

# Blood On The Tracks - The First Acetate

## *Untangling the Tale of a Topless Roadside Place*

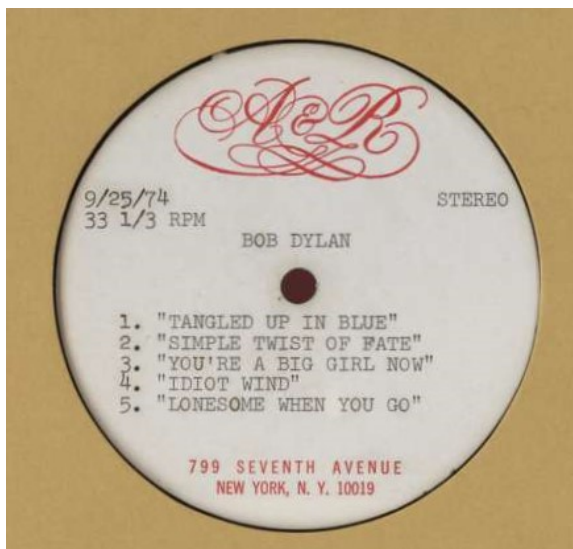
By Percy Song

### *Prologue*

In the beginning, *"Blood On The Tracks"* was quite different to the album it became. The songs were always going to be the same songs, but five of them were re-recorded in another studio, in another time and place, with some new lyrics, new arrangements and with different accompanists. It's a fascinating tale of a surety which turned to doubt that has been told a hundred times or more in books and articles and reviews. Tracks from a Test Pressing of the record Bob Dylan wanted to release before he changed his mind in December 1974 escaped soon after the LP was released in January. This Test Pressing became known as the New York version of the album, and down the years a few outtakes from the initial sessions were released officially, providing a tantalising, if limited, glimpse into what went on in A&R Studio A-1 at 799 Seventh Avenue in New York during four days in September.

Since 2018, we've been able to eavesdrop on those sessions in two formats. *"More Blood, More Tracks: The Bootleg Series Vol.14"*, a 6 CD boxed set from Sony/Columbia Legacy, contains the "complete chronological..." audio recorded in Studio A-1 as well as a number of revealing images of tape boxes and reels, disc labels and studio documentation, and a facsimile of the famous "fair copy" Red Notebook of lyrics. It is complemented by Clinton Heylin's comprehensive, informative and self-assured limited edition monograph, *"No One Else Could Play That Tune: The Making and Unmaking of Bob Dylan's 1974 Masterpiece"*. Drawing on old quotes and newly-mined memories of those who were there or thereabouts, he was also given access to all the extant session tapes and logs to enable him to tell the full story of those New York sessions.

But no matter how complete a story about Bob Dylan appears to be, whether on disc or on paper, there will always be a tiny pebble left unturned, an overgrown byway not fully explored, a neglected watering hole not visited. This piece of the jigsaw takes us back to the end of the beginning, after the bulk of the New York sessions were done but not quite dusted, when Dylan was selecting the performances he wanted on the album. It is the tale of the first *"Blood on the Tracks"* acetate.



### ***The Three Known Acetates***

This 12" two-sided acetate dated 9/25/74 (September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1974) is the first of three acetates known to have been cut on the A&R lathe during the three weeks following the initial New York "*Blood On The Tracks*" sessions, recorded between September 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. The Second Acetate, apparently two single-sided discs, was cut on September 30<sup>th</sup> (9/30/74) and the Third Acetate was cut on October 8<sup>th</sup> (10/8/74). The discs chart the stages of fine-tuning Dylan did to the New York album in the aftermath of the marathon post-recording session on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> during which the bulk of the editing and mixing of the ten songs selected for the album had been done.<sup>1</sup>

They were made for Dylan to listen to, away from the studio, to allow him to evaluate further the takes he had chosen for the final record, to decide whether there was a need for any more editing or embellishing of the songs, and to work out his preference for the sequencing of the tracks. In fact, so certain then was Dylan of the record he wanted to release, it turned out there was relatively little tinkering done between the remixing session and the production of the final Test Pressing two months later.<sup>2</sup>

