

THE CUTTING EDGE:

SESSIONS FOR HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED

by Roger Ford

Dylan returned to America from his solo UK tour during the first week of June 1965, just as The Byrds' version of 'Mr Tambourine Man' hit the No. 1 spot in America. Less than two weeks later he was back in Columbia's Studio A to pick up where the first side of "Bringing It All Back Home" had left off. Whether this was intended to be the first stage in recording his next album, or just to get a new single, **we don't know**. If the primary purpose was indeed to record 'Like a Rolling Stone' for a single release, it's interesting that it was not the first but the last song recorded at the mid-June sessions; perhaps he intended the other two songs to function as simpler warm-ups for the band, and to provide possible material for the single's B-side. In the event, of course, neither was used for that purpose, 'Gates Of Eden' being pulled off the previous album instead.



The musicians that producer Tom Wilson brought in for the two days of booked studio time were essentially the same New York session crew that he had hired for "Bringing It All Back Home" five months before: Bobby Gregg, Joseph Macho Jr. (a.k.a. Joe Mack), Al Gorgoni, Bruce Langhorne, Frank Owens and Paul Griffin. But Dylan, perhaps wanting a tougher lead guitar sound than Langhorne had provided on the previous album, had made a call to blues guitarist Mike Bloomfield, whom he had met a couple of years before during a visit to Chicago. He invited Bloomfield up to his house in Woodstock in the days before the sessions and ran through the material he had in mind to record. Bloomfield found a style of playing that Dylan liked, rather different from the electric blues that he was playing with The Butterfield Blues Band (though of course Bloomfield ended up playing some of that at the sessions too). Dylan then talked his new guitarist into acting as his musical communication channel at the sessions, showing the other musicians the song structures and how Dylan wanted them played. There had been no-one to do this for him at the January sessions, and Dylan was too inexperienced or too diffident (or both) to do it effectively himself.

The other new musician at the June 15-16 sessions was of course Al Kooper, who relates his well-worn story once again in the "Cutting Edge" book: essentially, that he made his uninvited debut as a studio organ player on the day that produced the master take of 'Like a Rolling Stone' – in other words on the second day of recording, June 16.

June 15, 1965

6/15/65
 Job No. B97992
 Reel No. 1C
 Studio A

Program: Bob Dylan
 Label: Colap

Start No.	Start Time	SELECTION TITLE SPOT DATA	Take No.	F.S.	Master No.	OK	REMARKS
1		Phantom Engineer Mumble Cloudy	1 2		86443		
2			3 4	B			
3			5 6	B			
4			7 8				(TR 7 NO SKATE)
5		Over The Cliffs Pt 1	1 2	B	86444		3.20
		Phantom Engineer (Remake)	3		86445		4.
		OVER THE CLIFF	4	5 6	86444		
		LIKE A ROLLING STONE	1 2	B	86446		6. BREAKDOWN & START 2 LOTS OF HOLD
			3 4	B			
			5				

IT TAKES A LOT TO LAUGH, IT TAKES A TRAIN TO CRY (CO 86443)

Though it was still a way off getting its final title, this song was one that Dylan had been working on for a little while. On the 65 Revisited DVD that has been bundled with more recent editions of *Dont Look Back*, there is footage of Dylan playing a sketchy version at the piano backstage at Leicester's De Montfort Hall on May 2, 1965. "If I don't come through, you know my baby will", Dylan sings in one of the more clearly audible parts.

Take 1, Complete (Disc 3 Track 5, also on 6-CD set): Dylan is at the piano again on the first attempt at capturing the song in the studio, and he's evidently just thought up a name for the tune: 'Phantom Engineer

Number Cloudy, Take 1', Wilson slates it, and Dylan gives a satisfied chuckle. The first verse just has piano, two guitars and bass; then the Hammond organ swirls in like a wind blowing in through the studio door, and finally Bobby Gregg comes in on drums as Dylan starts the second verse. The musician credits in the box set book indicate that Al Kooper was the organist, but (a) that clashes with Kooper's story – for which there is some supporting evidence that we'll come to later – and (b) it sounds far too confident and accomplished to be Kooper's debut on organ. For my money it's Paul Griffin¹. Whatever, the song has much more of a swing to it than the later, faster takes, and is a total gas. The words have come on since the Leicester sketch, but there are still some phrases to be smoothed out over the course of this session: for example, "Don't the angel look good, babe, sitting on his daddy's knee?" or "I stomped out a hundred compasses, God knows what they cost".

Takes 2-3, Fragments (Disc 3 Track 6): Dylan decides to start the second take with his harmonica, then starts playing the piano but collapses after a bar or so, laughs and calls “Take 3” himself; “I don’t know how to start the song”, he admits. He tries counting in the next take, gives up and then at his suggestion someone else (probably Bobby Gregg) counts it in with practised efficiency.

Take 4, Breakdown (Disc 3 Track 7): The first verse has a tambourine this time, and the drums and organ both pile in as soon as the first verse is finished. It’s the same arrangement and tempo, but it’s already starting to get a harder edge to it. After the second verse it descends into a bit of a shapeless jam, with harmonica, lead guitar and organ all guilty of aimlessness. “What was wrong?” asks Dylan as it collapses, but we don’t get to hear anyone’s reply.

Take 5, False Start (Disc 3 Track 8): At this point Dylan hands over the piano to Frank Owens and picks up an electric guitar for the first time at these sessions. He starts this next attempt solo, just guitar and vocal, but only gets halfway through the first line before Tom Wilson whistles to him to stop. “Hey Bob, hold it a second . . . start clean”.

Take 6, Breakdown (Disc 3 Track 9): This time the new guitar-led arrangement takes off, Dylan solo again for the first line; then Al Gorgoni joins in on second rhythm guitar, and then everyone else as Dylan starts the second line. It finds a fabulous groove, musicians and singer all absolutely razor-sharp; instrumentally it has far more precision and attack than anything on “*Bringing It All Back Home*”, and you can just feel what a blast it must have been for Dylan to be making this music. It goes like a master take for the first two verses; but they still haven’t really worked out who’s going to do what in the instrumental break or how they’re going to turn it round into the third verse. Dylan plays harmonica at the same time as Bloomfield solos on lead guitar, it goes back to a repetitive vamp and then just comes to a stop. The angel, by the way, is sitting on his *madman’s* knee this time.

Take 7, Insert (Disc 3 Track 10): There’s a minor mystery here: this take is identified in the “*Cutting Edge*” book as an insert, but it doesn’t match the style and tempo of any preceding take. It does, however, match the *following* take pretty exactly in these respects, so I do wonder whether these two tracks might have got into reverse order. The arrangement is now pretty much like the fast takes we’ve already heard on “*The Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3*” (Take 1 Remake) and “*The Bootleg Series Vol. 7*” (Take 9). This Insert take fades in near the start of verse three, as Dylan sings, slightly falteringly, “That’s where the engineer’s tossed”, and continues to the end without a fade.

Take 8, Complete (Disc 3 Track 11, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): A complete take in the same style as above (this time “Don’t the *ghost* look good... sitting on his madman’s knee”); but Dylan slightly fluffs the words in the last verse (I *don’t* wanna be your lover baby, I don’t wanna be your boss”), thereby giving a possible reason for an insert to replace some of the last verse. Paul Griffin (assuming it is he) gives it everything he’s got on the organ, with trills and swoops all over the place; but Dylan’s vocal is much less controlled than on Take 6, and a couple of times he painfully goes for a high note he can’t pull off. Even though it is an inferior performance of the same arrangement as the two outtakes already released, this is the take that got chosen for both the “*Deluxe*” and “*Best of editions*”. Given the chance, I’d have put Take 1 on both of those smaller sets and the two-verse Take 6 on the “*Deluxe*”; and I’d have left this one, complete take or no, for the “*Collector’s Edition*”.

Take 9, Complete (Disc 3 Track 12): This is the take previously released on “*The Bootleg Series Vol. 7: No Direction Home*”, though here the mix is narrower and less polished; as discussed in the previous article in this series, this is both intentional and appropriate to the fly-on-the-wall nature of this release. A more significant difference is that here we’re allowed to hear the ending unfaded – with the bass guitar finishing on a note a semitone sharp, presumably in jest. It’s a good performance, though not radically different from the later remake take released on “*The Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3*”. Oh, and the ghost has become a ghost-child.

SITTING ON A BARBED WIRE FENCE (CO 86444)

Dylan picks up a phrase he’d used back in January as a working title for ‘*Outlaw Blues*’, decides it’s his hound-dog that’s going to be doing the sitting, and takes it from there. He clearly doesn’t have much worked out in advance, as the words change radically from one take to the next; he sounds to be pretty much improvising the whole thing.

Take 1, Rehearsal and breakdown (Disc 3 Track 13): Dylan starts things off with an electric guitar riff, then gives some very brief instructions to the other musicians, who practise the main riff, though without drums. Then Bobby Gregg (probably) counts in the first take, starting it off with a drum shot, and the song takes off, Dylan making up dollar-and-cents values for the first two lines on the spur of the moment. He gets as far as “To see my bound-dog [*sic*] bite a rabbit”, realises it isn’t working out, and breaks off: “Ah, do it again, man”. According to the musician credits in the box set book, Al Kooper is on organ now, making his first appearance, with Frank Owens on piano. But (a) this doesn’t square with Kooper’s story (backed up by audible evidence, which we’ll come to later) that his first appearance was on ‘*Like a Rolling Stone*’; and (b) the organ playing here sounds far too confident to be someone who’s just sneaked in with no prior experience of keyboard session work. It seems much more likely that it’s Paul Griffin on organ and Frank Owens on piano. Perhaps Kooper got his name on the studio records by turning up with his guitar on the first day; there are photos that show him sitting in the studio with an electric guitar, not far from Mike Bloomfield.

Take 2, Complete (Disc 3 Track 14, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): Bloomfield kicks it off this time, with a wailing blues lick. Dylan plays more harmonica here than on the Take 3 that we’re more familiar with from “*The Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3*”, and it has plenty of different ad-libbed lyrics. Here we first come across the doctor who “gave me a shot but he wouldn’t tell me what it is that I’ve got”, later reassigned to ‘*Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues*’; we also get the by now much-quoted line “Well she’s good all right, but she ain’t as good as this guitar player I got right now”, followed by a Beatles-style scream – from Dylan or from Bloomfield, it’s hard to tell. It nearly falls apart on the third line of the second verse, when Dylan comes in a bar earlier

than on the first; Bobby Gregg is clearly thrown and fails to put in the required rest. After the final verse and some bent-note soloing from Bloomfield, Dylan shouts out to Wilson, "Fade it out!" but everyone keeps playing for another 25 seconds before the fade-out actually comes.

Take 3, Complete (Disc 3 Track 15): Here is the fabulous version that was on "*The Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3*", (and long before that on the "*Great White Wonder*" and "*Stealin*" bootlegs as '*Killing Me Alive*'). Here, of course, it is remixed "*Cutting Edge*" style, and as a bonus to buyers of the "*Collector's Edition*" it has nearly a minute and a half of rehearsal tacked on the front. In this, everybody starts playing little bits of the musical tapestry on their instruments, and the groove gradually builds; Bloomfield throws in a bit of *East-West*-style modal soloing. When it reaches a plateau, Tom Wilson says "OK, stand by... rolling... this'll be Take 3"; there's the count-in that some will remember from the old bootleg, and then they're into the familiar take. The song is not faded out here, though, as it was on the earlier "*Bootleg Series*" release; it continues for another ten seconds or so until everyone stops playing, as it did on the old bootlegged tape. Wilson asks, "Want it played back, Bob?" and Dylan comes back, "We recorded that song and I don't even have any words for it, man!" This may not be Dylan's most sophisticated composition, but as an illustration of what he could do with this studio band it's one of the high points of the "*Collector's Edition*".

