

DYLAN, CASH AND THE NASHVILLE CATS

Country Music Hall of Fame • Through December 2016

by Stephanie Stewart-Howard

In 1966, Bob Dylan released *Blonde on Blonde*, an album started in New York but recorded mostly in Nashville. It began a boom in collaboration between Nashville's best session musicians, among them David Briggs, Kenny Buttrey, Fred Carter Jr., Charlie Daniels, Lloyd Green, Ben Keith, Norbert Putnam, Jerry Reed, and Buddy Spicher, and the greats of folk and rock music from the East and West Coasts and Europe—The Byrds, Joan Baez, Neil Young, Simon & Garfunkel, Paul McCartney, and more. The results would be some of the greatest albums of the era.

These musical collaborations are celebrated in a new show at the Country Music Hall of Fame (CMHOF), *Dylan, Cash and the Nashville Cats*, which offers up images, artifacts, film, and recordings to showcase this extraordinary time in music history.

Curator Michael Gray says the Nashville Cats represent the second wave of major session musicians in the city's history, on the heels of the famous A Team in the 40s and 50s. The Cats exhibit offers the CMHOF a unique vantage point to consider how both country and rock/folk music makers affected American music culture and to celebrate musicians from wildly different backgrounds in a polarized era coming together.

Most notable is the tie between these artists and ABC's cutting edge *The Johnny Cash Show* from 1969–71, filmed at the Ryman and showcasing socially aware, often-controversial artists.

"Dylan and all the rest came in a politically charged time, and Nashville had a reputation as conservative—but the musicians were stylistically capable of producing any style of music," says Gray. "We knew we wanted to talk about Dylan and everyone who came in his wake. There's no question their work influenced so much, including 1970s Southern California country rock, like the Eagles and Americana and other styles today."

He adds, "Bob Dylan has been analyzed to death, but this is a fresh angle to that story, never fully



Randy Scruggs, Earl Scruggs, Bob Dylan, and Gary Scruggs in Carmel, New York, c. 1972

explored." The exhibit includes photos, film, and sixteen listening booths at the center, allowing visitors to sample the work of each of the featured session musicians. "These musicians were so versatile, so talented, they were the draw for Dylan and others."

Among the artifacts featured are the 1950 Fender telecaster guitar Charlie Daniels played on *Nashville Skyline*, stage costumes by Manuel, Kenny Buttrey's drum kit, Norbert Putnam's 1965 electric base (played on hundreds of recordings), the original song manuscript for the Johnny Cash-Bob Dylan collaboration "Wanted Man," and Gray's favorite, a 1967 pedal steel guitar played by Lloyd Green, including on the Byrd's 1968 album *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*. Green, Gray points out, was playing for Tammy Wynette, Charlie Pride, and Johnny Paycheck at the same time.

***Dylan, Cash, and the Nashville Cats* runs through December 31, 2016. For more information, visit www.countrymusicalloffame.org.**



Bob Johnston, Leonard Cohen, and Ron Cornelius, early 1970s



Johnny Cash used this custom-made Grammer guitar on his TV show