But tinkering there was. The First Acetate was cut before final edits were made to two tracks and before the famous "spooky organ" overdub was added on October 8<sup>th</sup>. Thus, it features versions of "*Tangled Up In Blue*", "*Simple Twist Of Fate*" and "*Idiot Wind*" not found on the Columbia Reference Recording, the Columbia Test Pressing nor, apparently, the third A&R acetate which is said to have been identical in content to those two later Columbia discs, albeit in a different running order.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, as we shall see later, this version of "*Tangled Up In Blue*" does not appear on the 9/30/74 Second Acetate although "*Idiot Wind*" without the overdub obviously does. It is not known whether this version of "*Simple Twist Of Fate*" is on the Second Acetate but what is certain is that only one of these three tracks, as presented on the First Acetate, is included on the "*More Blood, More Tracks*" boxed set.<sup>4</sup>

A European collector purchased the First Acetate in Nashville, Tennessee in 1983 from a now-deceased record company executive who must remain anonymous, believing it to be an acetate of the Test Pressing; it has been in the buyer's possession ever since. Although it is possible more than one copy of the 9/25/74 acetate was cut, this is the only one to have surfaced to date and, perhaps tellingly, there are no images of any acetate dated 9/25/74 in the packaging of the various editions of "*More Blood, More Tracks*". The label images that appear in Michael Krogsgaard's "*Master of The Tracks*" book and this article were provided by the current owner.

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<sup>1</sup> On page 79 of his monograph, Heylin states that Ellen Bernstein, Dylan's companion at the time, retained her copy of the Side Two Second Acetate but mislaid her copy of Side One. I'm assuming the latter did indeed exist and, for the purposes of this essay, treat the two discs as a single entity.

<sup>2</sup> Acetates are aluminium discs coated in lacquer. Performances on a tape can be transferred to these discs via a signal fed to a lathe which cuts the playing groove onto the disc in real time. Essentially it is a relatively quick, cheap and simple method for providing an artist with, literally, a record of the session or tape before he/she leaves the studio. These days the product is more likely to be a digital file.

<sup>3</sup> "No One Else Could Play That Tune" - Page 122. The Columbia Reference Recording is an acetate disc of the New York album Dylan intended to release. This would have been cut by Columbia, presumably from the Dylan-approved master tapes, for evaluation by record company executives prior to Test Pressings being made.

<sup>4</sup> The author has not heard the Second or Third Acetate so comments about their contents in this essay are necessarily speculative.

In Appendix IV of his monograph, published in 2018 through Route Books as a companion to the deluxe box set, Heylin is somewhat dismissive of the First Acetate, concluding that “...a certain wariness as to [its] authenticity is justifiable”, pointing out, among other things, the label has no A&R Studios catalogue number or song timings, two songs are mistitled, the track sequence is identical to the final album and, most damningly, that apparently “*Idiot Wind*” features an organ overdub. As we can see from the images above, he is correct on the first three points; however, he is incorrect in his other two assertions. Tony Brown, bassist throughout the New York sessions, has also said the organ is present on “*Idiot Wind*” on the 9/25/74 acetate and that Paul Griffin played live on all takes of the song. He is mistaken on both counts, as will be seen later.<sup>5</sup>

It might be an opportune moment to pause here and take another look at the labels of the First Acetate and compare them to the labels of the two subsequent acetates, shown on pages 80 and 81 of the “*Stories In The Press*” book that comes with the deluxe edition of “*More Blood, More Tracks*”, and whose authenticity is not questioned. Note the occasional double strike on the typewritten letters “O” and “F” appearing in places on all the labels, and also the break in the curlicue above the “A” in the A&R logo on Side Two of the First Acetate and Side One of the Third Acetate. It would not be controversial to conclude that the blank labels on all three acetates originated at A&R Studios and the text was produced by the same typewriter or labelling machine.