Take 2, Edited version, Complete (Disc 3 Track 16): Strangely, we now have a cut that wasn't even listed on the recording sheets: a repeat of Take 2 (the previous track but one), but with the play-out at the end edited. The track is five seconds shorter as a result, but it's not just a simple excision of five seconds of the multi-track: Dylan's scream still comes at 3:24, but the other three recording tracks are brought forward so that Bloomfield's bent-note solo starts at the same time as the scream. Dylan's vocal track loses its equivalent amount of time a little later, somewhere between his scream and his "Fade it out!" interjection, the latter being rather surprisingly left in. Assuming this edit was made back in 1965, the amount of work involved suggests that this was not quite the throwaway warm-up song it's often been portrayed as. Perhaps it was actually being considered for release, maybe as the B-side to '*Like a Rolling Stone*'. As to whether this minor edit was really worth including in even the most comprehensive Edition of "*The Cutting Edge*", well that's a different matter.

IT TAKES A LOT TO LAUGH, IT TAKES A TRAIN TO CRY (CO 86445)

Take 1 remake, Complete (Disc 3 Track 17): A final attempt on '*Phantom Engineer*', using very much the same arrangement as the earlier Takes 7 to 9, it hardly seems to have merited the "remake" tag and a new CO number. This is the full-tilt version that (in a mono mix) always kept '*Killing Me Alive*' / '*Sitting On a Barbed Wire Fence*' company on "*Stealin*" and later vinyl bootlegs². It found its first official release on "*The Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3*" in 1991, with a faded ending; on "*The Cutting Edge*" it is allowed to run on to the end, as on the early bootlegs.

SITTING ON A BARBED WIRE FENCE (CO 86444)

Takes 4-5, False starts (Disc 3 Track 18): There's some instrumental riffing and studio chat ("Do you want a break there?" someone asks), then Wilson slates "CO 86444, '*Over The Cliffs*', Take 4". It starts off much as before, but after a few seconds Wilson whistles and calls for "One more time, please, on the beginning". Take 5 starts, but Dylan apparently wasn't ready; it hardly gets past the first beat before he shouts "No, start again!" However, the piano plays on a little, suggesting that it's Frank Owens rather than Dylan playing it.

Take 6, Complete (Disc 3 Track 19): The recording sheet (which can be seen in the booklet for "*The Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3*") notes "Breakdown & Start" against this take, but we don't get to hear the breakdown. This take will be familiar to many collectors as the 'Goldmine' acetate version that surfaced in 1980 in a terrible stereo mix that seemed to have very little audible except Dylan's vocal and harmonica and Frank Owens' very repetitive piano (which, to be fair, was never meant to be way up in the mix). It sounds a lot better in this new mix – you can actually hear the organ and drums, and Bloomfield sounds as if he's playing in the same studio – but the song is starting to outstay its welcome. Dylan plays a lot of shapeless harmonica when he's not singing (never a good sign), and his lyrical ad-libs are getting increasingly disposable: "That's 'cos you never went through any tunnels and never fell down any screwdriver cliffs". They get to the end – unfaded here – but it's time to move on.

LIKE A ROLLING STONE (CO 86446)

And so to one of the showpieces of "*The Cutting Edge*", the complete session for '*Like a Rolling Stone*'. Well, not quite complete, but we'll come to that. On the "*Deluxe Edition*" it's given its own CD, but on the more strictly chronological "*Collector's Edition*" it spans Discs 3 and 4; either way, it's 67 minutes of listening to just one song. Greil Marcus was allowed to listen to the full studio tapes of the sessions for his book "*Like A Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads*"³, and the book's Epilogue gives Marcus's detailed take-by-take description of the proceedings; this runs to twenty or so pages – far more space than I have to devote to the task here. The copy of the tapes that he was provided with clearly contained much more extensive studio chat than we get to hear on "*The Cutting Edge*", and his Epilogue is well worth reading for that reason as well as for his characteristically vigorous critical commentary. I shall be comparatively brief.

Dylan was apparently playing with the song's musical elements while on the U.K. tour in May: In *Dont Look Back*, the piano instrumental he plays backstage at the Royal Albert Hall (around 1 hr 17 Min into the film) sounds very like the chord structure of '*Like a Rolling Stone*'. There it was in 4-4 time, but by the time he's got the song to the studio it's in 3-4 waltz time – perhaps a deliberately ironic choice for such a wholly un-romantic song.

Takes 1-3, Rehearsal (Disc 3 Track 20, also on 6-CD set): Take 1 was one of those included (in mono) in the 1995 *Highway 61 Interactive* CD-ROM; there it was preceded by a little more studio chat. There's no vocal, just Dylan playing a rather tentative

harmonica melody on top of the band. They get to where the first chorus would begin, but someone's got the chords wrong. "No, we got lost, man", Dylan breaks in, and it stops. We now get about three minutes of conversation at the end of this take, with Frank Owens on piano⁴ coaching some of the others in the correct sequence of chords – "E flat minor suspended fourth, E flat minor seven, then one bar of A flat suspension..." and so on. The organist bursts in with a loud chord at one point, and is asked to "hold it, Paul" – so we know it's Paul Griffin on organ on these early takes. The second take only gets through a few bars, then the third (still no vocal, just harmonica) makes it through into the chorus before it breaks down. Owens is still not happy that everyone's got the chords right, but Dylan wants to press on and do a take with vocals. The harmonica here, incidentally, sounds as though Dylan is using both hands to get more tonal variety, so he's probably playing neither guitar nor piano on all of these early takes.

Take 4, Rehearsal (Disc 3 Track 21, also on 6-CD set): This single-verse run-through with vocals was released on "*The Bootleg Series Vols. 1-3*"; Dylan gets a frog in his throat, and bails out after the first chorus. Now we have another minute or so of studio conversation, Dylan suggesting they try it again just a little faster. Bloomfield practises his licks in preparation.

Take 5, Breakdown (Disc 3 Track 22, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): Although only presented here (and listed on the recording sheets) as a single take, this is actually a false start followed by a breakdown. On the first Dylan plays his two-line harmonica intro, gets as far as "Once upon" and then stops. The second take (which was on *Highway 61 Interactive*) gets through the first verse and chorus again as on Take 4. The drums have got more confident, with a new shuffle and swing to them. Dylan's harmonica introduction is still surprisingly querulous, but his vocal is stronger, and he starts throwing bursts of harmonica in between the lines of the chorus. After the harmonica break at the end of the verse Dylan calls out "Play on!", but the other musicians have clearly had enough and it comes to a stop anyway. On the full studio tape described by Greil Marcus there's more chat following this, but for this release it's been edited out. On the 2-CD "*Best Of The Cutting Edge*" this track omits the false start.

And that's the end of the line for '*Like a Rolling Stone*' as a waltz; by the next day's session the time signature has become the 4-4 of the final version.

June 16, 1965

SELECTION TITLE SPOT DATA	Take No.	F. S.	Master No.	OK
<i>Like a Rolling Stone (Remake)</i>	1		CO 86440	
	2	b		
	3	b		
	4	b		
	6	b		
	6	b		
	8	b		
	9	b		
	10	b		
	12	b		
	13	b		
	14	b		
	15	b		

13 REHEARSAL TAKE 1

LIKE A ROLLING STONE (CO 86446)

Rehearsal remake (Disc 4 Track 1, also on 6-CD set): According to Marcus's description of the unedited tapes, what we have here is Rehearsal Take 2; this was actually preceded by a 1:53 Rehearsal Take 1, which comprised a false start followed by a breakdown that got part way into the second verse. In the supposedly

'complete session' on "*The Cutting Edge*" we don't get to hear this. "Let's just do one verse, man" says Dylan, and leads off on electric rhythm guitar. The sound builds as the proposed single verse progresses – tambourine, bass, lead guitar, organ, and last of all piano; there are no drums – Bobby Gregg was apparently absent at this point. This could have been the time in the famous Al Kooper story when Tom Wilson was away from the control room taking a phone call. The piano at the end of this take is very clearly Paul Griffin, so the rather tentative organ lines are probably Kooper, having crept into the studio to fill the seat vacated by Griffin⁵. Then Wilson returns, and after a few words he utters his "What are you doing there?" question, apparently directed at Al Kooper, who gives a nervous laugh in response. This strongly suggests that Kooper did not play at all at the previous day's session – though he could have been there watching, and possibly trying his luck on guitar before realising how good Bloomfield was.

Take 1 remake, Rehearsal (Disc 4 Track 2, also on 6-CD set): Here we're missing one of the musicians pointing out that "the organ player hasn't found his headset", which it would have been nice to include. Anyhow Kooper, armed with his headphones, wastes no time in producing his trademark riff, coming in during the second bar of the intro. Dylan's vocal starts off rather low-key but soon gathers confidence; the words of the first verse and chorus are now mostly in their final form, though the chorus still has "without a home" instead of the final (and much celebrated) "with no direction home". Bobby Gregg is back behind the drum kit and Bruce Langhorne has dropped by to play tambourine, but Al Gorgoni and Frank Owens evidently weren't invited back for the second day's recording. This take breaks down after the first chorus: the musicians haven't got the hang of the turn-around into the next verse. "No... we just gotta work that part out now," says Dylan. This take and the following Take 2 false start were included on *Highway 61 Interactive*, with slightly different bits of chat appended.

Takes 2-3 remake, False starts (Disc 4 Track 3, also on 6-CD set): Take 2 starts off well enough, but Dylan sounds as though he's distracted and fumbles his words in the opening line; he calls it to a stop. Take 3 starts, for the first time, with Bobby Gregg's famous one-two on the snare and bass drum, but for reasons that aren't obvious it grinds to a halt before the first verse begins.

Take 4 remake, Complete (Disc 4 Track 4, also on 6-CD set): This is the one, the master take released as a single and on "*Highway 61 Revisited*", probably Dylan's most revered recording. Here the track is not faded but continues until the musicians stop playing, twenty seconds past the end of the standard stereo mix⁶. Kooper plays a wild organ chord after everyone else has finished, and there are excited laughs and comments – "... sounded good", someone can be heard saying.

But – and this is why this song was such an atypical one to pick as an illustration of the complete recording process – they walk right past it. With practically every other song on the three 1965-66 albums, Dylan knows when he's got the song as good as it's going to get, and moves on. Here, perhaps feeling he's on such a roll that it can only get better, he keeps going for another ten fruitless takes. Listening to this sequence is a singularly dispiriting experience compared with following the development of practically any other song on this massive set.

Take 5 remake, Rehearsal (Disc 4 Track 5, also on 6-CD set): Whatever it was that delivered such magic on Take 4, they've lost it: maybe they just took a tea break, but it's as if they've come back after a week off. The tune sets off at a much faster pace, and Dylan stops it: "That's not it – how did we do it?" Bobby Gregg kicks it off again, but this time Wilson's whistle breaks in. "Do one verse, without recording", suggests Dylan; "OK, rolling six" calls out Wilson, ignoring the suggestion. "No, no, don't roll six", says Dylan, with total contempt in his voice; it's clearly nearly the end of the road for Wilson as Dylan's producer. They do one reasonable verse (with the tape rolling anyway), and Dylan stops it just into the chorus – "OK, let's cut it." This rehearsal, from the point where Wilson calls "Rolling six" (though without Dylan's caustic retort) was on *Highway 61 Interactive* as Take 6a, and the following false start as Take 6b.

Take 6 remake, False start (Disc 4 Track 6, also on 6-CD set): Off they go again, but Dylan sings "threw the dums a bime", laughing as he does so, then calls for a new take. "Is my guitar too loud?" he asks. For some reason there is no Take 7 marked on the recording sheet – and presumably none on the tape either.

Take 8 remake, Breakdown (Disc 4 Track 7, also on 6-CD set): Take 8 gets all the way through the first three verses, though not without mishap: instead of "Ain't it hard when you discover that" Dylan rather inelegantly sings "Now you discover... that", having left himself without enough words to fill the line. As it goes into the fourth verse Dylan apparently plays the wrong chord on his guitar and it comes to a stop. The first verse of this take was included on *Highway 61 Interactive*.



