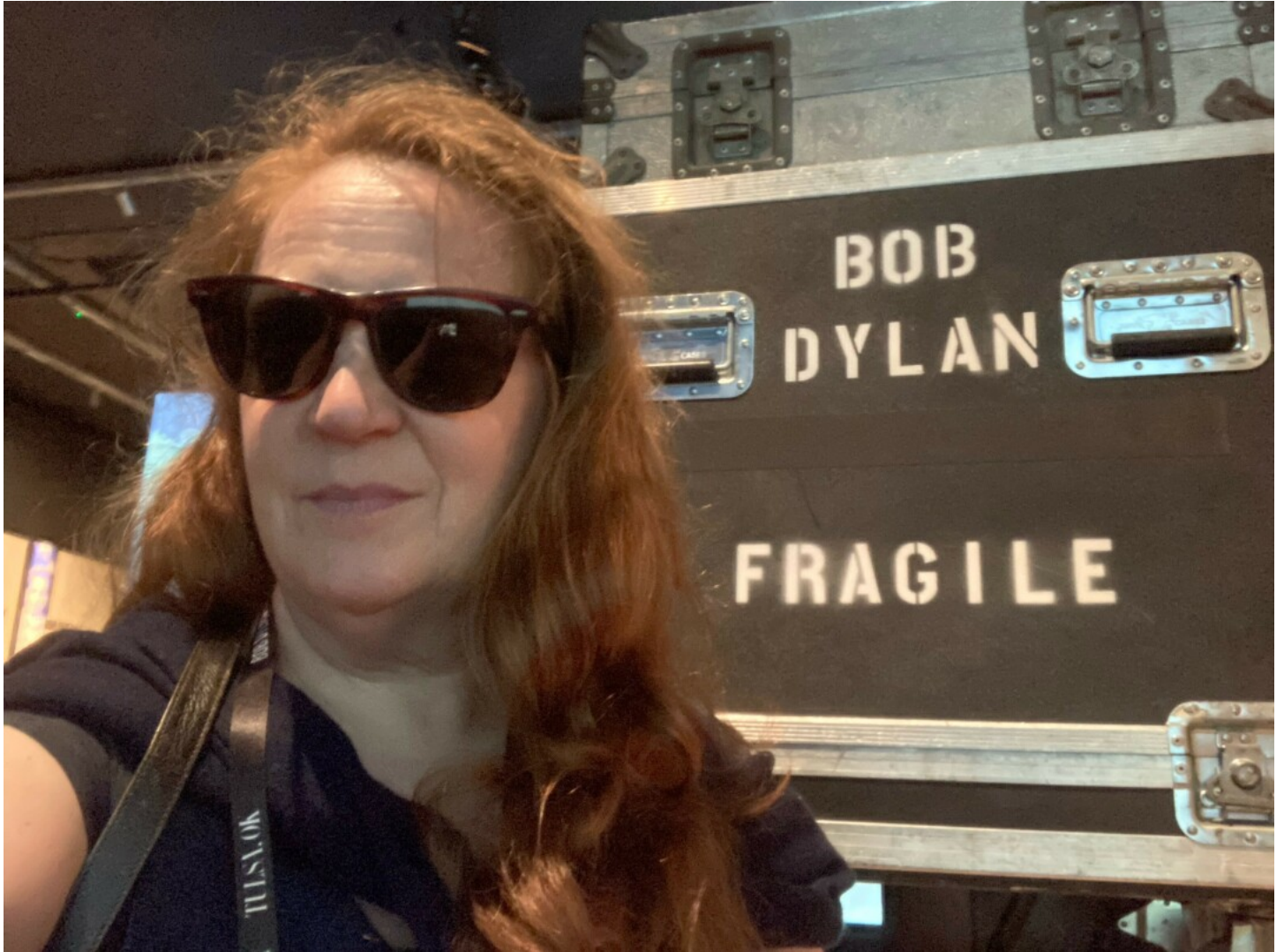


Bob Dylan - 'a voice of every generation'

Thursday May. 21st, 2026

Paul Metsa (/contributors/p/74/374-paul-metsa)



Professor Anne Margaret Daniel at a Dylan concert.

Professor Anne Margaret Daniel is both a Bob Dylan and F. Scott Fitzgerald scholar. She teaches at the New School in New York City and at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson in New York. She has written extensively on both men. Paul Metsa and Anne recorded a radio episode on Paul's *Stars Over the Prairie* radio which will air on May 23, 2026. This is an excerpt from their conversation celebrating Bob Dylan's 85th birthday.