The sound on the acetate is clean and sharp, bright and engaging, even though there is a fair amount of surface noise, with clicks and pops evident throughout, particularly during the first half minute or so of each side. Several people who have compared the First Acetate to the Test Pressing have described hearing a crisper, cleaner, and wider sound on the former, with Dylan’s voice mixed a little higher and with a touch more reverb on several songs. However, as previously noted, only three of the ten tracks on the First Acetate differ musically and/or lyrically to those found on the Test Pressing. Obviously it would not be unusual for minor alterations to be made to mixes as the album progressed to its final presentation, but fundamentally the performances – the takes – on seven of the tracks are the same on both discs and there would be little value in describing minor sound quality variations here.

It has been known by some for a number of years that there are differences between the Test Pressing, pirated shortly after “*Blood On The Tracks*” was released in January 1975, and the First Acetate, which did not circulate until this century, and then not so widely. However, until the release of “*More Blood, More Tracks*” in 2018 it was not possible to be sure how and when those differences came about. With all the audio evidence that was made available in that set, along with images of some of the studio-generated paperwork contained both in the audio set and in Heylin’s worthwhile monograph, the picture has become less opaque, if still not crystal clear. What follows is an attempt to unravel the tangled tale of the three tracks on the “*Blood On The Tracks*” First Acetate which turned up later on the Test Pressing but in altered states.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Heylin has not seen or heard the First Acetate. Brown was given a disc he called “The Acetate” as a memento of his outstanding contribution to the sessions. It may have been a copy of the Third Acetate or, more likely, a Columbia Test Pressing. Both these discs carry the organ overdub on “*Idiot Wind*”.

<sup>6</sup> Confusingly, the Columbia Test Pressing has often been referred to as “The Acetate” by fans.

## The Three Songs

### 1. Tangled Up In Blue

Two takes of “Tangled Up In Blue” were chosen as contenders to open “Blood On The Tracks”. The first, recorded on September 17<sup>th</sup>, was Take 3 Remake, pulled to a 16-Track Master reel immediately after that session. Its rival, from September 19<sup>th</sup>, was Take 3 Remake 2. This pair of almost identical twins born two days apart were placed side by side on a stereo mix-down reel compiled on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. The first was described on the sheet as “Outtake”, the latter “Complete”, suggesting that the later take was the one most likely to survive the selection process. Indeed, on another tape log dated 9/24/74 the earlier take has a note written next to it: DNU (Do Not Use). All other takes of “Tangled Up In Blue” recorded in New York would have to wait until 2018 to be revealed.<sup>7&8</sup>

In fact, **both** selected performances of “Tangled Up In Blue” were destined to be represented on the album Dylan intended to release, only one would be officially released in its entirety, and neither appear as performed at the sessions on “More Blood, More Tracks”. So, what’s going on?

A & R RECORDING, INC.  
322 WEST 48TH STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10036  
JU 2-1070

STEREO MIX  
SOUSY  
1 OF

Date: 9-23-74 Studio: A1 Client: CBS Artist: DYLAN W.O.: Eng: [Signature]  
☐ Mono ☐ Two TRK. ☐ 4 TRK. ☐ 8 TRK. ☐ 16 TRK. ☐ Orig. ☐ Safety ☐ Copy Producer: [Signature]

TAKE	TITLE	TIME	COMMENTS
1	TANGLED UP IN BLUE OUTTAKE R/L		
2	TANGLED UP IN BLUE COMPLETE R/L		
3	BIG (GRL NOW) R/L		

NO. 12-1

The First Acetate contains the **original, unedited** Take 3 Remake 2 of “Tangled Up In Blue”, as recorded on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1974, and although the vast majority of that take also appears on the later acetates and the Test Pressing, it has been edited – some would say manipulated. For those who don’t have access to the Test Pressing - either on a bootleg or the 2019 Record Store Day vinyl replica – the manipulated version also appears on the deluxe edition of “More Blood, More Tracks” (Disc 5, Track 3), albeit with the dryer, in-the-studio mix chosen by the producers for the set. The 2019 replica vinyl edition of the Test Pressing is faithful to the original 1974 echo-soaked production and is a joy to listen to if you can find a decent copy; many left the pressing plants with manufacturing faults.