KRLA Beat Magazine, August 7, 1965
This shows Columbia sent out press photos soon after the June session

Takes 9-10 remake, False starts (Disc 4 Track 8, also on 6-CD set): Two very short false starts, each of them cut short by Wilson's whistle before they get through the intro. "There's something wrong," he announces after the second, but there's no subsequent dialogue here to reveal exactly what. On *Highway 61 Interactive* we hear a little more from Wilson: "Something's wrong time-wise." Certainly the playing is less fluid than on the better takes.

Take 11 remake, Complete (Disc 4 Track 9, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): At last, another complete take of the song, but Dylan is beginning to sound tired, his phrasing nowhere near as sharp as on the master take. Again, the music sounds lumpy compared with the master take⁷, particularly in the opening verse, and Bloomfield's fills sound more awkward. "I'm afraid I screwed up", says Dylan after it's over, probably referring to some of his awkward phrasing.

Take 12 remake, False start (Disc 4 Track 10, also on 6-CD set): Kooper plays the same organ line over the intro as he has done since Take 9, but for some reason he's mixed much louder now. Wilson stops the take after a few bars, but we don't get to hear his subsequent request, reported by Greil Marcus: "Hey, Al, lay off on that intro thing there."

Take 13 remake, Breakdown (Disc 4 Track 11, also on 6-CD set): Kooper does indeed lay off during the intro, but he's very loud again once the verse starts, leaving his plain lines very exposed. Dylan sounds more connected with the song again, but he starts singing the second verse half a bar too early, and it crashes. "Why can't we *get* that *right*, man?" he asks, as though it was maybe somebody else's fault. This is clearly not a rewarding process, but still he presses on.

Take 14 remake, False start (Disc 4 Track 12, also on 6-CD set): Bloomfield, perhaps getting a little bored by now, invents a nice new lick to play over the intro. Dylan fumbles the first line ("Once upon a time, in your prime...") and it stops.

Take 15 remake, Breakdown (Disc 4 Track 13, also on 6-CD set): Part of this take (from the second verse onwards) was on *Highway 61 Interactive*. As with many of the later takes this final attempt is noticeably faster than the released version; but despite its brevity (just over two verses) I find it the second most enjoyable take overall. Kooper is still mixed very loud, but he's playing has loosened up and he's really on fire during the choruses; Gregg is playing *very* loose. Dylan sings with renewed conviction, and on the "deal" at the end of the second verse he suddenly ups the voltage by taking it up to a high G instead of the normal D. But his tiredness is beginning to defeat his improvisatory approach, leading to awkwardness here and there ("And you say unto him..." , for example). At the start of the third verse he forgets the rhyme on "frowns" and sings "faces" instead; he finishes the line but then just gives up. The band plays on for a few seconds without him, but then it's all over. Having finally given up, they all realised just how good Take 4 had been, and Dylan had a rough mix cut as an acetate. The rest is history.

So now we get to the bonus tracks: the four individual "stem" tracks from that monumental master take. Each stem is effectively one of the four tracks on the original studio master tape, with one or more instruments (or vocal) being recorded on each track. If you have the right sort of software you can use these four tracks to create your own mixes of the song⁸.

Master take, guitar (Disc 4 track 14, also on 6-CD set): This stem, which has just Mike Bloomfield's lead guitar, is probably the most interesting of the four. It reveals just how delicate his playing could be, in contrast to the tough, stinging single-note

blues soloing he was much more famous for. His playing during the verses here is sweetly melodic, almost like a finger-picking style, but when the chorus comes he quickly turns on the louder, harder edge that you hear cutting through the mix on the final recording. The other thing you notice is just how many minor slips he made during the verses; but of course it doesn't matter a bit: the finished whole is undiminished.

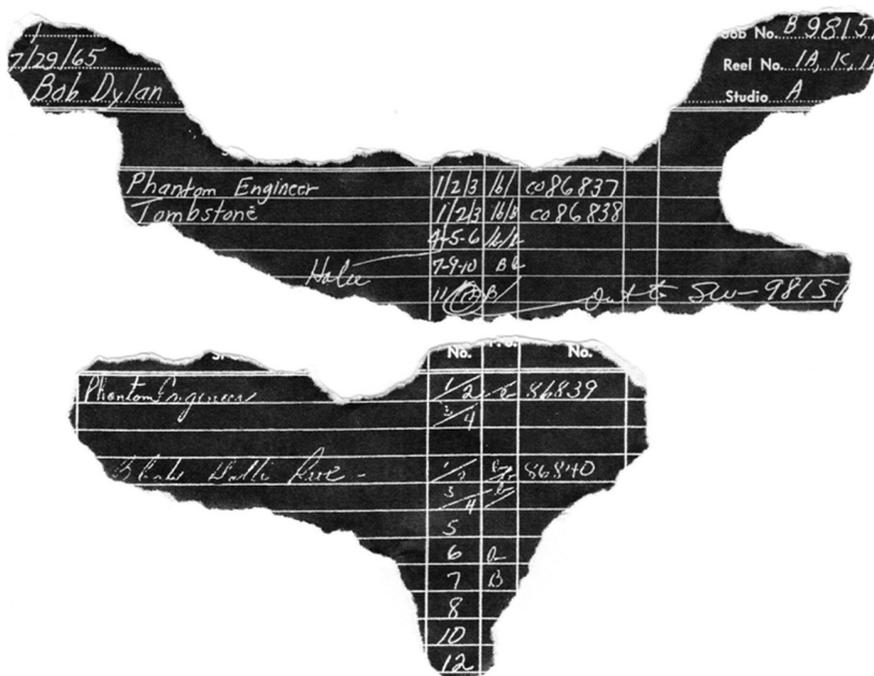
Master take, vocals, guitar (BD) (Disc 4 track 15, also on 6-CD set): Probably the least interesting as a separated track: we all know what Dylan's vocal sounds like, and his rhythm guitar playing is functional but unexceptional. The harmonica is included too, of course.

Master take, piano, bass (Disc 4 track 16, also on 6-CD set): Joe Macho's bass guitar is solid; Paul Griffin's piano is another delight that is half-hidden in the final mix. Of course it was never meant to be heard on its own, and there's too much space in it for it to work as a solo; but it's great to hear how it builds into each chorus, in much the same way as it does on the later *'One Of Us Must Know'*.

Master take, drums, organ (Disc 4 track 17, also on 6-CD set): If you (mentally) subtract the tambourine, reportedly played by Bruce Langhorne, it's surprising just how light and sparing Bobby Gregg's drum-playing is, only becoming heavier and more complex in the choruses. Kooper's organ-playing is largely as familiar as Dylan's vocal, having the pitch and timbre to cut through the mix; it's pretty good for a debut, and, as it turned out, a key ingredient in this song as well as a sound that launched a thousand imitations.

A stereo mix of the three purely instrumental stems was produced for the 2014 Michael Bloomfield box set, *"From His Head To His Heart To His Hands"*, compiled by Al Kooper. This actually provides a much more satisfying alternative way of experiencing this recording than listening to any of the individual stems on *"The Cutting Edge"*. It also has Bobby Gregg's count-in at the start, and the musicians' disbelieving comments at the end are more audible.

July 29, 1965



By now the Newport Festival has been and gone, and four days later Dylan is back in the studio to start work in earnest on his next album. Bob Johnston is in the control room, having replaced Tom Wilson as Dylan's producer. Joe Macho is back on bass, playing his last session for Dylan.

IT TAKES A LOT TO LAUGH, IT TAKES A TRAIN TO CRY (CO 86837)

Take 1, Breakdown (Disc 5 Track 1): This was one of the three songs Dylan performed with a band at Newport, still using its original *'Phantom Engineer'* title. The arrangement used at Newport was very much the same as the final takes from the June 15 session – straight blues-rock; but perhaps having seen The Chambers Brothers performing either at the festival or at the Sunday night post-festival party, Dylan has now given the song more of a southern soul groove. The words are beginning to mutate in the direction of the

final album version: in the second verse we have "Don't the brakeman look good, being where he wants to be". But Dylan is either stoned or in an unusually flippant mood; during the instrumental break he starts to laugh at something, then cracks up completely. This moment was better captured in Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home* film: "What the fuck are we doing with this song, man?" laughs Dylan, "... it's not such a terrible song to do!" Here the single-word expletive is absurdly deleted, leaving it hard to understand what Dylan is saying. Were the people at Sony afraid of having to put a Parental Advisory sticker on the box?

Take 2, False start (Disc 5 Track 2): The mood seems to be contagious, Bobby Gregg counting the song in with "Uno, dos, tres, cuatro..." Bloomfield plays the opening riff at about half the speed of the previous take, prompting an exclamation of "Groovy!" from Dylan. "Just do the changes – anything you wanna do, though," he adds. "Don't stop, man" says Gregg, but after Dylan's opening wail on the harmonica it all collapses in a heap.

Take 3, Complete (Disc 5 Track 3, also on 6-CD set): It's back to the same groove and tempo as Take 1, but you wonder whether this is supposed to be an R&B pastiche, or just a warm-up, or maybe both. The frivolity continues, with Dylan laughing now and then as he sings, and after the last verse he throws in "Rockefeller Centre calling!" for reasons unknown. Then he starts singing the "baggage car" verse over again: "I'll sing it again, I don't care", he laughs, before the take winds up. This was *not* a serious contender for a place on the album.

TOMBSTONE BLUES (CO 86838)

Take 1, Complete (Disc 5 Track 4, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): If you've bought the "*Collector's Edition*" of "*The Cutting Edge*" then you'll probably have heard Dylan's solo performance of this song at a Newport Festival workshop session a few days earlier, included in the free download of the 1965 "*50th Anniversary Collection*". The arrangement there was like nothing so much as a slightly bouncier "*It's Alright, Ma*" – and with no chorus at all, so the song may not even have had its title at that point. The descending bass line of that solo acoustic performance is carried over into the electric arrangement Dylan starts off with here, giving it a quite different feel from the later takes. This first take is also in the same key (E) as he had used at Newport; a tone lower than the released version, this gives it a less hyped-up feel. The chorus is there, but in a very fluid state, so we get things like "Mama's in the kitchen, ain't wearing no shoes / Daddy's in the oven, he's lighting the fuse / I'm in the factory with the Tombstone Blues". If that's Al Kooper on the organ, as the book says, then his playing's come a very long way in the six weeks since "*Like a Rolling Stone*"; but I suspect it's Paul Griffin. Either way, this take is a lot of fun, and fully deserves its place on the "*Best Of*" 2-CD set.

Takes 2-3, False starts (Disc 5 Track 5): There's some interesting studio conversation before Take 2 begins: after Johnston slates it, Dylan rather obliquely says, "...might have, we might, uh, we might have... Do you think you can do anything on this?" To which Johnston reasonably replies, "Whaddya mean?" Dylan gets a little more specific: "We might have background on the chorus... y'know." "Voices, you mean?" "Yeah." "Sure!" enthuses Johnston; "Sure, whatever you want!" One of the musicians – it sounds rather like Bloomfield – then puts in "...bring those cats in here, have them sing a B7 chord... oh, man!" "Those cats" may well be a reference to the Chambers Brothers, who according to Tony Glover⁹ happened to drop by the studio that day, having also been on the bill at Newport; Dylan and Bloomfield may have caught sight of them in the control room. For now, Johnston slates Take 2 again; Dylan strums on acoustic, but the pianist (Paul Griffin?) sounds as though he's not sure when to come in, and a few seconds later Johnston calls "Hold it!" (there's no more whistling to terminate a take, which must have been a relief to Dylan). Take 3 quickly follows and gets to the end of the first vocal line, but then in the next bar Joe Macho hits a wrong note on the bass and Dylan calls it off himself. These two takes are a tone higher in pitch than Take 1, in the key of F[♯]; this was presumably to give Dylan a more comfortable key to sing in, and he stuck with it for all the remaining takes of the song.

