

INTERVIEW WITH...

# JAKOB DYLAN

***“I’ve heard a lot of interpretations about my songs, and I welcome all of them.”***

*Ever since 1989, American band The Wallflowers has blessed music lovers around the globe with a passionate mix of roots, rock and heartfelt americana. With a back catalogue of six albums that begs to be explored and listened to, the band is set to release its seventh offering in July of 2021 entitled ‘Exit Wounds’. The perfect opportunity to discuss the craft of songwriting with singer, frontman and multi-instrumentalist Jakob Dylan.*



*Julian De Backer: ‘I just heard your new album, ‘Exit Wounds’, and it’s quite excellent. It’s the first Wallflowers album since 2012, which signifies a nine year gap. Does that mean you’ve written some songs over the years that you’ve kept for this record? Or can you put on*

*different songwriter hats, aka "one for the solo record, one for the band"?"*

*Jakob Dylan: 'Well, it's a little bit of both. I didn't mean for it to be nine years. I actually finished the record just before the pandemic started. We could have released it last summer, I suppose. Since the last Wallflowers record, we did a lot of touring and I did a movie called 'Echo in the Canyon' which took me around the world. We then made a soundtrack record of cover songs. I've been busy, just waiting to be inspired to have new songs for a Wallflowers record.'*



*Julian: 'Some albums take years to complete (Guns N' Roses' 'Chinese Democracy', for example), other only take a few weeks when the artist is in a really creative zone. Did the 'Exit Wounds' songs originate from one or two writing sessions? Or did you combine new songs with older stuff you had lying around?'*

*Jakob: 'Both. Some new songs, some older songs, some I've kept with me, and some I've refined. I can't tell you why 'Chinese Democracy' took so long, it didn't sound like it should have taken so long (laughs). It can take any amount of time. I would never take years, 'Exit Wounds' only took about a month or so.'*

*Julian: 'It was a fruitful month, then.'*

*Jakob: 'Yeah, you hang on to songs that are older, and sometimes you go back to them and revisit them, but songs you write in a block of time usually have something in common. They*

*feel good together. Sometimes, a song you wrote five years ago doesn't have a place amongst the new ones. They have got to make sense together. I still make albums. I don't really make singles. I'm still looking for ten or twelve songs that have purpose to be together.'*

*Julian: 'I have always loved the album concept. Just like Led Zeppelin or AC/DC, bands that never think in terms of playlists or streaming platforms.'*

*Jakob: 'If you grew up with records that way, that's how you still hear them. Not every song you write is meant to be a single or meant to be on someone's playlist. They help you get from one song to the next. I'm not holding a torch for the album, so to speak, but that's what I know how to do and that's how I hear records. If you do it the other way, that's probably okay too, but I don't really hear music that way.'*

*Julian: 'I started collecting vinyl in the year 2000, when vinyl wasn't the coolest collectible in the world, and back in 2004, I found a copy of your album 'Red Letter Days' in a Belgian music store. To be perfectly honest, I had never heard of your band back then, and I just bought it on a hunch. It was released on Interscope, which was a label I liked, and I thought: 'It can't be bad'. I played it all summer long, and it became one of my favourites growing up ...'*

*Jakob: 'Oh, cool. That's something you used to*

*be able to do. Buy records from labels that you liked. I did that a lot, growing up.'*

*Julian: 'Indeed. You just assumed it was going to be great. So I want to thank you for making 'Red Letter Days', which was a friend during my growing up days.'*

*Jakob: 'I'm glad I could be there for you.'*

*Julian: 'One of your best songs, 'The Empire In My Mind', is on 'Red Letter Days', but it's a hidden track. Why did you hide it? It should have been front and center.'*

*Jakob: 'Oh, we wrote that song for a TV show, so we might have just tacked it on at the end. I don't recall if it was hidden or not, that's funny. Obviously, I remember the song, but if you would have asked me a minute ago, I would have told you that I don't think it's on 'Red Letter Days' (laughs). I think we may have included it after the fact.'*