<sup>7</sup> I’m using the nomenclature found on “More Blood, More Tracks” to identify takes. This Columbia/Sony system of identifying takes would have been applied in 2018 when the boxed set was assembled. Heylin probably uses notation A&R engineers wrote down on the studio logs and tape boxes in 1974.

<sup>8</sup> When a take is described as “pulled” to a master reel, it means the section of tape containing that performance is physically removed from the original recording session tape and transferred to another reel on which a number of the most promising performances might be gathered together. The original session tape will then be joined back together minus the pulled takes.

At the session on September 19<sup>th</sup>, Dylan sang the first line of the fourth verse on Take 3 Remake 2 thus:

*"She was working in a roadside place and I stopped in for a beer".*

It isn't a vocal flub, but it is the only take of *"Tangled Up In Blue"* throughout the *"Blood On The Tracks"* sessions in which Dylan refers to his transient watering hole as *"...a roadside place..."* rather than *"...a topless place..."* and this appears, uniquely, on the First Acetate. The first half of the line, *"She was working in a roadside place..."* was removed from the master tape, apparently on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1974, and replaced with *"She was working in a topless place..."* from Take 3 Remake which had been recorded two nights earlier.

It seems, therefore, that Dylan – for it surely was he – decided after listening to the First Acetate that the September 19<sup>th</sup> performance was the one he wanted to release but realised the mention of a roadside place rather than a topless place failed to paint the required picture for a listener imagining the scene inside the joint when, just as he was about to leave, the waitress bent down to tie the laces of his shoes.

It is possible Dylan had already identified the need for the edit - Heylin calls it a "punch in" - before he listened to the acetate and let it go with a note to make the edit before the final mixing and mastering was done. Edits had already been carried out on *"Meet Me In The Morning"* (the removal of a verse) and *"Idiot Wind"* (the replacement of a couplet, discussed later) prior to September 25<sup>th</sup>, for example, and Buddy Cage had contributed his steel guitar overdubs to the former song and *"You're A Big Girl Now"*<sup>9</sup>

Studio documentation detailing the edit made to *"Tangled Up In Blue"* is hiding in plain sight in the image of a 16-Track Master Tape Sheet which can be viewed on page 60 of the media-carrying book in *"More Blood, More Tracks"*. A somewhat incoherent comment has been added adjacent to the song title:

\*New Edit 9/26/74 – ONE LINE from OLD TAKE/topless BARS

16 TRACK MASTER  
-DOLBY-

SW 1 OF 3

A & R RECORDING, INC.  
322 WEST 48TH STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10036  
JU 2-1070

Date 9/17/74 Studio A1 Client CBS Artist DYLAN WO# Eng. J. G. HENRI

☐ Mono ☐ Two TRK. ☐ 4 TRK. ☐ 8 TRK. ☐ 16 TRK. ☐ Orig. ☐ Safety ☐ Copy

Producer: J. G. HENRI

TAKE	TITLE	TIME	COMMENTS	TAKE	TITLE	TIME	COMMENTS
1	TANGLED UP IN BLUE			1	IDOT WIND - RED		out to Bob Dylan 9/11/75 TOPLESS BARS
2	TANGLED UP IN BLUE COMPLETE						
3	Idiot Wind						

<sup>9</sup> "No One Else Could Play That Tune" - Page 79. Just to be clear, this edit on *"Tangled Up In Blue"* is not a "punch-in" in the traditional sense, where a new insert is recorded and added to spare tracks on the master tape, leaving the original section (the "punch-out") intact. The whole of the *"She was working in a roadside place"* line - not just the vocals, but guitar and bass, too - has been physically cut out of the Take 3, Remake 2 multi-track tape and replaced with the complete *"She was working in a topless place"* line from Take 3 Remake.

