



FILM: **A COMPLETE UNKNOWN**

FDG RATING: 4.3 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

James Mangold: *director, co-writer*
Timothée Chalamet: *actor, Bob Dylan*
Monica Barbaro: *actress, Joan Baez*

DATE: February 16, 2025

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **A COMPLETE UNKNOWN**

Even Dylan fans were blown away by Timothée Chalamet's performance as the early Bob Dylan who emerges as a complete unknown, from Duluth Minnesota in the early 1960s and arrives in New York, a 19-year-old with a guitar and a backpack, immersing himself in the Greenwich Village folk music scene. Although nominated, he didn't win the 2025 Oscar for best actor, disappointing many who thought he deserved it. A seemingly impossible character to impersonate, Chalamet was able to embody the gruff, rude, talented music icon, Bob Dylan, with his raw gritty voice, unique style of playing guitar with a harmonica, and memorable song lyrics. (Dylan was awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition".)

The film takes artistic liberties in chronicling Dylan's meteoric rise to fame culminating in the 1965 Newport Folk Festival where he was booed and called a traitor for performing his electric guitar music. Along the way, we see him visiting his folk hero, an ailing Woody Guthrie, hospitalized with Huntington's disease; being mentored by the established folk singer Pete Seeger (Oscar-nominated Edward Norton) who gives Dylan his first big break, and meeting the already successful Joan Baez (Oscar-nominated Monica Barbaro) with whom he had a tumultuous romantic relationship. Remember album cover "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan"? Elle Fanning plays Dylan's girlfriend who is pictured on the cover and some think she also should have been nominated for an Oscar.

What we loved most about the film was hearing Chalamet sing so many of our favorite Dylan songs. Often, biopics about musicians have limited rights to the music, but *A Complete Unknown* was like being at a Dylan performance. And Chalamet learned to play guitar like Dylan and to sing like Dylan so he could perform all the songs and music sets himself. Barbaro did the same for her role. One discussion participant said the only flaw for him was that Chalamet sang slightly better than Dylan.

Another discussion participant praised Norton's staggering portrayal of Seeger, saying he was more Pete Seeger than Seeger himself. Other positive comments described the music as stunning. Also noted was how well the early New York scenes captured Dylan's fierce independence. And let's not overlook the actor who played Johnny Cash who another participant said was excellent.

The film definitely targeted and appealed to a specific age demographic but from a historical perspective, as one discussion participant said, Dylan was the voice of a generation. His music reflects the values, concerns, independence, and creative spirit of his time.

Entertaining, nostalgic, with exceptional performances and filled with incredible music, we applauded *A Complete Unknown* with an enthusiastic 4.3 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
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