

**Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now The Minnesota musicians behind Bob Dylan's 'Blood on the Tracks'
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CATHY WURZER: Time for a little history in our reoccurring series *Minnesota Now And Then*.

[MUSIC - BOB DYLAN, "IDIOT WIND"]

BOB DYLAN: (SINGING) Idiot wind blowing every time you move your mouth. Blowing down the back roads heading south. Idiot wind blowing every time you move your teeth. You're an idiot, babe.

CATHY WURZER: That, of course, is Bob Dylan. Here's a question for Dylan fans. Did Bob ever record an album in Minnesota? The answer is yes and no. In December of 1974, the Duluth born, Hibbing raised, singer-songwriter had a new album in the bag. He recorded it in New York City with a crack team of session players. But something didn't feel right. So at the 11th hour, Dylan convened in a Minneapolis studio with six Minnesota musicians. He ended up rerecording five tracks. Kevin Odegard is with us. He was a guitarist on the Minnesota Sessions for what would become Dylan's January 1975 release *Blood on the Tracks*. Kevin, it's so nice to have you here.

KEVIN ODEGARD: 19 years it's been since we spoke. How are you?

CATHY WURZER: I am-- well, so far so good. Thanks for being here. All right. Now, for folks who do not know the back story, it's a good back story too. December 74, Dylan had completed *Blood on the Tracks* in New York. So how did you and the other Minnesota guys end up on this album?

KEVIN ODEGARD: Just a freak accident. I was trying to watch *Kojak* ignoring the railroad calls to go to-- on a day just like this. It was a cold dark night in the twin cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. And I let the phone ring because I was a big *Kojak* fan, and I wanted to finish the program before I had to deal with real life.

CATHY WURZER: Old TV--

KEVIN ODEGARD: Finally, I picked it up-- yeah. I just-- *Who Loves Ya, Baby?* I just picked it up, and it was David Zimmerman, Bob's younger brother, looking for a guitar, not for me, not for anybody else. The first call was just for a guitar. And he wanted a 1920s 0042 gut string. It was called in those days a Joan Baez model, smaller body guitar. And he sent me to work on that assignment.

CATHY WURZER: Oh, my gosh. And you thought to yourself, "OK, I can do this." And just for folks who don't know about you, you'd run into Dylan, I think, at High Holidays because you knew David and their mom, Betty, right? You were kind of in the extended circle.

KEVIN ODEGARD: I was in the extended circle, yes. And I'd run into Dylan before. I would run into him again after all this. And I would work for him from time to time. And it was always a pleasant wonderful surprise experience for me.

CATHY WURZER: So, OK. You get the guitar for-- you procure the guitar, and then you end up with the other guys in a session.

- KEVIN ODEGARD:** The guy who owned the guitar shop was picky. His name was Chris Webber. And once he found out that I wanted the guitar, he smelled a rat. He knew I was with somebody big, right? So he said, "Well, who's it for?" I said, "I can't tell you that." Two phone calls later, I have to get permission for everything I say in or out. He finds out it's Dylan. He said, "OK, I'm coming to the session." And I have to protect the guitar. I have to be with the guitar because it's not mine. It's on consignment. It's on the wall. "I'm riding with you. Pick me up at 4:30." Which we then did on Friday, the 27th.
- CATHY WURZER:** And I know enough about this to know that you guys were recording in South Minneapolis at the old Sound 80 recording studios, which has a really great history. And I think isn't it-- nowadays, it's still it's still open. Isn't it the-- what? The quietest room in the world?
- KEVIN ODEGARD:** It is the quietest room in the world. Orfield Labs. Steve Orfield, wonderful guy. They have some gold records down there from some of us. And they'll give you a tour if you walk up to the front desk. Steve is a Dylan fan and is only too happy to show you around.
- CATHY WURZER:** So you and the guys get in there. Dylan's there. You're going to start to play. The first song that you worked on was, well, we just heard it, right? *Idiot Wind*.
- KEVIN ODEGARD:** Right. It was discordant. We didn't like it. I didn't like it. Nobody liked it. Chris worked on it. Because it starts on a C minor, which is an odd place to start. What we didn't know was-- well, we didn't know a lot. And I haven't spoken to you in 19 years. We know more now than we ever did, as we learn about what happened with that. He came in with it. Chris worked with him to tweak it. And Chris became the de facto leader of the sessions for that reason. He called Chris in to show him the song. And Chris kind of fixed up a thing here and a thing there. And today-- I'd just say this about Chris. Today, Chris was my daily affirmation, my morning meditation.
- Imagine standing before you is the biggest rock star on planet earth. And you have a crew of fearless explorers, let's say, around you at your command. So Chris charted the way to the summit, not once, not twice, but four times within the space of as many hours. So that's Chris Webber for you. The guy who was a little picky in the guitar store took on this role of session leader and will always be my hero.
- CATHY WURZER:** Wow. I know you cranked through some what five songs. We're going to play one of them. And this is one of my favorites. Let's hear it.
- [MUSIC - BOB DYLAN, "TANGLED UP IN BLUE"]
- BOB DYLAN:** (SINGING) Early one morning, the sun was shining. I was laying in bed, wondering if she's changed it all if her hair was still red. Her folks, they said, our lives together sure was going to be rough. They never did like mama's homemade dress. Papa's bank book wasn't big enough.
- CATHY WURZER:** I love this song. I'm telling you. So tell me a little bit about it. Now, did you-- you said you didn't like-- you thought the *Idiot Wind* was discordant at first. What'd you think of *Tangled Up in Blue*?