Another hand has added:

(*ORIG LINE ~~PREVIO~~ BEFORE TAKE*)

The notes strongly indicate that any acetate or pressing made after September 25<sup>th</sup> will have the replacement line.

Heylin states that the “...roadside place...” line, which he identifies correctly as coming from Take 3 Remake 2, was removed by Phil Ramone, the New York sessions engineer and joint owner of A&R Studio, on September 30<sup>th</sup>, the date the Second Acetate was cut. It is certainly possible that the “new edit” note was written on the 26<sup>th</sup> with the edit being carried out on the 30<sup>th</sup> in time to appear on the Second Acetate but it seems more likely the edit was done and then noted rather than vice versa. Either way, the “*She was working in a topless place...*” line was now fixed in place and must appear on the Second and Third Acetates and the Columbia Reference Recording as well as on the Test Pressing.<sup>10</sup>

What remains unclear is why, if the “*She was working in a roadside place...*” line was available in the archives, as seems to be the case, the producers of “*More Blood, More Tracks*” elected to keep the edit in place rather than reinstate the line in its rightful place. Maybe there was a desire or directive to replicate the presentation of the original Test Pressing, or perhaps the line was only available either on the live mix reference reel or a stereo mix-down reel in which case the 1974 mix could not have been reverse-engineered to match the dry mix of the modern presentation.

Whatever the reason, the fallout created by this 1974 splice in “*Tangled Up In Blue*” is not limited to Track 3 on Disc 5 of “*More Blood, More Tracks*”. Although the boxed set producers found that the multi-track for the September 19<sup>th</sup> take was intact, the September 17<sup>th</sup> take had a “*She was working in a topless place...*”-sized hole in it which needed to be filled because it had been used in 1974 to replace the “...roadside place...” line. Perhaps the obvious and easiest solution would have been to copy the actual line from the historically manipulated take and paste it back in to make Take 3 Remake whole again. Instead, the rather clumsy solution used was to copy the “*She was working in a topless place...*” line from Take 2 Remake, also recorded on September 17<sup>th</sup>, reduce its speed, and paste it into the hole left in Take 3 Remake. Thus, as noted above, the two takes initially selected by Dylan to appear on the New York album don’t appear on “*More Blood, More Tracks*” as they were performed at the sessions.<sup>11</sup>

However, all is not lost in a quest for authenticity. Take 3 Remake, labelled “Outtake” on the stereo mix-down reel, *is* complete, apparently in its 1974 mix, on “*The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3 [Rare & Unreleased] 1961-1991*”. On that set it is misattributed to the session on September 16<sup>th</sup>, but clearly it is Take 3 Remake from the following day *and* with its “*She was working in a topless place...*” line intact. This means the 1991 producers either had access to an unedited multi-track copy, from which they tried to approximate the mix created by Ramone in 1974, or the stereo mix-down reel made before the line was donated to Take 3 Remake 2. As for the “...roadside place” line, well, it remains orphaned in the vaults, with only the First Acetate providing the aural evidence that it ever existed.

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<sup>10</sup> “No One Else Could Play That Tune” – Page 79

<sup>11</sup> All the extant analogue tapes were digitised by Matt Cavaluzzo and Glenn Korman prior to the boxed set being mixed, mastered and compiled by Steve Berkowitz and Steve Addabbo. It is possible the producers, working with digital files rather than original multi-track tapes, may not have been fully aware of the various splices that had been made in 1974.


## 2. Simple Twist Of Fate

You'll be relieved to know that compared to the edit made in 1974 to *"Tangled Up In Blue"*, explaining this one is a piece of cake! Again, two takes of *"Simple Twist Of Fate"* were pulled to a master reel for further consideration. The first was the solo Take 2 from September 16<sup>th</sup> which remained in contention for a place on the LP until the second option, Take 3 Remake from September 19<sup>th</sup>, with Tony Brown's support on bass, supplanted it at the remixing sessions on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. Dylan liked this version so much that it made it all the way through to the Test Pressing **and** the official *"Blood On The Tracks"* album. Done and dusted? Well, almost, but not quite.

