

Knocking on Heaven's Door

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 29 December 2009 14:27 - Last Updated Sunday, 15 March 2015 17:48

In 1972 *Rudy Wurlitzer* asked Bob Dylan for co-operation. He was in the final stages of writing the script for the film *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. He wanted Dylan to create the soundtrack.

Wurlitzer needed a theme song. As Dylan had nothing else to do at the time, he set about reading the script. He liked the film characters and quickly wrote the ballad 'Billy'. He even asked Wurlitzer for a role in the film. Wurlitzer promised to help, so Dylan and his wife went to Durango, Mexico, where the director Sam Peckinpah was shooting the film.

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Peckinpah wasn't delighted with the idea of Dylan taking part in the film. Kris Kristofferson and James Coburn, who played main roles, claimed that the decision had been taken over a dinner table. They were all enjoying a glass of tequila and some time in the middle of the supper Peckinpah asked Dylan to play something for them. He played his songs, including the two which had been written for the film: 'Billy' and 'Goodbye Holly'. The end result was that Peckinpah wanted the contract signed. Dylan played the part of Alias, Billy the Kid's friend.

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Bob Dylan as Alias

The film production progressed with much difficulty due to constant quarrels with the producer MGM Studios. The two and a half months with the film crew was a hard time for Dylan.

After the filming ended, recording session began in Columbia studio in Mexico City. The music session wasn't easy either.

Dylan was accompanied by several local musicians and Kris Kristofferson group's members. They recorded several versions of 'Billy' but Dylan wasn't pleased. One version he recorded only with Terry Paul, the bass player. This version was ultimately accepted for the film. Jerry Fielding, an experienced sound designer, was asked for co-operation by Peckinpah, who was aware of the difficulties. Dylan did not appreciate him at all, he considered him too conservative and their co-operation was full of disparity. But it was Fielding who played a very important role in the end.

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Billy the Kid (ferrotype photograph)

Namely, he impelled Dylan to compose one more song, because he believed that the soundtrack would be poor, if based on just one ballad 'Billy'. Agitated Dylan took only one day to write:

Knocking on Heaven's Door.

In this a little strange way a beautiful piece was created.

The musical layer of the song is based on just four chords: G, D, Am7, C. The first sequence goes like this: G-D-Am7-Am7, the second: G-D-C-C. Then the sequences are repeated.

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When the song became a hit, the meaning of the text began to be analysed. As usual, there were many theories. It always astounds me in cases of film music that often the text is interpreted without any reference to the picture. The role of music in a film is to emphasize a scene and it needs to be analysed accordingly.

Knocking on Heaven's Door was included in the album *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* and appeared as a single from '*Turkey Chase*' on side B in 1973.



Pat Garret and Billy the Kid

The song was liked and performed by many musicians, who played it in different styles and tempos. The best known cover was recorded by *Guns N'Roses* (it became No 2 in UK charts). This version is not original, anyhow. It had been performed in the same way by an Australian

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band Cold Chisel. Other performers include: Eric Clapton, Avril Lavigne, Led Zeppelin & Pink Floyd, Phil Collins, Randy Crawford.

In 2004 the magazine Rolling Stone placed *Knocking on Heaven's Door* on the 190. position on the list of **500 Greatest**

Songs of All Time

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Knocking On Heaven`s Door, Bob Dylan, lyrics

*Mama, take this badge off of me
I cant use it anymore.
Its gettin dark, too dark for me to see
I feel like Im knockin on heavens door.*

*Knock, knock, knockin on heavens door
Knock, knock, knockin on heavens door*

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Knock, knock, knockin on heavens door
Knock, knock, knockin on heavens door

Mama, put my guns in the ground
I cant shoot them anymore.
That long black cloud is comin down
I feel like Im knockin on heavens door.

□

Knock, knock, knockin on heavens door
Knock, knock, knockin on heavens door
Knock, knock, knockin on heavens door
Knock, knock, knockin on heavens door