KEVIN ODEGARD: Well, between Chris and Bob they fixed *Idiot Wind* and it sounded like something out of the '60s. It was tremendous by the time he was done with that. We did seven or eight takes. By Monday night, when we did *Tangled Up in Blue*, we liked that song, except for it was in G, and it was just kind of OK. And because Dylan was relaxed and just with a bunch of homeboys, one of them from the range, Bill Berg the drummer, he was really just in a garage band for a night. And we put all pretensions aside. There were no movie stars. There were no celebrities in the room. It was just Robert Zimmerman and four dudes from South Minneapolis plunking on our guitars.

So it was good, but it wasn't as good as I thought it could be. So I forgot entirely where I was. And Bob looked up at me three feet from my face and said, "Well, what do you think?" And I told him it was passable. And that was really an insult. So I figured, well, he's going to retire my jersey now. I'm off the field. It's over. And it wasn't. He took my advice. We moved up to A. And one take-- in one take, 6 minutes later, we were all looking at our shoes meditating. We couldn't say anything. It was an indescribable, unspeakable moment of truth and glory for all of us as musicians. It was something, that I now have grandchildren, that I will tell them about someday.

CATHY WURZER: Like I say, it's one of my favorite songs. I know there's a new book coming out that tells the story of you all. The Minnesota musicians in this seminal recording session by my dear friend Rick Shevchik. And was that kind of fun too to put this together?

KEVIN ODEGARD: Well, Shevchik is a master chef when it comes to writing books. He's the best interviewer, psychoanalyst I've ever worked with in my life. And I always felt a little bit better like, when is he going to send me a bill? Because he'll dig deeper than anybody I've ever met. And I've met a few now in the last 48 years. I've met a couple of journalists. And Rick Shevchik is among the best and Paul Metz, his partner on the project. This is the book that should become the Bob Dylan movie that is the Bob Dylan movie, even without Bob Dylan. Bob Dylan is the Greek chorus, let's say. But this is a great book. And it talks about--

I'm mean, you've seen Beatles movies where kids are getting ready for the Beatles to come to town, and there whole movies about them without the Beatles in it. This book in my mind is a-- it's a movie. It's a major motion picture. And it's a lot of fun. And if you dug deep into everybody else's psyche as he did into mine, this book is going to win awards, it's going to win prizes, and it's going to sell a lot of copies. It's a really, really great book. It's an update on the whole project, like, has never been done.

CATHY WURZER: See, before we go, I got about 30 seconds. What happened to the guitar you used on *Tangled Up in Blue*?

KEVIN ODEGARD: We talked that over. And I had some offers on the table. We looked at guitar collectors, hedge fund managers, people who had enough money to buy it. But, Susan Casey, my wife and I decided at the end of the day, "Hey, let's go to Tulsa and give this thing to the Bob Dylan Center, which is our new treehouse. It's our new clubhouse. Metz and me and all the musicians who ever worked for Dylan, every journalist, all the great journalists gather there. So it's our own-- if we were kids, it'd be where we went to play with Bobby Zimmerman and his sandbox in his treehouse. It's a great, great place. And there's plenty of Minnesota."

You walk into the first floor and you're standing on Main Street in Hibbing, Minnesota. You just can't believe how much Minnesota there is in this place.

CATHY Oh, I tell you what, Kevin, I have appreciated you being here. Thank you for your stories. And I look forward to the book. And I hope you have a good rest of the day. Thanks so much.

KEVIN Thank you. Bye now.

ODEGARD:

CATHY We're going to go out to one more tune from the album. This is *If You See Her, Say Hello*.

WURZER:

[MUSIC - BOB DYLAN, "IF YOU SEE HER, SAY HELLO"]

BOB DYLAN: (SINGING) If you see her, say hello. She might be in Tangier.

CATHY Boy, I tell you, guitarist Kevin Odegard is great. He was one of six Minnesota musicians who played on Dylan's 75

WURZER: album *Blood on the Tracks*. Rick Shevchik, as you heard, in Paul Metz's book *Blood on the Tracks*, the Minnesota musicians behind Dylan's masterpiece will be released this August from the University of Minnesota Press.

BOB DYLAN: (SINGING) --all right. Though things get kind of slow, she might think that I've forgotten her. Don't--