Take 3 Remake, **as performed**, made it as far as the First Acetate. It may have escaped Dylan's attention long enough to have been included on the Second and Third Acetates which, as noted previously, the author has not heard, but the manner of its presentation was certainly denied an appearance on the Test Pressing and *"Blood On The Tracks"*.

At the session, Dylan sang four verses before embarking on an instrumental interlude with harmonica, after which two more verses and an instrumental coda completed the song; and that is how the song appears on the First Acetate. At some point between September 25<sup>th</sup> and the production of the Test Pressing the instrumental interlude was physically cut out of the multi-track tape and repositioned in its final home, after the **third** verse, providing the symmetry of three verses - instrumental break - three verses - instrumental coda that Dylan had favoured on Take 3A recorded with the Deliverance band on September 16<sup>th</sup>. Listen very closely to the official LP and you can hear a minor anomaly at about 1' 54" where the tone and position of Dylan's guitar alters momentarily at the start point of the edit.<sup>12</sup>

As with the "...roadside place" edit in *"Tangled Up In Blue"* the edit in *"Simple Twist Of Fate"* is documented on a 16-Track Master tape sheet, illustrated on page 60 of the media-carrying book of *"More Blood, More Tracks"*. Alongside the original entry of the song title, written by assistant engineer Glenn Berger, is the later addition in another hand, "(W/Edit)". Unfortunately, the edit has not been dated. The date at the top of the sheet is a little confusing, but the song itself is noted as being the take from 19 September.<sup>13</sup>

  
A & R RECORDING, INC.  
322 WEST 48TH STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10036  
JU 2-1070

16 TRACK MASTER  
SOULSY  
SW 20E3

Date 9 17 74 Studio A1 Client CBS Artist DYLAN W O # Eng. SHIRLEY

☐ Mono ☐ Two TRK. ☐ 4 TRK. ☐ 8 TRK. ☐ 16 TRK. ☐ Orig. ☐ Safety ☐ Copy

TAKE	TITLE	TIME	COMMENTS	TAKE	TITLE	TIME	COMMENTS
1	MEET ME IN THE MORNING	9:16	✓				
2	LONESOME (FAST)	9:16	✓				
3	SIMPLE TWIST OF FATE (REVISED)	9:19	(W/EDIT) ✓				
4	BACK OF HEARTS	1 9:16	✓				

out to Bob Dylan

<sup>12</sup> Again, this was not a "punch-in". The section of multi-track tape was physically removed and repositioned.

<sup>13</sup> Glenn Berger, in the "Prelude" chapter of his entertaining book *"Never Say No To A Rock Star"*, mentions his distinctive printing style, "... with an 's' that looks like a lightning bolt."

The edit remains in place on *"More Blood, More Tracks"* so, although all the music from Take 3 Remake is there on Disc 5, Track 5, it is not all in the position in which it was originally played. It is most likely the only other places it can be found intact, as recorded, apart from the First Acetate, is on a multi-track copy, a pre-edit stereo mix-down reel or the studio live-mix reference reel.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. *Idiot Wind*

The tale of the New York *"Idiot Wind"* is almost identical to that of *"Tangled Up In Blue"* in that two takes from different sessions were pulled to master reels, both were represented on the Test Pressing of the planned New York album and, even with the release of *"More Blood, More Tracks"*, only one take has been officially released in its entirety.

Take 6 from September 16<sup>th</sup> was pulled to a master reel after recording sessions ended the following day. Whether this take was seriously considered for the planned LP is debatable, but if Dylan had never returned to the song there would have been no choice but to include it. It survived through to the remixing session on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> where it was joined by Take 4 Remake, recorded on September 19<sup>th</sup>. It really was no contest and Take 6 lost out to the later performance when the final takes of songs for the album were chosen.