Take 4, Complete (Disc 5 Track 6): "We're rolling on four – don't play it, feel it!" says Bob Johnston with a laugh, continuing to display a more genial and enthusiastic approach than the rather dry Tom Wilson ever did. It's a good run-through of the descending-bass-line arrangement, though Dylan makes one small vocal slip in the fourth verse, and Joe Macho thinks he's going into the chorus too soon in the sixth. For one of his instrumental breaks Bloomfield plays the guitar riff from Howlin' Wolf's "*Smokestack Lightning*". The take is allowed to run through to the end, where the pianist throws in a little mock-classical, circus-ring finale.

This appears to be the end of the morning session (10:00 am – 1:00 pm); a note on the recording sheet shows that "Halee" (Roy Halee, that is) took over as engineer between takes 4 and 5. The players reconvened at 2:30 pm. Although the credits in the box set book don't reflect this, it seems that Russ Savakus¹⁰ took over from Joe Macho on bass for the afternoon session. This is indicated in Michael Krogsgaard's published notes on the studio documentation¹¹; and the style of bass playing is quite different from Take 5 onwards, as well as the lines played. It's likely that Frank Owens has also taken over from Paul Griffin as the second keyboard player.

Takes 5-7, False starts, rehearsal (Disc 5 Track 7): "CO 8683," says Johnston (incorrectly), "Take number five, '*Tombstone*' – really get a groove going"; but the groove dissolves after a few bars of the intro. "We're rolling on number six" – the drums don't come in when they should. Take 7 is stated in the book to be a rehearsal rather than a breakdown – maybe this is indicated by some dialogue that we don't hear. Certainly the arrangement has changed since Take 4. The descending bass line has gone, replaced by the more monotonous arrangement that we know from the master take; this is no doubt the point at which Russ Savakus took over the bass. The other big change is that we now have backing vocals on the chorus. The book gives no indication as to who provides these, but it certainly sounds like the Chambers Brothers; presumably during the break they were persuaded to step in and give it a go. There's just a single verse and chorus, then they stop. "What?" asks Dylan; "Bass quit playing there for one verse" says Johnston, though in fact that appears to be true only for one line or so. "I don't know how long I can keep singing this," warns Dylan.

There is no Take 8 – a fact confirmed by the recording sheet, annotated 7-9-10.

Take 9, Breakdown (Disc 5 Track 8, also on 6-CD set): Here is the hard-rocking version previously released on "*The Bootleg Series Vol.7: No Direction Home*", and advertised there as an alternate take; it plainly isn't that, as it only lasts three verses. As expected it is differently mixed here, and the remix makes the organ much less audible; but the editing of the breakdown ending is just the same. After the third verse Bloomfield does a particularly reckless solo, apparently the cause of Dylan's cracking up with "I can't sing... You gotta put a wall up over him, man!" This is the last take with the backing vocals; according to Tony Glover, Dylan asked for the Chambers Brothers to be given an acetate of the song to work with; as we know, they came in a few days later to overdub their vocals.

Take 10, False start (Disc 5 Track 9): "I can't sing so loud, alright?" Dylan lets people know before they start. And start is about all they do – it falls apart as soon as the drums come in.

Take 11, Breakdown (Disc 5 Track 10): This is getting very close in sound to the final released take. Russ Savakus still seems to be having some difficulty adapting to the bass guitar: there's quite a lot of fret buzz here and there, and it doesn't entirely sound like a stylistic choice. After the third chorus Dylan wants to get on with the fourth verse, but Bloomfield thinks it's blues solo time again. They collide, and after a line Dylan gives up. "Hey, dig, man, you're doing too much!" he says, presumably to the guitarist.

Take 12, Complete (Disc 5 Track 11): The master take. It's a much more bass-heavy mix than on "*Highway 61 Revisited*", and Savakus's strings still buzz from time to time; on the stereo "*Highway 61*" mix this is less noticeable. As on the *mono* album the organ is very low in the mix; in the 1965 stereo mix it was more audible, at least in the choruses. The ending is unfaded, as it was on the rough-mix publishers' tape; the musicians play on for a little while before Frank Owens finally brings it to a stop.

IT TAKES A LOT TO LAUGH, IT TAKES A TRAIN TO CRY (CO 86839)

Take 1, Complete (Disc 5 Track 12): Following Dylan's lunchtime (or tea-break?) rethink, the song is reborn very much in the form we know from "*Highway 61 Revisited*". This is a very nice take, just a shade slower than the released version; the words, and much of the phrasing, are almost identical. Savakus's edgy bass-playing seems to work better at this pace, making it sound almost like an upright bass. Perhaps the effect on "*Tombstone Blues*" was intentional, but now he's controlling it better. The band plays on for nearly a minute after the last verse, but instead of being faded out or allowed to run 'till everyone stops, this one is just snipped off in mid-note.

Take 2, False start (Disc 5 Track 13): A step in the wrong direction: Dylan starts it off a little faster on acoustic guitar, but the figure he plays isn't so clean. The two pianos (Al Kooper on the honky-tonk, I think, though the book makes no mention of a second piano) come in over the introduction, sounding as though they're competing with each other. In the second line Dylan draws out the word "Can't" longer than makes sense, and Bob Johnston cuts in with "Hold it! One more time."

Take 3, Complete (Disc 5 Track 14, also on 6-CD set): This one has the exact pace of the final cut, and similarly builds more in the sixth line of each verse; but it has a few blemishes. Savakus's bass style is just over the top: he keeps hitting a high note with that buzzing sound, and it gets irritating. Dylan slightly stumbles in the phrase "I went to tell everybody," and overall the playing is just a little more lumpy than the final take. I'd have preferred to see the more distinctive Take 1 on the "*Deluxe Edition*" rather than this one. We don't get to find out how long the play-out was, as this recording is faded out; it's the shortest of the three complete takes.

Take 4, Complete (Disc 5 Track 15): The master take sounds warmer here than on "*Highway 61 Revisited*", Bobby Gregg's great drumming softer-edged and further back in the mix. The faded ending is several seconds longer than on the stereo album, the same length as on the 1965 publishers' tape.

POSITIVELY 4TH STREET (CO 86840)

Takes 1-3, False starts (Disc 5 Track 16, also on 6-CD set): "What's the name of this, Bobby?" asks Bob Johnston. Dylan thinks, then comes up with '*Black Dally Roo*', amends it to '*Black Dally Rue*', (he spells it out) then adds "Or '*Crimson Dally Rue*', take your pick." Johnston suggests "'*Pink Dally Rue*' – pink bird," but it appears on the recording sheet as '*Black Dally Rue*'. This dialogue seems to be the extent of Take 1. Dylan strums the opening chord on electric guitar and the drums come in, but Dylan calls it off. He asks Bobby Gregg to count it in for Take 3, they start off again, but Johnston doesn't like the start this time, and after a couple of bars it's "One more time".

Take 4, Complete (Disc 5 Track 17, also on 6-CD set): Now that they've worked out how to kick it off, it's evident that Dylan has this one pretty much worked out in advance. It's taken at a noticeably slower pace than the single, and there are minor differences in the lyrics and phrasing, but essentially the song is there.

Take 5, Complete (Disc 5 Track 18, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): Someone has picked up a tambourine (or some other sort of miniature bells); this instrument is there on the master take, but here it's too upfront. The words and phrasing are getting ironed out, but we still have "Do you think I'm such a fool / As to make contact", which puts an awkward stress on "As". Kooper plays in more of a midrange, fairground organ style during much of the song, rather than the simpler treble lines of the final version. Like the previous take, this is faded out.

Take 6, Breakdown (Disc 5 Track 19): The intro is beginning to sound more like the final version, with Kooper introducing his trademark organ lines. Dylan sings "To say you are my friend" conversationally, almost Basement Tapes style. Half way through the second verse Gregg suddenly hits a drum with a wallop, and the take breaks down. "What?" asks Dylan; "I'm sorry," says someone, and Dylan asks "Did you broke your thumbnail? What happened, man?" The response (from Savakus?) is something like "I fucked up the string with something" (better suggestions on a postcard, please); Dylan shows some concern: "Oh... Did you hurt yourself, man?"

Take 7, Breakdown (Disc 5 Track 20): Perhaps picking up from the previous conversation, Dylan comments "Maybe I ought to sing a Hank Williams song... Can you handle those better, man?" The response is unintelligible, but possibly offended. "Get it!" says Dylan as Gregg does the count-in. He mixes up the words in the third verse and asks to start again.

Take 8, Breakdown (Disc 5 Track 21): The problem of the "...fool / ...contact" lines is halfway solved by a change to "Do you take me for such a fool", but the following "As to make contact" is still giving Dylan problems. He forgets the words in the ninth verse and gives up. "I -ed a word up", we hear him say, another expletive presumably deleted to protect our sensibilities. Johnston has a suggestion to make: "Bob, would it help if you put the lyrics up there on a stand?" "No, it don't help at all, man," replies Dylan.

Take 9 is absent both from the recording sheet and from "*The Cutting Edge*".

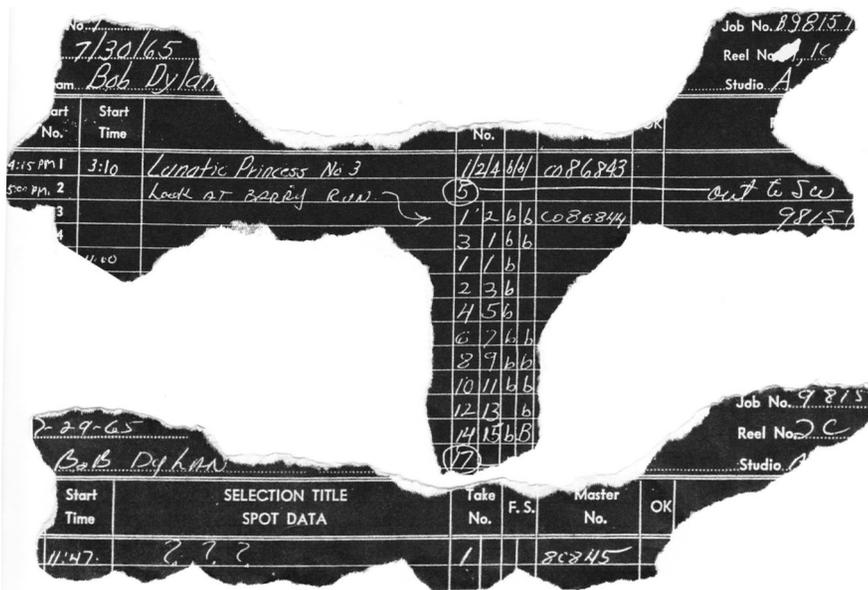
Take 10, Breakdown (Disc 5 Track 22): More trouble with the lyrics: Dylan throws himself off track with "You say you lost your faith in me", attempts to recover with "I cannot believe that", but even before it's out he knows it's a lost cause. "I'm sorry," he says, then "I can't move my hand, man, it's very hard"; quite why, we'll never know.

Take 11 is another take that never was, apparently.

Take 12, Complete (Disc 5 Track 23): Finally, the take that was so good it was kept off the album and held back for the next single. Everything goes right – even the words! – and a few seconds after the point where the long “*Greatest Hits*” version fades out Johnston breaks in with “OK... that’s it, man”, signalling not just that the song is in the bag, but that it’s the end of a very long day’s recording. There are various delighted comments from the band – “Beautiful!”... “Lovely!”... “Well worth it!” “All right, lovely, go home!” responds Dylan breezily.

The next track on the “*Collector’s Edition*” is the early take of ‘*Desolation Row*’ that was bootlegged long ago and then released on “*The Bootleg Series Vol.7: No Direction Home*”. In terms of the studio documentation, this is on a recording sheet of its own (see illustration, Aug 4), on which the track time of 11:47 helps to identify the song, here given the title “? ? ?”. While it’s true that the sheet is dated 7-29-65, both the song’s CO number (80845) and the sheet’s Job number (98157, up in the top right hand corner) clearly show that the date was a slip and the sheet actually relates to the second tape reel of the following day’s session. Reel 2 for July 29 already had its recording sheet, containing just ‘*Phantom Engineer*’ and ‘*Black Dalli Rue*’, while The TID for Reel 1 on July 30 has “Cont. on 2C” written on it. I will discuss the track in its correct chronological place.

