farina, Gordon Lightfoot, Fred Neill, Elizabeth Cotton, Mississippi John Hurt, John Fahey and on and on and on. he was not living far away. it was magical to hear bits and pieces of the 'big pink' basement tapes on FM radio in Lansing NY. they would play whole sides of their favourite albums then pause and play the other side. the only commercials were for 4-H, the local food cooperative and gigs for Buffalongo and the Highwood String band at the Rongovian Embassy in Trumansburg. I remember extolling his virtues to my father and saying that he would be read and played in a hundred years. he scoffed and laughed. one of those moments when even wise fathers are wrong and prodigal sons are right. it's a reminder to me now to listen as a babe not a know-all to my own precious sons. in all of this he was something beyond commercial radio land that he obviously detested or was it that he just didn't need them? some divine force must have told him to sit back and allow the words to penetrate our collective brains. when I think of love and lovers past and present it is his songs that I hear. when I'm travelling on planes, trains and automobiles it is his songs that brings a bit of cheek and joy and happiness to me. "if you see her say hello.." "a coat for the howlin winds" "shelter", "teeth like pearls". who or what is Bob Dylan? he is all of us and none of us – a trusted voice amid the turmoil and ignorance.

“They’re selling postcards of the hanging
They’re painting the passports brown
The beauty parlor is full of sailors
The circus is in town.”