But there was a problem. Despite its superiority, there was something Dylan didn't like on Take 4 Remake. I can only think it was the way he almost shouts the words *"trust"* and *"babe"* in the line, *"You didn't trust me for a minute, babe"*, and the somewhat over-the-top modulation of his singing during the subsequent line, *"I'd never known the Spring to turn so quickly into Autumn."* He'd sung that couplet much better on Take 6.

It was a quick decision. With the rejected take readily at hand in the editing room it would have been a matter of half an hour's labour for a skilled engineer armed with a razor blade to remove the offending couplet from the preferred Take 4 Remake, demote it to a gash reel or append it to the tail end of a master reel, and splice in the same couplet from Take 6. This is what happened and it was done before the First Acetate was cut on September 25<sup>th</sup>, leaving a couplet-sized hole in the master of Take 6.<sup>15</sup>

At some point during the editing and evaluation process, long after bassist Tony Brown had played his significant role at the recording sessions, Dylan decided that the already-edited, or manipulated, Take 4 Remake *"Idiot Wind"* needed to have some colour added to it in the form of an organ track from Paul Griffin, who had already contributed piano and organ in real time at the session on September 17<sup>th</sup>. It isn't clear when this decision to embellish *"Idiot Wind"* was made; Griffin was an in-demand session player, has many 1974 session credits to his name, and may not have been immediately available. However, it was a week after the Second Acetate was cut, with the new edit on *"Tangled Up In Blue"* in place and, possibly, with the harmonica interlude on *"Simple Twist Of Fate"* relocated, that Griffin came into Studio A-1 to add the overdub to *"Idiot Wind"*.

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<sup>14</sup> It is evident from the audio on the boxed set that the compilers of *"More Blood, More Tracks"* did not have access to a full set of unsullied multi-tracks. If, in 1974, copies of multi-tracks were made prior to editing then they must have been mislaid at some point.

<sup>15</sup> Generally speaking, pieces of tape that have been removed from a reel to facilitate an edit are not thrown away; they will either be spooled onto reels dedicated to these discards or they will be added to the end of the reel from which they have been cut out. The reels housing the discarded pieces of tape are often referred to as "gash" reels and they are usually stored with the master reels. There will be exceptions.



accessed an unedited multi-track copy or, more likely, a stereo mix-down of the take created before the couplet was removed to insert into Take 4 Remake.

The producers of *"More Blood, More Tracks"*, however, had a dilemma. They had a digital multi-track of Take 6 but there was a hole in it where the *"You didn't trust me for a minute, babe/I'd never known the Spring to turn so quickly into Autumn"* couplet had been removed in 1974. Although the missing piece could have been reinstated from Take 4 Remake easily enough with a digital copy and paste, the hole in Take 6 was filled with the **original** Take 4 Remake couplet that had been cut out in 1974 and, presumably, appended to a master reel or archived on a gash reel. Thus, on *"More Blood, More Tracks"*, the Take 6 *"Idiot Wind"* from September 16<sup>th</sup> contains the couplet as recorded on September 19<sup>th</sup>, and the Take 4 Remake *"Idiot Wind"* from September 19<sup>th</sup> contains the couplet as recorded on September 16<sup>th</sup> – they are effectively swapped.

Some might say the producers of the boxed set, if they were aware of the edit to Take 4 Remake, and its source, could or should have reverse-engineered the process to deliver Take 6 as originally recorded and Take 4 Remake as originally recorded, presenting the sessions the way they actually happened. As Take 4 Remake is included twice on *"More Blood, More Tracks"*, with and without an organ overdub, it would have been simple to reinstate the couplet as performed on the former; fans with the required digital dexterity have done this successfully in a matter of minutes. However, on the latter, it would have been more problematic to match the selected overdub with the reinstated couplet because, as noted above, in 1974 Paul Griffin's organ overdubs were recorded over the already-edited Take 4 Remake. Perhaps they tried it and it didn't work well, or maybe they elected to leave it the way it was presented in 1974.<sup>18</sup>

In any case, as it turns out, neither of the Take 4 Remake tracks on the boxed set match the Test Pressing. The first, with no organ at all, is what appeared on the 9/25/74 First Acetate, albeit in a dryer mix and with studio chatter, and the second, according to Steve Berkowitz in his interview for Analog Planet, uses the *"Booker T More Tasteful"* organ overdub, leaving *"More Laid Back Again"* imprisoned on its reel.