July 30, 1965



Russ Savakus apparently left the team after the previous day’s session, having decided that this was really not the right environment for him to learn the electric bass. Al Kooper called his bassist friend Harvey Brooks (actually Harvey Goldstein back then) to put him on standby, and persuaded Bob Johnston to give him a try the following day. It clearly went well, as Dylan not only kept him on for electric bass duties at the remaining sessions, but also recruited him to play live at the Forest Hills and Hollywood Bowl concerts a few weeks later.

FROM A BUICK 6 (CO 86843)

Take 1, False start (Disc 6 Track 2): A little jewel of a take, starting with the funkier of double-stop guitar licks from Bloomfield, Dylan joining in on rhythm

guitar a moment later. I wish they could have kept it up for a complete take, but it founders on the first vocal line for no obvious reason.

Take 2, False start (Disc 6 Track 3): “‘*The Lunatic Princess, Number Three*’, Take 2” is Bob Johnston’s slate for the song. Dylan starts it off on rhythm guitar, then changes his mind and asks Bloomfield to start it; “No, you start it out,” replies Bloomfield. “OK... I’ll start out with the harmonica,” says Dylan. He does a long harmonica note, but the other musicians don’t seem to be ready, so it’s on to the next take.

Take 3, Complete (Disc 6 Track 4, also on 6-CD set): On the recording sheet there is no Take 3, but a complete Take 4; possibly Johnston made an accidental jump in the numbering of his spoken slates on the tape. Perhaps because of this confusion, this is the version that was mistakenly included on early US and Canadian stereo pressings of “*Highway 61 Revisited*”, a mistake perpetuated in Japan until the 1980s. **This is its first time out on CD.** While it’s clearly inferior to the master take, it sounds very much better in this bassier, narrower mix than it did on the vinyl pressings. With Bobby Gregg’s clickety-clack drumming mixed well up it’s actually quite fun. The fade-out is a second or two longer, so we get to hear a couple of duff rhythm chords from Dylan; maybe he was just winding down.

Take 4, Complete (Disc 6 Track 5): This is the master take, actually numbered 5 on the recording sheet. Bloomfield has dropped the nagging guitar lick that was all over Take 3, and the song gets a lot more focus and punch. The play-out is 25 seconds longer than the stereo album version, though it’s still ultimately faded out.

CAN YOU PLEASE CRAWL OUT YOUR WINDOW (CO 86844)

Takes 1-4, False starts (Disc 6 Track 6): Dylan slates this next song himself: “‘*Look At Barry Run*’, Take 1,” he laughs, before Gregg counts it in. There’s evidently been plenty of rehearsal, as the intro sounds surprisingly like the later takes, if a little more laid back. Paul Griffin’s syncopated piano style is immediately recognisable, and Bloomfield’s doing something similar to what he did on ‘*Like a Rolling Stone*’; but three bars into the intro Johnston calls for a restart. Take 2 has Kooper much more evident on the celeste (an instrument perhaps chosen to stop the song sounding *too* similar to ‘*Like a Rolling Stone*’). Dylan gets started with, “He sits in your room, his tomb, with a mouth full of tacks” but at that moment Bobby Gregg stops playing for some reason, and once everyone else has noticed, the take ends. After some brief chat Dylan says brightly, “All right, let’s go! Take 1 again... let’s start at the beginning – Take 1, not 3!” This time we have “... with his hands full of tacks”, but the second line dissolves into a chuckle from Dylan and it comes to a stop again. “You didn’t have it?” asks Dylan after some inaudible remarks from other musicians. And that’s it for this track: there’s no audible evidence of a fourth false start.

The recording sheet, it must be said, is somewhat confusing regarding the early takes of this song. The first five takes are shown as false starts, but they are numbered 1,2,3,1 and 1 again. Following this is the first complete take, also numbered 1!

Take 1, Complete (Disc 6 Track 7, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): This is actually more than a complete take, beginning with Kooper playing *'Jingle Bells'* on his celeste; Dylan then has a very bad go at it on electric guitar, and Bobby Gregg joins in just before the tape is cut. This is presumably the fifth of the false starts, and **it must be pretty annoying for owners of the 2-CD "Best Of" collection – or indeed any of the other editions – to have to listen to this every time they play the record.** Anyway, after that the *real* Take 1 is counted in. As is so often the case at these 1965-66 sessions, the earliest complete take is the most interesting alternative to the master take, because it is the most different. With this song the arrangement is very similar throughout the lengthy sequence of takes, but here the tempo is decidedly slower than the later attempts, and there are more of the small differences in the lyrics. For some reason this particular version is mixed rather differently from all the other takes of this song, with the piano less prominent in terms of both position and volume. It does often seem that the tracks destined for *"The Best Of The Cutting Edge"* have been mixed with a little more care and polish than all of the rest.

Take 2, False start (Disc 6 Track 8): A fairly ragged start here, and Dylan only gets as far as "... his tomb" before breaking off with "No, no... wrong bass: you were going 'dooh, dooh...'" Griffin and Bloomfield do a few seconds' improvisation.

Take 3, Complete (Disc 6 Track 9): Kooper is perfecting the licks he plays on celeste over the introduction, and the tempo is faster than the previous complete take. The song is now really in its final form (until the October remake, that is). All that remains is for Dylan to polish his phrasing and get a clean take that he's happy with. This one isn't bad, but clearly not quite good enough. The ending is cut rather than faded.

Take 4, False start (Disc 6 Track 10): Bloomfield is a little more in evidence on this short take; it's ended after the second line by Dylan calling "Fuck, hey, stop!" (there's one that slipped past the censors). It's not obvious what went wrong.

Take 5, Complete (Disc 6 Track 11): Collectors will know this one from the rough mix publishers' tape that surfaced in the late 1970s, later bootlegged as *"Highway 61 Revisited Again"*.¹² It was the much more polished final take that was selected as a candidate for the new album (see the recording sheet), so it's a puzzle as to why this earlier take was chosen to go off to Witmark. Bloomfield plays a great lick in the third verse as Dylan sings "... while your face is so changed".

Take 6, Rehearsal/false start (Disc 6 Track 12): The rehearsal part of this track is actually a couple of instrumental snippets, with Dylan running through some of the chord changes on electric guitar, and all the other musicians except Gregg joining in for the chorus. Then Johnston slates Take 6, Gregg says "Here we go... hold it"; for no obvious reasons Dylan throws in "The doctors are here!" and laughs, and then they're off. Johnston doesn't like the intro, though, and calls for "One more – everybody real strong."

Take 7, False start (Disc 6 Track 13): The next take starts OK but the tempo has been creeping up since Take 5, and Dylan only gets through the first couple of lines before he calls out, "No, it's still too fast".

Take 8, False start (Disc 6 Track 14): The tempo drops back down a little, but just after Dylan sings "You know he has no intentions" Harvey Brooks plays a wrong note and a moment later it's over.

The recording sheet shows a Take 9 false start next, but if this exists then it isn't included here.

Takes 10-11, False starts (Disc 6 Track 15): "Go ahead, do that introduction, that's all right" says Dylan after Johnston's slate. "I don't care," replies one of the musicians; "I don't care either, go ahead," says Dylan. After a bit more of this banter Paul Griffin starts the take with a loud piano chord, but no-one else joins in. "OK, we're rolling on eleven – everybody strong!" says Johnston encouragingly. "Be strong, Mike," mutters Dylan to Bloomfield. The take starts off, but in the first line Dylan accidentally reverts to an earlier version of the words: "with a mouth full of... hey... one more time".

Take 12, Complete (Disc 6 Track 16): A fourth complete performance, fine musically but with a few slightly untidy variations in Dylan's wording and phrasing; for example, the second chorus has "Hey, come through the window / Come on, it won't ruin you"; and the third verse unusually has "Till his genocide fools and his friends rearrange". Johnston cuts off the play-out with "OK, hold it".

Here, according to the recording sheet, should be a Take 13 false start, but it is absent.

Take 14, Breakdown (Disc 6 Track 17): Dylan continues to improvise on the lyrics: "Cursing the dead *but* they can't answer him back". Towards the end of the first verse it appears that Bloomfield is playing his guitar with a *slide*, getting an almost Hawaiian effect; but it doesn't really come off, and Dylan, seemingly thrown off balance, misses his entry into the chorus.

Take 15, Breakdown (Disc 6 Track 18): Bloomfield has put his slide away, but still seems to be in search of something new. In the first chorus he plays a sort of calypso phrase repeatedly, but his guitar is noticeably out of tune. Dylan seems not to mind, and carries on with the second verse, still playing with the words ("... to hand him his chalk / Or *remember* where he throws it"). At the beginning of the third verse he comes out with "He looks so righteous while your face looks so bruised", but clearly doesn't like it: his cry of "Aaaaahh!" brings the other players to a halt.

Take 16 is missing from both the recording sheet and *"The Cutting Edge"*.

Take 17, Complete (Disc 6 Track 19, also on 6-CD set): Suddenly, as with *'Positively 4th Street'*, it all comes right, and we're left with the perfect version of this song. In the end it didn't get onto the album, probably because of its musical similarities

to *'Like a Rolling Stone'*; and *'Positively 4th Street'* was rightly preferred for the next single. This take, though, is the one that found its way onto the first U.S. pressings of that next single by mistake¹³, under the title *'Positively 4th Street'* – well, if you were told to get out the tape for *'Positively 4th Street'*, how would you choose between two songs listed as *'Black Dalli Rue'* and *'Look At Barry Run'*? Of course, Dylan remade the song with The Hawks for a single release later in the year, but it was much more of a throwaway then. This is the first time we've been able to hear this great earlier version in stereo, and it's marvellous. The ending is extended for ten seconds or more compared with the single, giving you ample opportunity to hear how Harvey Brooks's muscular bass playing has taken off as this song has developed.

DESOLATION ROW (CO 86845)

Take 1, Complete (Disc 6 Track 1): As stated above, this take has been located out of sequence on *"The Cutting Edge Collector's Edition"*, on account of an incorrect date (July 29) written on the recording sheet; all other factors point to it being recorded at the end of July 30. Dylan got Kooper and Brooks to stay on after the other musicians had gone home, to try out a long new song he'd written. Kooper plays electric guitar and Brooks electric bass. Dylan plays an acoustic guitar with the 6th string tuned down to D to get the same modal effect as on *'It's Alright, Ma'*, but he seemingly didn't check the tuning of the other strings, and his guitar sounds either mildly or painfully out of tune, according to your degree of musical sensitivity. Personally I find Kooper's guitar sounds even more out of tune; but either way it only enhances the dark, primitive ambience of this take, which many have already likened to the early Velvet Underground (think *'Venus In Furs'*, recorded the following year). It's certainly not the worst case of bad guitar tuning at these sessions. To add to the garage sound there is also some sort of background distortion audible in the later verses of the song. This version, of course, was already released on *"The Bootleg Series Vol. 7: No Direction Home"*, in a slightly more polished mix. It was also included in the tape of new songs that was sent off to Witmark & Sons (presumably because it was the only take recorded at the time the tape was compiled), and found its way onto bootleg albums in the 1970s. It became famous for the "boiled guts of birds" line. On that tape the end of the song included a couple of seconds more of Kooper's riffing on guitar.

