

MUSIC

# Settled in Sweden, the Man Who First Booked Dylan

By REBECCA ROSMAN DEC. 7, 2016

STOCKHOLM — Bob Dylan won't be visiting Sweden this week to accept the Nobel Prize in Literature, though he has sent a speech in his absence. The news of his no-show at the ceremony on Saturday disappointed fans — as well as one resident here who has old ties to rock's poet laureate: Israel Goodman Young, the man who gave Mr. Dylan his first New York concert.

Mr. Young was the folk enthusiast who made possible the \$2 tickets to Mr. Dylan's Nov. 4, 1961, gig at Carnegie Chapter Hall; only about 50 people attended, but the event has earned its place in rock 'n' roll history as Mr. Dylan's first big break.

Mr. Young has lived in Sweden for more than 35 years and, at 88, takes a bus and a train every day to reach his Folklore Centrum in the Södermalm neighborhood of Stockholm. Part performance space, part treasure trove of memorabilia, this modest shop could be mistaken for an old living room, with dust blanketing the used hardcovers lining the shelves. This emporium is his second act; its first iteration on Macdougall Street was the epicenter of Greenwich Village's 1960s folk music scene.

Mr. Young, known as Izzy, said that he didn't regret being associated with that seminal show, but that he wished people's memories of his career went beyond it.

Bob Dylan "is the only thing people remember me for," he said with a shrug as he recounted their relationship one recent afternoon at his store.

Mr. Dylan was a regular customer at Mr. Young's original Folklore Center, and his little-known song "Talking Folklore Center" described the lure of the place.

"His voice was like a bulldozer and always seemed too loud for the little room," Mr. Dylan wrote of Mr. Young in his 2004 memoir, "Chronicles." "Izzy was always a little rattled over something or other. He was sloppily good-natured. In reality, a romantic."

Two years ago, when John Schulman, a book collector in Pittsburgh, sought rare archives documenting the 1960s New York folk scene, he contacted Mr. Young to see if he would sell some items he had collected — perhaps books, manuscripts, photographs or tape recordings — to the Library of Congress.

But then, a friend of Mr. Young's intervened.

"I said, listen, that's not what's valuable here," recalled Edward Bromberg, who first met Mr. Young in Stockholm more than 30 years ago. Mr. Bromberg told Mr. Schulman of Mr. Young's diaries, which included details from that folk scene that are otherwise inaccessible. "He's the Samuel Pepys of the Village," Mr. Bromberg said.

Mr. Young's journals are a mix of poetry, anxiety, ramblings and notes on just about everyone who came through his store — and just about everyone did.

In one entry, Mr. Young describes traveling with the music manager Albert Grossman to Canada in 1962, where he heard Joni Mitchell sing for the first time and invited her to play in New York. In another, he writes of a young Tim Buckley humbly hesitating to accept payment after a performance at the Folklore Center, eventually taking the money, only to spend it on a cab ride home.

Mr. Young sold his archives to the Library of Congress for an undisclosed sum, and they are now being sorted and cataloged at the library's American Folklife Center; eventually, they will be made at least partly available online. In addition to the diaries, they include tape recordings, including one of a 20-year-old Patti Smith reading poetry, as well as homemade posters Mr. Young drew.

Mr. Young, a native New Yorker, credits his lengthy career in music to a random encounter with dance. When he was in his 20s, he had planned to take a date stargazing. After the skies turned overcast, she suggested that they attend a square-dancing class. “Within three or four weeks, I was the best one in the room,” he recalled proudly.

From there, Mr. Young began reading folk poetry and hanging out in the like-minded circles then brewing around the Village. He built a small mail-order business selling folk books he collected.

In 1957, a friend told him about a shop for rent; if he wanted to sell books, he might like his own store. But the owner wanted a \$400 cash deposit immediately.

Mr. Young scraped together the money and ran to 110 Macdougall Street, where he signed the lease. He became known for his loud, brash persona, but also for his big heart and genuine interest in artists and their work.

Mr. Young sold books and music on everything folk, but he would let customers stay for hours without pressuring them. He would also organize small concerts at the back of the shop.

“He was just very generous, which went along with the communal spirit of the neighborhood,” said Stephen Petrus, an author of “Folk City: New York and the American Folk Music Revival.”

Mr. Young, Mr. Petrus said, was “happy to promote people, and he liked being the M.C. at a concert,” adding that “he wasn’t really looking for a profit.”

Mr. Young estimates that he hosted around 1,000 concerts at or near the Folklore Center, including performances by Tom Paley, Mr. Buckley, Emmylou Harris and Ms. Mitchell.

Mr. Young has used the archive sale to keep his Stockholm center running. Brian Kramer, a friend who hosts a blues guitar course there, described him as “telepathically honest in a brutal but brilliant way.” He added, “But he’s exactly himself, and he loves music.”

His relatively quiet life in Sweden was interrupted in October, when the announcement of Mr. Dylan's Nobel Prize had his phone ringing off the hook.

"People were calling Izzy's, trying to see how they could get in touch with Dylan's publicist," Mr. Bromberg said.

At one point, Mr. Bromberg added, the Swedish Academy called Mr. Young for Mr. Dylan's contact information — they were trying to notify him of his award.

Regrettably, Mr. Young said, he no longer had any.

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