## Epilogue

So, that, in a very large nutshell, is the tale of the First Acetate. It was created in the immediate aftermath of the two-day editing and mixing session in September 1974 for a version of *"Blood On The Tracks"* that wasn't released. By the time it was pulled off the lathe and labelled on September 25<sup>th</sup> 1974, *"Call Letter Blues"* and *"Up To Me"* had already been removed from the list of potential inclusions for the album; *"Meet Me In The Morning"* had been edited and overdubbed; *"You're A Big Girl Now"* had been given its steel guitar overdub; and a cuckoo couplet had taken refuge in *"Idiot Wind"*. The sequencing of the album had not been decided at that point but the first instincts displayed on those labels proved to be mostly valid. Try the sequence for yourself –it has a certain pleasing symmetry but the final running order is better.

By the following day, the roadside place in *"Tangled Up In Blue"* was history although the harmonica interlude in *"Simple Twist Of Fate"* may have hung on in its performed position a little longer; the

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<sup>18</sup> It is not known what information the 2018 producers had regarding the audio they had been given in digital form. Simply put, they had one take of *"Idiot Wind"* that was missing a couplet and also had one fragment containing the couplet. Marrying the two, even though they are obviously not soul mates, may have been considered the best option.

naked, but edited, *"Idiot Wind"* certainly did. By October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1974 all three tracks as presented on the First Acetate had had uniqueness thrust upon them, and the first two of those tracks retain that status to this day.

## ***Afterword***

**W**hen the album was released in January, 1975, Pete Hamill's sleeve notes on the back cover hinted at what had gone on before five of the songs had been revisited, revised and restructured in Sound 80 Studio in Minneapolis. There he was - quoting a lyric that wasn't on the LP from a song that was! *"If you're making love to her, kiss her for the kid..."* What is going on? Are there outtakes? There must be outtakes; there are always outtakes.

However, in the case of *"Blood On The Tracks"* it was more than outtakes. It was a different album, an alternative album; *"Another Blood On The Tracks"*. But which one could legitimately be assigned that label of "alternative"? By early December 1974 the sleeve for the New York album had been printed, Columbia had assigned CO numbers to the tracks and produced the Reference Recording acetate with the approved final sequence. The famous New York Test Pressing had been distributed to some of the players and one of Dylan's copies was being played, and surreptitiously recorded, in the home of one of his confidants. It was done, dusted and ready to go. And then, with a flick of the wrist, the artist exercised his prerogative and changed horses in mid-stream.

Opinion is divided on the merits of the two albums. Some will say the Minneapolis recordings save the day, some that the original concept was buried by them. Others will balance precariously on the fence of convenience, claim neutrality, and suggest that each one is as good as the other and anyway we now have them both. Me? Oh, I'm just heading for another roadside place with the laces of my shoes working loose.

## ***Acknowledgements:***

Thanks to all the Blood Bankers for doing the heavy lifting over the last two years. This essay would not have existed without your collective input and every one of you could have written it better. If I name you here you might be inundated by mail from fans that isn't fan mail so I hope it's enough that you know who you are.

Thanks to Alan for agreeing to host this thing on SFAG.

Thanks in advance to the owner(s) of the Second and Third Acetate who might feel compelled to get in touch with me.

Thanks to Dr. Glenn Berger for agreeing to answer half a dozen questions about the sessions in New York. Revisions to the text will be made when his replies have been received.

Thanks to anyone who has read this far without falling asleep.

Percy Song

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