

Throughout the film, Lee is portrayed as an impossible woman: a drinker, thoroughly stubborn, chain-smoking in almost every scene, and determinably cantankerous above all else. We also see a woman who is deeply loyal to her friends, intolerant of sexism in her field, and independent in a marriage. She has no qualms about who she is and how she comes across, even when she might appear as an inferior mother.

One truly remarkable and artful feat that deserves recognition is the re-rendering of Lee Miller's photographs. The precision that the production sought to reconstruct her work is evident during the credits of the film, when her original photos are juxtaposed against the reshoots. If this film fell short in other ways, it justified itself wholeheartedly by its reimagining of Lee Miller's most impactful work. The most central part of her legacy, however, are the photos she took at Buchenwald in early 1945, after the Nazi officers had fled. She never fully recovered after seeing the unimaginable horrors of bodies stacked in train compartments and those left alive fighting off starvation. The movie concludes with the liberation of the concentration camps.

The message of this film is ultimately the power of Lee's work, how courageous she was and how determined she was to record the truth of a monstrous war. There can be no Holocaust denial because of the photographs she took. Audiences looking for a deeply impactful, albeit slightly flawed film on an incredible woman's journey need look no further than *Lee*. Even with its shortcomings, it is a different perspective of WWII. Hopefully it reaches a new generation of viewers, so they may be introduced to an indelible woman and her work.

*Sylvia Walker*

James Mangold, director. *A Complete Unknown*. Searchlight Pictures, 2024.

*A Complete Unknown* is a biographical drama based on Elijah Wald's 2015 book *Dylan Goes Electric! Newport, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night That Split the Sixties*. Set against the backdrop of the tumultuous 1960s, the film chronicles a brief yet pivotal period in legendary songwriter Bob Dylan's (Timothée Chalamet) career. Bob Dylan himself was actively involved in the making of the movie. This film captures his bold transition from folk singer to rock icon,

showcasing his rebellious attitude and talent for inspiring lyrics.

The film opens in 1961 with a young, unkempt Dylan arriving in New York City. He immediately seeks out one of his musical inspirations, Woody Guthrie, who is hospitalized with Huntington's disease. Keeping Guthrie company is his friend and fellow folk icon, Pete Seeger (Edward Norton). Dylan introduces himself, expressing admiration for Guthrie, and plays a song he wrote, "Song for Woody." The performance impresses the two seasoned musicians, and in a symbolic passing of the torch, Guthrie hands Dylan his harmonica. Seeger, recognizing his talent, invites Dylan to his home, where he quickly integrates into the local folk music scene in Newark, New Jersey. His exceptional songwriting and unique voice distinguish him among his peers and connect him with the rebellious spirit of the folk movement, which valued acoustic rhythms and politically charged lyrics. However, as his fame grows, he struggles with the weight of this newfound attention.

Throughout the film, Dylan is portrayed as a nonconformist, a theme reinforced in several key scenes. In one memorable moment, during a duet with singer-songwriter Joan Baez, he refuses to perform a crowd-favorite song, preferring to play his newer material. When Baez begins strumming the requested song, he walks off stage, indifferent to the audience's disappointment. His uncompromising nature, while frustrating to some, shows his artistic integrity in an era where conformity was the norm. Another key figure in his journey is Johnny Cash, who appears throughout the film as a mentor of sorts, encouraging him to follow his own musical path. In one scene, Cash encourages Dylan to choose his own path, telling him to "make some noise, Big D." Dylan is depicted as difficult and blunt but never malicious. Instead, he comes across as a determined purist unwilling to compromise his artistic vision. Despite his sometimes-abrasive personality, his genuine nature and undeniable talent capture the zeitgeist of the decade.

The film culminates with Dylan's infamous 1965 performance at the Newport Folk Festival. By this time, he had already scored a major hit with "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and was a regular presence at the festival. However, in a bold move, he takes the stage with an electric band, shocking his folk music fans. The audience reacts with a mix of boos, cheers, and stunned silence. As the band tunes their instruments, a woman in the crowd shouts "JUDAS!" to which he famously responds, "I don't believe you... you're a liar." Meanwhile, an increasingly frustrated Pete Seeger

attempts to lower the volume on the sound system, leading to a physical altercation with Dylan's manager, Al Grossman. This scene, staying true to actual events, propelled Bob Dylan to become one of the most influential figures in rock history.

Why was Dylan's shift to electric music so controversial? To understand the importance of this moment, it is vital to consider the cultural context of the 1960s. The decade was marked by major political and social upheaval. Americans experienced the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Kennedy assassination. Social norms were challenged with events such as the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War protests, and the Counterculture Revolution. The folk music scene, where he initially became famous, was an idealistic and countercultural movement. In the early 1960s, the most popular music genres included doo-wop, early rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and the emerging soul sound. Songs like Chubby Checker's "The Twist" and Buddy Holly's "Everyday" were still mainstream hits. The Beatles were just a few years away from revolutionizing rock music. College students drawn to philosophy and politics grew interested in folk music because of its provocative, social revolutionary message. Folk purists viewed rock music as simplistic and juvenile, a style for teenagers rather than serious musicians. Though Dylan was not the best guitarist, singer, or harmonica player, he had the rare ability to incite raw emotions of nonconformity through his lyrics.

Understanding this historical setting enhances the impact of the film's dramatic climax. However, even without prior knowledge of the 1960s folk movement, *A Complete Unknown* remains an engaging and thought-provoking film. It is a must-watch for fans of rock music, musical biographies, and historians.

*Salvador Macias*

Ridley Scott, director. *Gladiator II*. Scott Free Productions, 2024.

The historical drama *Gladiator II*, a sequel to the original *Gladiator* (2000), directed by Ridley Scott, details the life of Lucius Verus Aurelius. The film takes place sixteen years after the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE and the end of the Pax Romana period (27 BCE -180 CE). It masterfully portrays imperial power, governmental corruption, arrogance of those seeking power, and the violence permeating Roman society. A strong plot is built around its