*Julian: 'Speaking of 'Red Letter Days', the song 'Here in Pleasantville' is one of your best. Was it inspired by the movie of the same name?'*

*Jakob: 'No, the term 'Pleasantville' had been used before. The song was probably written around the same time as the movie, but I don't think I saw the movie.'*

*Julian: 'Going back to your new record: for non-musicians like me, the role of a producer isn't always clear. We know the Brian Eno or Rick Rubin stories, but I was wondering: what*

*did Butch Walker do for 'Exit Wounds'? And how does working with him compare to, say, Paul Fox, T-Bone Burnett or Andrew Slater from previous Wallflowers records?'*

*Jakob: 'Well, you know, I'm kind of like you, often I don't know what the role of a producer is (laughs). They're very different. The ones you just mentioned, none of them work in a similar way. Overtime, you figure out which one you work best with. I've worked with producers who sit there and just give you opinions, I've worked with producers who are also songwriters, I've worked with producers that don't even show up. So, there isn't any one way to do that job. For me, it's good to be in a room with a producer who is another set of ears. I don't need somebody to make my record, I need someone to really bounce ideas off of and to help me do a lot of things I don't really want to do. I work best with someone who's also a songwriter or a musician, who's very active in the studio and almost becomes a member of the recording process. The producers that just give opinions, at some point you end up resenting that. You're down in the trenches, and that person usually isn't. We all have opinions, and I guess some opinions have a better track record than others. Butch is a great songwriter and a great performer. He knows what someone like me is going to respond to. If nothing else, the main role of a producer is to help you feel as confident as you can and be as inspired as you can be. If you shut that down, there's no point in making a record. For me, Butch certainly provided that.'*

*Julian: 'He was there to guide you towards a better album.'*

*Jakob: 'Yeah, that's what it is. There isn't any producer that can make a good record with someone who doesn't have it in him. There are producers who just want a vocalist, to make their own records. I'm not one of those. Butch has a track record with a lot of pop music and he's had success in that area, but he's able to do anything for anybody.'*

*Julian: 'In the new song 'Roots and Wings', you sing the phrase 'I gave you roots'. As a non-native speaker, I have to ask: do you mean 'roots' as in 'ancestry' or as in 'beginnings, origin'?*

*Jakob: "Beginnings", to be from somewhere, being there from the beginning. It's not ancestry, no. I can't give that to many people. I've heard a lot of interpretations about my songs, and I welcome all of them. That's what a good song should do.'*

*Julian: 'Perhaps my favourite song of the new album is 'I Hear The Ocean When I Wanna Hear Trains', which drives on a very groovy, excellent beat. A funky party atmosphere at its core. Do you create lyrics for the tunes you compose, or vice versa, or do both lyrics and music come at the same time?'*

*Jakob: 'In the best songs, it all comes at once. But if you wait for that, you may be waiting a long time. That particular song is very pliable,*

*it has a very elastic regarding chord progression and vocal melody. I was inspired by Mink DeVille. 'Spanish Stroll' was in my head at the time.'*

*Julian: 'Oh, yeah, that's a great song. Now, you mentioned in other interviews that you were influenced by The Clash, The Jam, et cetera. You even invited The Clash's Mick Jones on the song 'Reboot the Mission'. It truly does sound like a Clash song, quite excellent. Were you able to channel your inner Joe Strummer? Did you invite Mick Jones once the song was written, because it reminded you of The Clash?'*

*Jakob: 'That's it, exactly. We were inspired by The Clash that day. We finished it, and obviously many people were going to mention that it sounded like 'Radio Clash' or a song off their album 'Sandinista!'. It was an opportunity to ask Mick Jones, and a great way of dealing with any possible criticism that it sounded too much like The Clash.'*

*Julian: 'Was he open to the idea? Did he come and jam with you?'*

*Jakob: 'We were in Nashville, he was in the UK, and I sent him two songs, hoping he would just pick one. He picked both of them and sang on both.'*