August 2, 1965

Start	SELECT	SPOT	NO.	OK
3:30	HIGHWAY 61	1 2 6 6	CO 86846	
3:45		3 4 6		
4:35		5 5		
5:35		6 7 6		
		8 9 6		
	Harvey Brooks	1 2 6 6	CO 86847	
		3 4 6		
		5 5		
	Harvey Brooks	6 7 6	86847-	
		8 9 6		
		10 10		
		11 10		
		12 6 6		
		13 4 6		
		14 6 6		
		15 4 6		
		16 6 6		
5:35	QUEEN JANE	1 2 6	CO 86848	HEADPHONE
4:15		3 4 6 6		
6:00		5 6		
		7 7		
6:00	BALLAD OF A RAINY DAY PT #1	1 2 6	CO 86849	HEADPHONE
		3 3		
	INSERT #1	1		
	DESOLATION ROW	1 2 6 6	CO 86845	
		3 4 6 6		
		5		

After the best part of three days off, the crew reassembled at 8 pm on Monday August 2, with the studio booked through to 3 am. Dylan had spent the long weekend up in Woodstock working on the remaining songs for the new album, with Al Kooper writing out chord charts for the other musicians to use. According to the studio records, the pianist for the first part of the session was Frank Owens, with Paul Griffin taking the late shift. Dylan's usual studio drummer, Bobby Gregg, was replaced by Butterfield Blues Band drummer Sam Lay for the 8 pm – 11 pm session; Gregg, perhaps booked elsewhere for the early session, took over from midnight on. Sam Lay, of course, had recently been part of Dylan's ad-hoc band for the Newport Festival.

HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED (CO 86846)

Take 1, False start (Disc 6 Track 20): "All right!" says Dylan, and they set off at a loping pace in the key of C. But after the first line Dylan breaks off: "Ah, wait, man... I got too close to the microphone".

Take 2, False start (Disc 6 Track 21):

"Wait, maybe we oughta change the key", says Dylan; he experiments a bit with his guitar and voice and settles on B b. Al Kooper can be heard warming up on electric piano. "We're rolling on two," says Johnston, but Harvey Brooks evidently thinks they're playing in B and the take folds after the first bar.

Take 3, Complete (Disc 6 Track 22, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): The first complete take, and interestingly different from the familiar album track as Mike Bloomfield has yet to pick up his guitar slide and Dylan has not yet discovered the police whistle. There are the usual improvised variations in the lyrics ("I got a thousand red, white and blue shoestrings / And a bunch of telephones that don't ring / I simply gotta get rid of these things"), but really the song is fully formed and just searching for the best performance. Bloomfield does some nice soloing before the final rapid fade.

Take 4, False start (Disc 6 Track 23): The key is back up to C again, presumably after some further discussion. Bass and piano start it off, but Dylan isn't happy with the rhythm they set up: "Aaaaah! One two three four, man," he says; Bloomfield plays a couple of notes, and that's it.

Take 5, Complete (Disc 6 Track 24, also on 6-CD set): Still no slide guitar or whistle, but this time Dylan has put down his guitar and picked up a harmonica, which he plays with both hands, starting off in the intro and then playing at suitable intervals through the song. The sound is cleaner with only one electric guitar, and there seems to be only one piano too. It's a terrific take, with Dylan's vocal and harmonica on absolutely top form, and Owens (I think) doing sterling work on electric piano; if it weren't for a couple of spots where Dylan hesitates slightly over the words this one could easily have made the album.

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CR-102C REV. 9/84

SAM LAY ON BOB DYLAN'S HIGHWAY 61

Counterfoil of cheque Sam Lay received for his session work [believed to be from the collection of the late Jim McLaren]

Take 5 mis-slate, Complete (Disc 6 Track 25):

The recording sheet confirms that there were indeed two Take 5s logged for this song; such things happened. The instrumentation has changed again, with Dylan back on rhythm guitar (and no harmonica); there are two pianos, Kooper to the left and Owens to the right; and Bloomfield is playing slide guitar, though rather tentatively. Dylan's vocal is good again, but overall the take doesn't have anything like the impact of the one before.

Take 6, Complete (Disc 6 Track 26): This is the version that was on "*The Bootleg Series Vol.7: No Direction Home*", though it sounds very different in this rather murky mix. The key is back down to B \flat again, and Bloomfield is getting noticeably more confident with his slide playing.

Take 7, False start (Disc 6 Track 27, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): Finally we get to the point where Dylan discovers the famous whistle¹⁴; one version of the story is that it was found in Sam Lay's drum case¹⁵; Kooper says it was one he used to carry on a cord around his neck for simulating a police raid when friends were smoking marijuana¹⁶. Dylan is plainly delighted with it anyway, and the rest of the band has to keep the intro going and going while Dylan tries it out. Everybody falls about laughing – there's even a woman's laugh in there – and Johnston, laughing himself, says "Stand by!" for the next take. Sam Lay throws in "I could play all right if I didn't have to look at that cat's face!" Frank Owens suggests, more seriously, that they'd been taking the intro a little too fast; Dylan, the whistle evidently still in his mouth, replies "No, that'sh right, that'sh not too fasht at all; yeah, that'sh good, go ahead." You can even hear the little disc spinning round inside the whistle as he talks.



Take 8, False start (Disc 6 Track 28): "Yeah, get that easy-going riff going," instructs Johnston. "That was the funniest damn thing I ever heard," says one of the other musicians; "Hey, don't laugh, now," replies Dylan through a mouth full of whistle, "cos I'll look at your face, man, while I'm playing,". Someone responds to a request from Frank Owens for an indication of the tempo they want. "Rolling on eight", calls Johnston; they're off, with Dylan blowing the whistle as he does on the album cut, but Johnston calls for a restart.

Take 9, Complete (Disc 6 Track 29): And here *is* the album cut. Dylan manages to blow the whistle here and there without cracking up, Bloomfield plays his slide guitar with real attack, and it all goes just fine. We get an extra ten seconds or so of play-out here, the tape cut just short of where it was on the rough-mix publishers' tape.

JUST LIKE TOM THUMB'S BLUES (CO 86847)

Take 1, Breakdown (Disc 7 Track 1, also on 6-CD set): Sam Lay and Frank Owens apparently carried on for the remainder of the 8:00 – 11:00 pm session, which covered the earlier takes of this song; Kooper is on electric piano again. The intro sounds much more relaxed than the album track, with both electric guitar and piano playing much lower in their ranges – though the actual key and tempo are no different. The percussion is minimal, Gregg providing the Latin-flavoured rhythm mainly on hi-hat and the rim of his snare drum. Dylan is still forming the words: "When you're lost in Juarez, raining and it's Easter too / And your gravity drops and negativity don't pull you through". In the turn-around into the second verse Dylan plays a wrong note on his guitar¹⁷; "Aaaaah, hey, what's... what's... we don't *have* to do that, man," he says, presumably referring to the guitar motif he plays in the intro and between verses; "No, it's nice," Frank Owens reassures him.

There's apparently a missing take here: Take 2 is shown on the recording sheet as a false start, but there's no sign of it on "*The Cutting Edge*".

Take 3, Complete (Disc 7 Track 2, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): The tempo is a little slower this time, and a rather lame tambourine has been added to the percussion; it's not clear who's playing it. On the up side, Frank Owens plays some nice Tex-Mex fills on piano, and there are some unfamiliar lyrics to catch your ear: "And later on you're left howling at the moon"; and "How they blackmailed the sergeant of arms up and giving [?] his post / To go-bust Angel who just arrived here from the coast". Johnston cuts off the take at the end with an unenthusiastic-sounding "Okay".

Take 4, Rehearsal (Disc 7 Track 3): Dylan practises his guitar intro with Kooper on electric piano; without the percussion they sound as though they're playing in slow motion. The second line adds bass, drums, piano and now a maraca (or some other sort of shaker), thankfully played better than the tambourine. And that's the rehearsal over.

Take 5, Complete (Disc 7 Track 4): This is the take we've heard before on "*The Bootleg Series Vol.7*". As expected, the mix is different here, and the fade-out is just a shade longer. The maraca has definitely taken over from the tambourine now,

and the drums are heavier than in the earlier takes. The lyrics are getting ironed out, though we still have “But it was all a big laugh, there was nobody even there to call my bluff”. It’s a very good take, but as you know there was better yet to come.

More missing takes now; from the recording sheet, it seems there was a complete Take 6, and then two false starts, Takes 7 and 8. It’s perhaps significant that they were at the beginning of the second reel of the evening: maybe either the tape machine wasn’t working properly for a while or the tape subsequently got damaged. However, there is some evidence that Columbia studios normally had two machines recording everything simultaneously, and if this is so then it’s surprising that neither copy has survived.

Takes 9-10, Breakdown (Disc 7 Track 5): The lyrics have taken a step backwards: “When you’re lost down in Juarez, it’s raining and it’s Easter time too”. After the first line of the second verse Sam Lay plays a drum fill that seems out of place, and the take crashes. There’s nothing here to clarify why this apparently single take got two numbers.

Takes 11-12, False starts (Disc 7 Track 6): We don’t hear the count-in for Take 11, but it’s clear that Dylan’s guitar and the piano are out of step, and it quickly comes to a stop. “That was me who came in too soon,” Dylan confides to someone over the count-in for the next take. The intro gets slightly further this time, but it’s still a little ragged; “One more,” calls Johnston.

Take 13, Complete (Disc 7 Track 7, also on 6-CD set): Another excellent complete take, perhaps even better than the one chosen for *No Direction Home*. On this particular track Bloomfield’s guitar is mixed slightly to the left of Dylan’s, so it’s a little easier to distinguish them. By now Dylan has come up with “But the joke was on me” for the last verse. Dylan’s harmonica after the last verse isn’t as good as on the final take, and Kooper slightly overplays the electric piano for a couple of bars, but other than that it’s hard to find reasons why they kept trying for a better take. Maybe Dylan was hoping that the impending change of personnel might produce something even better.

Takes 14-15, False starts (Disc 7 Track 8): This appears to be the start of the midnight shift, with Paul Griffin and Bobby Gregg taking over from Owens and Lay respectively: both piano and drums have a noticeably different character from this point on. On the first attempt Johnston isn’t happy with the first two bars of the piano/guitar intro, and calls for a restart. While he’s speaking one of the musicians evidently makes a quip that causes great hilarity; it seems to have been occasioned by Paul Griffin’s way of playing the piano intro with little ‘slip’ notes, as someone throws in “... play Floyd Cramer piano, man,” a reference to the similar style of the archetypal Nashville country music pianist. Maybe this was a dig at Griffin, or maybe it was a joke about Johnston’s Nashville background; either way, it’s a little ironic in the light of Dylan’s subsequent switch to recording down there. Griffin firmly sticks with his style for the next take, though he has a momentary hesitation in the second bar. Johnston again calls “One more”; when Dylan asks why, he replies “Cos they were off, the piano and the guitar.”

Take 16, Complete (Disc 7 Track 9): At last, the master take emerges, and you know just how good it is. The fade-out comes a few seconds later here than on the stereo *“Highway 61 Revisited”* album, at just about the point where the track was cut on the publishers’ tape. It appears that when Johnston thought the ending of a track had gone on long enough to be faded at the mixing stage, he just cut the recording regardless of whether the musicians were still playing; this was probably standard practice.

QUEEN JANE APPROXIMATELY (CO 86848)

Take 1, Rehearsal (Disc 7 Track 10): Dylan runs through the first few chords with the band, Kooper tinkling on the celeste like it’s Christmas time. Maybe Dylan had already decided to shelve *‘Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window’*: it seems unlikely he’d have wanted *two* songs with the celeste on his new album.

Take 2, Complete (Disc 7 Track 11, also on 6-CD set): Having said that, there’s plenty of room for two such songs within this immense collection, and this complete take with the celeste is very welcome. It’s noticeably slower than the album cut, and the piano hasn’t yet adopted its lead role. The words haven’t all fallen into place yet, either: “When your mother rips up all your invitations”... “And the smelling of the roses does not remain”... “And all of your children turn against you”. But I like it for its more relaxed pace, for the very measured way Dylan sings the phrases, for the way he often lifts the high notes in the third line of each verse... and for the fact that the instruments are mostly in tune. It couldn’t have made the original album, as the rhythm suddenly goes to pieces during Dylan’s harmonica solo at the end; but it’s one of my favourite tracks in the whole *“Collector’s Edition”* and I’d have liked to see it on the *“Best Of”* anthology.