Paul Metsa: Anne, you are a student of American history, and you've seen, been aware of Dylan and know as much about Bob as just about anybody, which is why we're so happy to speak with you. How would you describe Bob Dylan to someone from Mars?

Anne Margaret Daniel: Wow, that's a heavy question. I would describe him as the word that comes to my mind first is timeless, and not in a hokey way of, "Oh, he's timeless. Oh, his music is timeless," or, "He has no sense of time," or something like that. But someone who actually transcends time, someone who feels like he has lived in many centuries over many, many human generations.

And I think of that word generation being involved with Dylan because from the time he became a popular singer and songwriter in the very early 1960s, he was tagged with this phrase, "Voice of a generation." And that is such a misnomer. He's the voice of every generation he's lived in and generations that are way in the past and generations to come.

I mean, the man feels to me, at least, and I'm just telling how it feels to me. I'm trying to describe to a Martian how it feels to me. He feels like he lived in the time of the building of the pyramids, and it feels like he lived definitely in the days of ancient Rome and when Greeks were bringing sacrifices to the Oracle at Delphi and gathering around the foot of Mount Olympus and believing that the gods lived there.

It feels to me like he's walked the Great Wall of China and been on the boats of the English Navy when they were sailing all over the world in the 1600s and 1700s. It feels to me like he was at the Battle of Bunker Hill and saw the battles of the Civil War. He ran across the field in front of Dunker Church at Antietam, and he was standing at the Bloody Angle when the tide of war turned at Gettysburg.

I mean, his songs bring all that to people today who have no sense of history and can't remember things beyond the last time they texted something on their phone. And when Dylan says and when he sings that he contains multitudes, that's the multitude he's talking about. It's the multitudinousness of cultural history, artistic history.

When he sings about Caravaggio and when he talks about Botticelli, when he quotes from Shakespeare and shows you that he knows Shakespeare as well as any literary scholar, I mean, I truly, like Robert Johnson at the Crossroads, Paul, I would have sold my soul to have seen Bob Dylan play the role of Hamlet in 1966 or '67. He would have been overwhelming.

But that's kind of incoherent because I always get incoherent when trying to presume to explain Dylan to anyone, even a Martian.

PM : No, it's beautiful and one of the most poignant descriptions of Dylan I have ever heard, thank you.

AMD: I would just say that he is a person living on this planet at this time who carries with him things that matter culturally across the board to all of humanity. And I think that is what keeps Dylan current.

When I was in Macon recently to see him, there were Mercer University students. There were high school students. There were people in their 90s there, all ethnicities, races, creeds, colors. They had come to hear him. They'd come to hear literally what he has to say. And I was sitting next to a young man who had moved to Macon from Erie, Pennsylvania, some years ago for work. And he'd never heard Dylan before. And he left the place just lit up and excited. And recalling the song, "False Prophet," he said,

"He's telling it like it is and like it will be." And I thought that was one of the best descriptions of Dylan I've ever heard. The guy was so excited. He was off to meet his friends down at a bar downtown and tell them all about the show. And that's the effect that he still has and I think always will have on people. And it's most powerful in his live performances. He's back on the road.

PM: Professor Anne Margaret Daniel, this has been so such an incredible conversation. We've just got one minute left. What is your birthday wish to Bob Dylan? What would you say if you bumped into him walking the streets of Greenwich Village?

AMD: Walking the streets of Greenwich Village, or somewhere in Minnesota, or somewhere out in California, or wherever he is, I hope he's celebrating his birthday in a place he loves best surrounded by family and friends, as we all should be on our birthdays.

And I would wish him, in a very old-fashioned way, many happy returns of the day and a heartfelt, joyful year to come doing exactly what he wants to do, because, frankly, that's what he's gonna do anyway. That's what he's always done.

PM: This has been so enjoyable. I look forward to seeing you the next time you visit Minnesota, if I don't get out to New York first. This has been just an incredible birthday tribute to the bard, Bob Dylan. Thank you so very much.

AMD: Paul, you come out to New York anytime and expect me back soon in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and definitely, definitely, definitely Duluth!

More info on Anne at annemargaretdaniel.com.

Credits



Paul Metsa (</contributors/p/74/374-paul-metsa>)

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