*Julian: 'Just two days ago, a Belgian channel aired your documentary 'Echo in the Canyon'. It's really an amazing documentary, and I'm not saying this to flatter you or give a fake*

*opinion. My dad also watched it, and he wanted me to tell you that it was flat-out incredible. 'I was catapulted back to my 16-year old self', he said. He absolutely loved it. You nailed it.'*

*Jakob: 'Oh, that's great!'*

*Julian: 'In the documentary, Tom Petty doesn't necessarily consider Mozart to be better than Brian Wilson. I'd love to hear your opinion on that statement.'*

*Jakob: 'I'm not going to argue about anything that Tom Petty said. Brian Wilson makes classical music, to some degree. Petty was trying to separate Brian Wilson from his rock and roll peers, to say that he's on another level of sophistication that exceeded rock or pop music. I would agree with him. I don't think it's a startling conclusion. Most people wouldn't put those two names in the same category, but he was attempting to do that, and I think he was quite right.'*

*Julian: 'Brian Wilson wrote 'Pet Sounds' when he had heard The Beatles' 'Rubber Soul'. Did you ever write a song as a sort of reaction to something mindblowing you had just heard?'*

*Jakob: 'I wouldn't say so directly. I get knocked out by things all the time. Sometimes, things that knock you out, they do the opposite. They shut you down and intimidate you. I don't have an example that made me run to mimic, but I know what he means, though. At the time, they were nudging each other along. The*



*Beatles, The Beach Boys, The Rolling Stones, it was all friendly competition. Things were so new, young and fresh. They were peeling back the onion as they went. Hearing each other's records made them competitive in an appealing way. They wanted to top it, I suppose. We don't have the same kind of peers.'*

*Julian: 'You started out in the late eighties, early nineties. The grunge was huge, afterwards you had the Britpop with Blur and Oasis. But it's not the same, indeed. The canyon had an embarrassment of riches, with brilliant bands around every corner.'*

*Jakob: 'Rock and roll was much younger then. There was a lot of excitement, they didn't know where it would and could go. I don't think most of the people thought they were going to have careers, they were having a good time as long as it would last. They also didn't have that many genres. Today, there's just so much out there, it's not as easy to know who you feel any kind of kinship with.'*

*Julian: 'It's frustrating. You can't buy everything, and you can't listen to everything. We always end up losing, because there are lots of songs we never hear during our lifetime.'*

*Jakob: 'Yeah, sure. There's too much.'*

*Julian: 'Where did you find the video fragments and snippets of the Mamas and the Papas/The Byrds/The Beach Boys? Record label vaults or*

*the private collections of the artists in question?'*

*Jakob: 'It was complicated, you have to get clearance for that. We didn't want stuff that was already overused. At this point, fifty-five years later, we've seen most of it already. So we tried to find some unique footage that wasn't so common. But, yeah, you've got to go into the vaults and get permission. That's part of the difficulty of making a movie like that. You don't have anything if you don't have the real footage. We didn't want to use animation to tell the story. It's a solution, but we wanted the real deal.'*

*Julian: 'I wish I could go back to the California from your movie. I've never been to Los Angeles, I've only been to Florida and New York.'*

*Jakob: 'I hope you didn't do too bad in Florida, but New York is awesome.'*

*Julian: 'I wish I could live in New York, but that's too expensive, haha.'*

*Jakob: 'Oh, it's expensive, yeah.'*

*Julian: 'Mr. Dylan, I want to thank you for your time. I wish you all the best with 'Exit Wounds', a great record for the ages. I'll recommend it to all my friends.'*

*Jakob: 'Tell your dad I appreciate it that he liked the film so much.'*

*Julian: 'I'm going to introduce him to your music as well. I hope you can come to Belgium for a show once the pandemic is over. Thank you for everything.'*

*Jakob: 'All right, you too. Thank you, have a good day.'*

*Julian De Backer © 2021 for Keys and Chords*

*A WOODLAND HILLCREST PROMOTION PRODUCTION | KEYS AND CHORDS  
2001 - 2024*