Take 3, False start (Disc 7 Track 12): The celeste has gone, and the piano hasn’t yet stepped up to take its place in the intro, which as a result sounds rather stolid. As soon as Dylan starts singing, Kooper streams in on the Hammond that he’s switched to, making it sound much more like the final version. It comes apart in the third line – Bloomfield thinks someone doesn’t have the chords right. “Bob is not going directly C – E minor – D minor, he’s going C – F – E minor,” he tells whoever it is.

Take 4, False start (Disc 7 Track 13): Paul Griffin now starts to play his tinkly lounge-style piano over the intro to give it some focus, but Dylan plays a chord badly in the second bar, and the take folds.

Take 5, Complete (Disc 7 Track 14, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): The same style again, but this one goes all the way. It’s still played very slow, and the more reflective pace makes it seem as if Dylan is singing more to himself than to anyone else. The words still have the odd awkwardness: “And you want somebody that you will not have to speak to,” but he plays a good harmonica solo before the fade-out.

Take 6, Complete (Disc 7 Track 15): Now the pace picks up so that it’s a shade *faster* than the album track we’re used to, and the rhythm section gives the song quite a bounce. Bloomfield has turned on the tremolo effect on his amp, and with this his

guitar fills up more of the space the song had before; this would be OK, but his guitar is also getting noticeably out of tune. The opening line reverts to one of its previous incarnations: "When your mother sends back all *her* invitations".

Take 1, Complete (Disc 7 Track 16): The final tempo gives the song more of a sense of urgency than the earlier takes, but without seeming too up-beat. The urgency is enhanced by Dylan singing his phrases across the rhythm of the song more than on any of the previous takes, and his voice also carries the sense of weariness he is projecting on 'Queen Jane': "And you're *SICK* of all this repetition...". Bloomfield has turned off the tremolo effect, but not returned his guitar – and I suspect Dylan's is also out of tune. But it was late at night, and Dylan still had a couple of songs to record. The fade-out on this "*Cutting Edge*" remix is just a shade short of the "*Highway 61 Revisited*" stereo album mix, and a few seconds shorter than the rough mono mix on the publishers' tape.

BALLAD OF A THIN MAN (CO 86849)

Take 1, False start (Disc 7 Track 17): "Hey, this is called '*The Ballad Of The Thin Man*', Part One," says Dylan with a snigger. Dylan is on piano for this one, and I think Paul Griffin on organ.¹⁸ Kooper starts it off on electric piano, Dylan joining in rather tentatively and Bloomfield playing some sustained blues notes a little like Robbie Robertson did later on the world tour. But as Dylan sings "You trying hard..." all the instruments except the bass stop playing, and Dylan is left asking "No good?"

Take 2, Breakdown (Disc 7 Track 18, also on 6-CD set): This time Dylan opens the song with his familiar doomy piano chords, and Bloomfield has melted into the background. Griffin's improvised organ fills are different, but every bit as good as on the album version; they make it through to the "sword swallower" verse, with just a few small variations in the words along the way; but as Dylan sings "up to you and he kneels" one of the pianos plays a horribly sharp note and as far as Dylan's concerned it's over. "Let's take it from there," he says even as everyone else is still coming to a stop; in other words, he wants to restart the performance and recording from the beginning of that verse and then splice the two partial takes together. Bloomfield, though, thinks differently: "Do it again, man!" – and that's what they do.

Take 3, Complete (Disc 7 Track 19): On only the third take, they produce the album track – almost. In the penultimate verse Paul Griffin makes a rare slip as Dylan sings "Give me some milk...", his organ line clashing with the bass. So, this is the master take *prior* to the spliced insert that this mistake made necessary (see the next take). It's interesting that an unedited 4-track master still exists; this tends to support the idea that there were generally two multi-track machines at work recording each session. One of the master tapes was evidently edited before the mono and stereo album mixes were made: the edit sounds identical in both mixes. It was the *unedited* Take 3 that was sent off in the rough mix tape to Dylan's publishers, though there it ran on for a few seconds longer; what we're given on "*The Cutting Edge*" is barely longer than the stereo album track, though the fade-out is more sudden.

Take 4, Insert (Disc 7 Track 20): Dylan and the band re-recorded the whole of the "one-eyed midget" verse and chorus to provide ample material for the required insert. It fades in just before Johnston slates "Intercut 1", the band establishing a steady B minor groove while Dylan has a cough. Eventually he starts singing, and even here the words vary a little: "You *watch* this one-eyed midget...". After the chorus the band plays on for a couple of bars before it fades out, Griffin playing some nice organ trills. In the event the only part used for the insert was from the beginning of "Give me some milk" to the end of "Do you, Mr Jones," so it's nice to hear what came before and after.

DESOLATION ROW (CO 86845)

Years ago, Michael Krogsgaard's researches in the Sony archives¹¹ revealed that Dylan recorded five takes of this song at the August 2 session, where of course we knew other musicians were present; but he did not find any clear indication of whether the one complete take listed for this date was the one used on "*Highway 61 Revisited*", following overdubbing on August 4, or whether that released take was recorded entirely at the August 4 session. Now, with the benefit of actually being able to *hear* every take, we know that the latter was the case. So, one of the major revelations contained in "*The Cutting Edge*" is that Dylan did in fact record '*Desolation Row*' with a full band accompaniment. Well, almost a full band. It seems that Paul Griffin had probably gone home by now: there is no organ to be heard on any of these takes, just an electric piano, which sounds more like it's being played by Al Kooper as indicated in the box set book. Mike Bloomfield's electric guitar is also very muted, to the extent of being quite difficult to separate from Dylan's electric rhythm guitar; they are located at the same lateral position in the mix. The book credits Dylan with harmonica on all five takes, though he doesn't actually play it at all.

Takes 1-2 remake, False start/breakdown (Disc 8 Track 1): While the early take of this song recorded on July 30 was set in the key of D, the new arrangement sets it a tone higher, in E; this gives it a much lighter feel. Kooper starts it off with a little electric piano figure; the other instruments come in, but a few seconds into the intro Johnston cuts it off with "One more time- everybody together, number two." Gregg asks Johnston, "Was there an overhang on the cowbell?" "I didn't hear it", replies Johnston (possibly referring to the cowbell, which seems inaudible, rather than to any overhang – whatever that may be). Dylan breaks in with "Play the drums very lightly, man", to which Gregg's response is "One – I *am* – two, one, two," and then they're into the second attempt, which commences in exactly the same way. Dylan starts the first verse, but at "They're painting the –" the tape just cuts.

Take 3 remake, Breakdown (Disc 8 Track 2): This time it's Dylan's electric guitar that opens the track, everyone else following on. The first verse passes without incident, but half way into the second Dylan starts to lose concentration: "And here comes Romeo, moaning / You belong to me I know, I believe..." Then he breaks off – "No, no, no, no... something's wrong... it's like I gotta *fight* it, man... I can't do that". It seems to be the same problem that he'd had back in January with '*Mr Tambourine Man*', the song trying to shrug off the amplified backing that only dragged it down.

Take 4 remake, False start (Disc 8 Track 3): A very ragged start, Gregg trying to do the count-in after Dylan's actually started playing; and Bloomfield's guitar is horribly sharp. It doesn't get past the first line.

Take 5 remake, Complete (Disc 8 Track 4, also on 6-CD set): We're back to the electric piano opening, but it's essentially the same arrangement, and this time Dylan sticks it out. But now *his* guitar is slightly out of tune, and because it's an electric – and well up in the mix – it actually sounds naggingly worse than his acoustic did on the more famously out-of-tune version recorded the previous Friday. The pace is a little quicker than that July 29 recording, but still quite a lot slower than the final album track; so even with no harmonica breaks and little time wasted between verses, it still takes nearly 11 long minutes. Having neither the intense darkness of the early version nor the ironic lightness of touch of the acoustic version chosen for the album, it just trudges. The famous “boiled guts of birds” line, incidentally, has been boiled down to just “the guts of birds”.

August 3, 1965

The next day the Chambers Brothers came back in to record backing vocals on the master take of *'Tombstone Blues'* (Take 12 from July 29). There is nothing to suggest that Dylan was present. Curiously, while we were given none of Angeline Butler's May 1965 overdub takes for *'If You Gotta Go, Go Now'*, here we get all three of the Chambers Brothers' attempts on *'Tombstone Blues'*.

TOMBSTONE BLUES (CO 86838)

Take 1 Vocal overdub, Breakdown (Disc 8 Track 5): The box set books bill this as a complete take, but it's clearly a breakdown. The backup singing is fairly ragged, and one of the Brothers hasn't learned the words, singing “I'm in trouble...” instead of “I'm in the kitchen” in the third chorus. After this, Bob Johnston stops the backing track: you can hear the decay of the severed lead guitar note.

Take 2 Vocal overdub, Complete (Disc 8 Track 6): They're generally much more together on this take, and hold the final note of each chorus (“Blu-u-u-u-es”) beautifully. But one of them forgets that on the original track Dylan came in a beat later on the fourth chorus than on all the others, and so starts singing too soon. It makes you realise just how good the session musicians were to take this in their stride at the original session.

Take 3 Vocal overdub, Complete (Disc 8 Track 7): This time they get it right, but Dylan evidently didn't like the results enough to use the overdub on the album track. A mono mix of this final take was cut as an acetate, and a tape of this has long circulated among collectors; that mix contains Bob Johnston slating the track as “‘Tombstone’, number three overdub” and at the end offering to play it back for the singers to hear. A rather poorly-produced stereo mix was released on the 2014 Michael Bloomfield box set, *“From His Head To His Heart To His Hands”*; it sounds a lot better here on *“The Cutting Edge”*. It seems odd that the 6-CD *“Deluxe Edition”* included the version of *'Tombstone Blues'* that was already released on *“The Bootleg Series Vol. 7”*, but omitted this interesting little blind alley.

August 4, 1965

Start Time	SELECTION TITLE SPOT DATA	Take No.	F. S.	No.	OK	REMARKS
	Desolation Row (Remake)	1	2	6	6	TR 2 No SLATE
	Desolation Row (Comp 1)	1	1	1	1	
	Desolation Row (Comp 2)	1	1	1	1	

After the failed attempts to record this as an electric number, Johnston brought Russ Savakus back in to play stand-up bass with Dylan on an acoustic version. Savakus may have struggled on electric bass at the July 29 session, but he was a very respected string bass player in the jazz field, and he had recently played on some folk sessions too.

DESOLATION ROW (CO 86937)

Take 1, Rehearsal (Disc 8 Track 8): Presumably this was a rehearsal for Savakus; or was Dylan really thinking of recording the whole song on piano? The

instrument he's playing has been prepared in some way to give it a jangly sound: it sounds like a grand piano with a metal rod or something similar laid across the strings. Dylan plays a wrong chord on the third line, which can't have helped Savakus much. The tape cuts abruptly after the first verse.

Take 2, Rehearsal (Disc 8 Track 9, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): On the 6-CD and 2-CD editions this is billed as ‘piano demo’; but on the 18-CD set it is listed as a rehearsal, which I'm sure is probably more accurate: Savakus has already worked out the beautiful bass lines he goes on to use on the final album track. Possibly it was a demo for Charlie McCoy, to prepare him for recording his second guitar part. Dylan plays piano again; it sounds like the same grand, but with whatever it was removed from the strings. This time we get the first verse of the song plus a whole verse on harmonica before it fades out. It's a lovely little performance, justly included in the *“Best Of”* edition, and a full take like this would have been very welcome – though perhaps with Charlie McCoy's guitar to add variety to the sound.

