

## 3. Fingerpicking

### Fingers and thumbs

The earliest recordings of Dylan playing fingerpicked guitar are probably from May 1961. On the so-called *Party Tape*, recorded at Bonnie Beecher's apartment on his first trip back to Minnesota from New York, Dylan plays through a mixed bag of over twenty folk and blues standards, together with some Guthrie songs and a single self-penned ditty to Bonnie herself.

#### Railroad Bill

Tuning: E A D G B E Capo: 2nd fret

The musical score for 'Railroad Bill' is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a standard notation staff and a corresponding guitar tablature staff. The tablature uses numbers 0-3 to indicate frets. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3. Chord diagrams for C, E7, F, G7, and C are shown above the staves. The piece is in drop D tuning (E A D G B E) with a capo at the 2nd fret, resulting in a key signature of one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The music features a mix of single-note runs, chords, and a prominent alternating thumb drone on the 6th string.

'Railroad Bill', the tale of a fugitive variously portrayed as a murderous desperado or heroic Robin Hood figure, was based on a real-life outlaw in Alabama. A ballad detailing his exploits first appeared in 1895 and it has been a standard in the folk repertoire ever since. I've collected a few different versions together to highlight various aspects of fingerpicking technique that Dylan would soon absorb into his own playing.

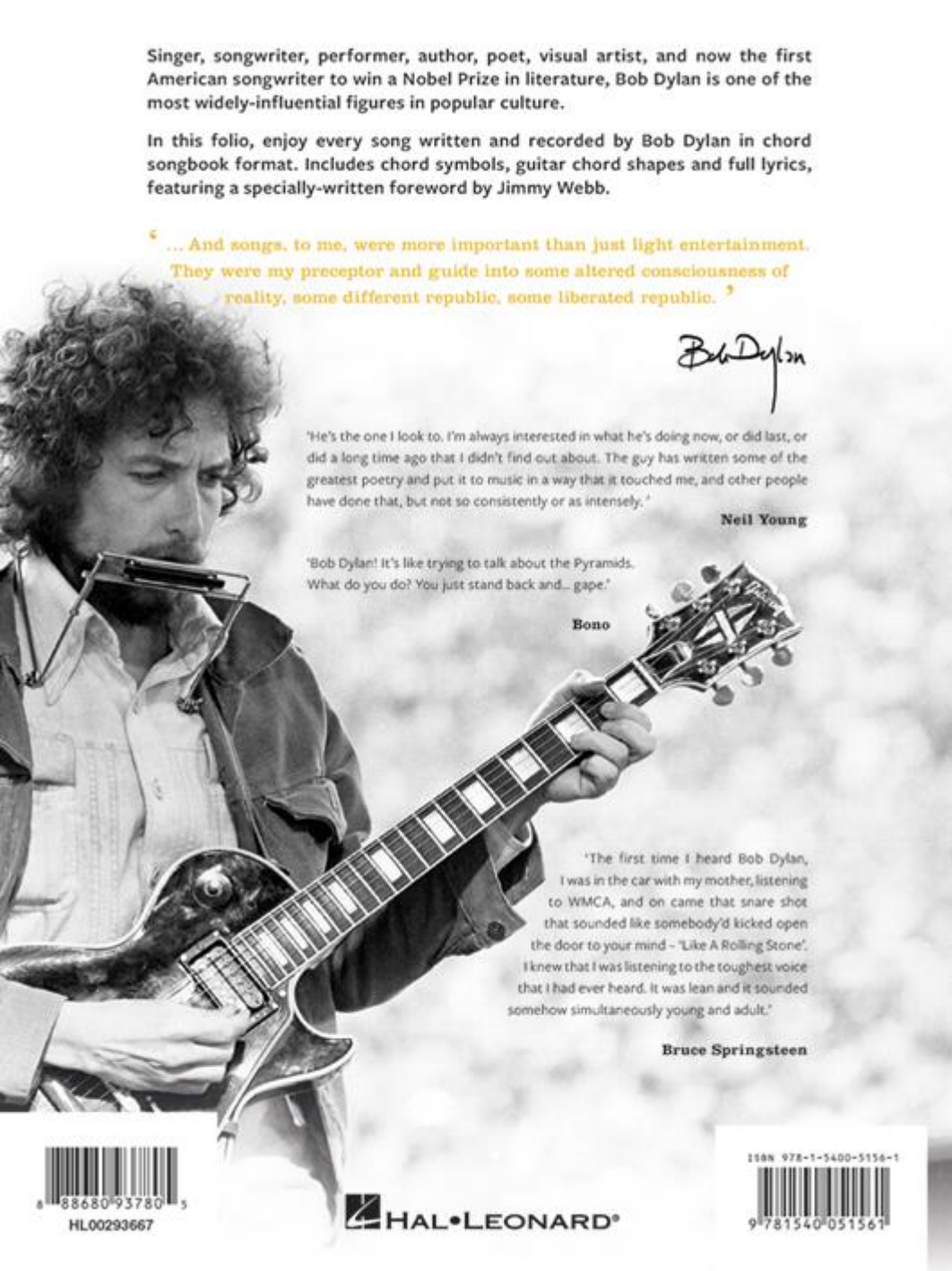
The set includes two songs sung to a confidently fingerpicked guitar accompaniment: a Reverend Gary Davis number, 'Death Don't Have No Mercy'; and 'Railroad Bill', a popular old folk blues. On 'Railroad Bill', Dylan picks in a syncopated ragtime style, with so-called walk-ups and walk-downs in the bass to reach the next chord. His thumb technique provides a regular, solid beat, and at the age of twenty, he's clearly adept at moving stepwise in the bass this way, although these walking lines never really establish themselves in Dylan's own songs.

Dylan was certainly familiar with Cisco Houston's version, released by Folkways in 1953 on *900 Miles And Other R. R. Songs*. Houston, a close friend of Woody Guthrie and sometime performer with the Almanac Singers, plays this song in drop D tuning. The thumb continuously alternates between the open 6th and 4th strings against syncopated upper string notes in a familiar Travis-style pattern (see **Travis picking**, p. xxiv). With the low D string, this alternating thumb note creates a drone that we'll see in various incarnations of 'Rocks And Gravel'. Notice too how the thumb wraps around the 6th string to fret a low E beneath the A chord.

Singer, songwriter, performer, author, poet, visual artist, and now the first American songwriter to win a Nobel Prize in literature, Bob Dylan is one of the most widely-influential figures in popular culture.

In this folio, enjoy every song written and recorded by Bob Dylan in chord songbook format. Includes chord symbols, guitar chord shapes and full lyrics, featuring a specially-written foreword by Jimmy Webb.

“... And songs, to me, were more important than just light entertainment. They were my preceptor and guide into some altered consciousness of reality, some different republic, some liberated republic.”



“He’s the one I look to. I’m always interested in what he’s doing now, or did last, or did a long time ago that I didn’t find out about. The guy has written some of the greatest poetry and put it to music in a way that it touched me, and other people have done that, but not so consistently or as intensely.”

**Neil Young**

“Bob Dylan! It’s like trying to talk about the Pyramids. What do you do? You just stand back and... gape.”

**Bono**

“The first time I heard Bob Dylan, I was in the car with my mother, listening to WMCA, and on came that snare shot that sounded like somebody’d kicked open the door to your mind - ‘Like A Rolling Stone’. I knew that I was listening to the toughest voice that I had ever heard. It was lean and it sounded somehow simultaneously young and adult.”

**Bruce Springsteen**



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ISBN 978-1-5400-5156-1