Take 1, Complete (with insert) (Disc 8 Track 10, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): Here things start to get a little confusing. The take numbering goes back to 1, probably in recognition of the fact that the two preceding short takes were just rehearsals

(though on the recording sheet they were marked with a 'b' as false starts). The recording sheet indicates that the next take was a complete take, numbered 1, and this was followed by another labelled Incut 1 – presumably an insert to be applied to the complete Take 1. On “*The Cutting Edge*” we are not given the insert as a separate take (in the way that we were with ‘*Ballad Of a Thin Man*’, for example). **Instead we apparently have the complete Take 1 with the insert already applied.** I suppose it’s possible that no tape now exists of the unedited Take 1; but I wonder whether it’s more to do with the producers’ desire for a complete alternate take of ‘*Desolation Row*’ to go on the 2-CD “*Best Of The Cutting Edge*” release, where a take with an obvious slip in it would not sit so well as one that had already been rectified with an insert. This could also account for the prominence of the stand-up bass in this mix: in the absence of Charlie McCoy’s decorative guitar part, the enhanced bass gives the track some additional sonic interest. And of course Savakus’s bass-playing fully merits this attention.

Compared with the final take, Dylan’s vocal delivery is a little more clipped, though none the worse for that; and there is a surprising change to the words in the final verse: “Right now my head is breaking / Don’t send me no more letters, no”. There’s a small hitch in Dylan’s guitar-playing just before the penultimate verse, and his harmonica in the break that follows this verse isn’t as strong as on the released take. He also stops well short of completing a final verse of harmonica at the end; either he thinks he’s done enough for a fade-out, or he’s already decided that this take isn’t a keeper.

Take 5, Complete master without guitar overdub (Disc 8 Track 11, also on 6-CD and 2-CD sets): Accounts of Charlie McCoy’s involvement in this song have generally suggested that he recorded his guitar part live, as part of a trio with Dylan and Savakus – and that they played through the song twice¹⁹. However, the way the recordings are presented on “*The Cutting Edge*” it seems that Dylan and Savakus recorded the song twice, but McCoy recorded his guitar part afterwards as an overdub. **In theory it could be that McCoy did play live on the two complete takes,** and his part has just been mixed out; but there’s not a trace of his guitar being picked up, even faintly, by any of the other microphones. Either way, here is the take we hear on “*Highway 61 Revisited*”, but without McCoy. This version is mixed very differently from the preceding complete take, perhaps to make it sound a little closer to the released album track, or perhaps just for the sake of variety. The box set book says that this track was released on “*Highway 61 Revisited*”, but of course it was the following track, with the guitar overdub, that was on the 1965 album. Sadly the end of the take is edited very tightly, thereby excluding Dylan’s laugh that can be heard on the old mono album.

Take 6, Guitar overdub (Disc 8 Track 12): According to the recording sheets, we’re on to a second tape reel now. The first reel can hardly have been filled up by just two complete takes of ‘*Desolation Row*’ and three short ones: so perhaps the guitar overdub was done by playing back Take 5 from Reel 1 and recording that onto Reel 2 with McCoy playing along. The recording sheet for Reel 2 shows two takes of ‘*Desolation Row*’ (Comp 1)”, numbered 6 and 7, neither of them marked as a false start or breakdown. On Take 6 we appear to get McCoy’s guitar part dubbed onto Take 5, and sounding exactly as it is on the released album, except that here it is mixed centrally so that it’s a lot less clearly audible than on the stereo “*Highway 61 Revisited*”. Comparing this new mix with even the relatively mellow DCC mastering of the original stereo album, it’s evident just how much that 1965 stereo mix emphasised the upper midrange frequencies at the expense of the bass. The ending is edited just the same as on Take 5.

Take 7, Guitar overdub (Disc 8 Track 13): Now this is where it gets *really* confusing. On the recording sheet both Takes 6 and 7 are circled as preferred takes, and a line goes from the circled 7 to a note saying “out to SW 98151”, that being the job number for the new album’s compilation reel. Below this line there is a note, initialled BJ (Bob Johnston), which appears to say “edited Take 7”; so perhaps the original Takes 6 and 7 were edited together in some way for the final master. However, “*The Cutting Edge*” sheds surprisingly little light on any of this. As indicated above, what we are given as Take 6 already seems to have had all the editing it’s going to get; and **the track identified as Take 7 is just a few bars of Take 5 with a bit of overdubbed guitar from McCoy that was not used in the released track.** If McCoy did indeed play through the whole song twice, even as overdubs, then most of his second performance has been lost. It seems impossible to reconcile what’s on “*The Cutting Edge*” with the contemporary studio documentation, let alone with participants’ distant recollections. But of course, if Johnston was having tapes cut up and spliced together as much as the available evidence suggests, maybe it’s not surprising that what remains is difficult to reconstruct into a logical sequence.

TOMBSTONE BLUES (CO 86838)

Take 1 Harmonica overdub (Disc 8 Track 14): Having by now discarded the Chambers Brothers’ backing vocals on this song, Dylan was apparently still looking for some other way to add interest to the track. Probably recalling his overdubbed background harmonica on “*Bringing It All Back Home*”’s ‘*Outlaw Blues*’, he decided to try it on this one, again playing the harp held in both hands for a proper blues sound. The only problem was that ‘*Tombstone Blues*’ was played in the key of F[♯]; this would have required a harmonica in the fairly unusual key of B, which Dylan most likely didn’t have. So he evidently had the master take sped up sufficiently to raise the pitch by a semitone, allowing him play along using a standard C harmonica. Given that he only recorded a single verse and chorus, this was probably just an experiment, and had it been judged a success he would no doubt have gone out and bought a B harmonica to do it at the right speed. Thankfully, he decided against this course of action, and accepted that the original recording was good enough as it was.

So that was the new album in the can, plus the next single. “*Highway 61 Revisited*” was in the shops less than four weeks later, and the ‘*Positively 4th Street*’ single a week or so after that. Dylan had some time off during August and September, punctuated by the Forest Hills and Hollywood Bowl concerts; but in late September he started serious touring with The Hawks. Future recording sessions had to be fitted in between shows whenever the schedule allowed.

Next time: the New York sessions, October 1965 – January 1966.

NOTES:

- 1 Griffin's overdubbed organ playing on a couple of the early "**Blood On The Tracks**" recordings had some of the same style, with much use of the swell pedal.
- 2 The 'Goldmine' acetates, tapes of which circulated in the early '80s, contained a very strange piano-heavy stereo mix of this same take.
- 3 Greil Marcus, *Like A Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads*, PublicAffairs, NY, 2005.
- 4 Although Dylan reportedly asked Mike Bloomfield to adopt this sort of role at the sessions, the voice we hear is nothing like Mike Bloomfield's; and whoever is doing the coaching is clearly using the piano to illustrate what is required, even at one stage (2:58 – 3:12) correcting Bloomfield's guitar-playing. A 2012 *Carouse!* TV interview with Frank Owens (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKyPhMUS_cQ) reveals a voice that is still very close to the one we hear on these takes. Owens was a musical director, composer and conductor as well as a pianist, so was well suited to the role he took on at this session.
- 5 Kooper has always said that it was an hour or two into the session when Griffin was moved from organ to piano, giving him the opportunity he'd been looking for; so maybe there was a period of earlier rehearsal at which Griffin played the organ – possibly even including the taped Rehearsal take 1 which is missing here. Or maybe Kooper was conflating the June 15th and 16th sessions into a single remembered event.
- 6 This extended ending can also be heard on the tape of new songs thought to have been sent to Dylan's publishers towards the end of the "**Highway 61 Revisited**" sessions – see Note 12 below.
- 7 To be fair to the later takes, this is at least partly because of the way the tracks have been mixed for "**The Cutting Edge**". The master take is mixed so as to sound very similar to the released recording, but the subsequent takes are mixed with the drums much louder. Interestingly, on the pre-release publishers' tape the rough mix of the *master* take had the drums surprisingly loud; whoever did the final mono and stereo mixes evidently decided that the drums needed to be less obtrusive.
- 8 At the time of writing you can use an app on the bobbydylan.com website to do this to a limited degree. Look for the *Studio A Revisited* micro-site, and then pick *Jam Session*. It's really very basic, though: all you can do is stream a mono track that has the four stems mixed in the proportions you choose. No stereo panning, no EQ or effects, and you can't save anything. If you really want to do this sort of thing you're much better off extracting *wav* files from the CD (or using the official download) and then mixing them with digital editing software. *Audacity* may not be the most sophisticated option but it's free.
- 9 Tony Glover, booklet notes for "**The Bootleg Series Vol.4: Live 1966**"
- 10 Some accounts have indicated that this was Russ Savakus's first studio date playing electric (as opposed to stand-up) bass, and that he was apprehensive and somewhat thrown by the disorganised nature of the session; one report says he threatened to walk out. (Michael Bloomfield, interview on KSAN Radio, 1973; Colin Irwin, *Legendary Sessions: Bob Dylan, Highway 61 Revisited*, Flame Tree Publishing, London, 2008).
- 11 Michael Krogsgaard, *Bob Dylan: The Recording Sessions, Part One* (*The Telegraph* #52, Summer 1995). Now accessible at <http://www.punkhart.com/dylan/sessions-1.html>
- 12 This set of roughly mixed recordings from the "**Highway 61 Revisited**" sessions is often described as an acetate, probably because of the crackly noise that crops up here and there, particularly on '**Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window**' and '**Desolation Row**'; but this is not the sort of noise you get from surface wear on an acetate, which generally has a repetitive character like a scratch on a vinyl record. There is none of that – which in itself would be remarkable for an acetate, since they wear very quickly. The noise on this tape sounds much more like some sort of electrical interference, maybe from a bad wiring connection or perhaps from another electrical appliance being used nearby while the tape was being copied. **One story goes that this was a tape of Dylan's new songs that was sent to his publishers (Witmark & Sons) in rough mix form, and perhaps compiled before Dylan had re-worked 'Desolation Row' on August 4 – hence the inclusion of the early version of that song. I think this is very likely to be true, and so refer to this as the publishers' tape.**
- 13 The box set book says this take was "Accidentally released as B-side of first pressing of '**Positively 4th Street**' single"; this is incorrect – it was the A-side. All pressings had '**From a Buick 6**' on the B-side."
- 14 The notes in the box set book say that it's a slide whistle (a.k.a. a bosun's whistle), but it's not. Those have a slide which you have to move up or down to change the note. This is a siren-type thing, incorporating a little spinning perforated disc; the harder you blow, the higher the pitch goes. Dylan would have needed a spare hand to operate a slide whistle. Anyhow, there are photos of Dylan with the whistle in his mouth and you can see what sort it is.
- 15 See Tony Glover's booklet notes for "**The Bootleg Series Vol.4: Live 1966**".
- 16 Al Kooper, interviewed by Andy Kershaw for BBC Radio 2's *Highway 61 Fifty Years On*, broadcast October 2015.
- 17 There are *two* electric guitars on this track, played by Dylan and Bloomfield. It's difficult to tell them apart, as they are always very close together in the mix. But I think Bloomfield's playing is limited to soft-toned decorative fills, while Dylan plays the more structural part, most clearly heard in the intro and in between the verses. For example, if you listen carefully to the released album track at 1:55, just after Dylan sings "she invites you up into her room," you can hear the two guitars playing independently.
- 18 See Tony Glover's booklet notes for "**The Bootleg Series Vol.4: Live 1966**". Glover, a guest at the session, noticed "the leer on the organist's face as he dropped in some horror movie swells here and there." It's noticeable that here he refers to "the organist", while elsewhere referring to Al Kooper by name, i.e. the organist was someone other than Kooper, someone whose name he didn't know. Griffin is the only likely candidate. See also the interview with Glover in Jon Bream: *Dylan, Disc By Disc*, Voyageur Press, 2015.
- 19 These accounts include McCoy's own: talking to Andy Kershaw for BBC Radio 2's *Highway 61 Fifty Years On* (broadcast October 2015), he said that Dylan played a couple of verses for him first and then said "Well it's real long, just keep going till we get to the end." Asked if they had many attempts they had at it, McCoy answered that "We played it once... we listened to it once, we did it a second time, and the bass player had another session to go to, and that was end of story." Of course, we do know that musicians' memories can be as unreliable as anyone else's after fifty years.

