

rowland scherman

PHOTOGRAPHER



BY JOHN GRENIER-FERRIS

It's one thing to know you're good at something, and quite another when the world agrees with you. Sometimes, recognition takes a while.

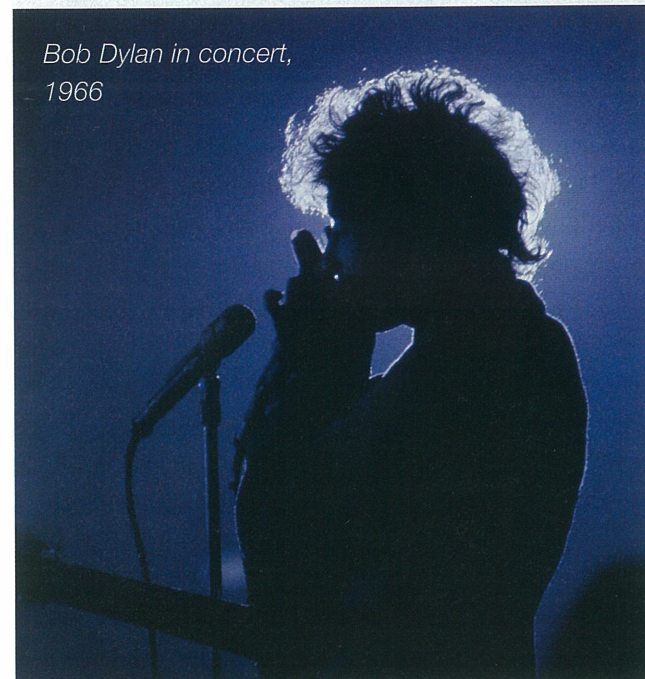
From Woodstock to the funerals of the Apollo astronauts, from the Beatles to Martin Luther King, Jr., photojournalist Rowland Scherman chronicled the times, places, and people that shaped today's world. He has garnered a Grammy Award for his iconic photography, but for more than 30 years afterward, he lived in obscurity. "Rowland is not a self-promoter," explains Bob Korn, an accomplished printmaker in Orleans, whose clients include well-known photographers Joel Meyerowitz and Jim Dow. When Scherman walked into Korn's business one day with a slide of Bob Dylan, Korn realized Scherman was a "somebody." But who?

Photography and journalism have long been familiar parts of Scherman's life. His father was promotions director for *Sports Illustrated* and *Newsweek*. His uncle, David E. Scherman, a *Life* photographer and editor, got his nephew a job as a summer intern in *Life's* darkroom when he was a student at Oberlin College. After graduating in the late 1950s, Scherman became the first photographer hired by the Peace Corps.

With gigs as a photographer for the U.S. Information Agency and a freelancer for *Life* magazine, Scherman received a steady stream of assignments that made him an eyewitness to key moments in the 1960s. He snapped a shot of Bob Dylan arriving at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival with a bullwhip slung over his shoulder. Later that day, Scherman slipped onstage with his wide-angle lens for an intimate view of Dylan and Joan Baez singing side by side. He took classic pictures of the Beatles from a concertgoer's perspective. He was mere inches from Dr. Martin Luther King when he delivered his "I Had a Dream" speech, and he spent time

on Bobby Kennedy's campaign plane in 1968.

Scherman's body of work reveals his identity. Far from a simple photographic record of history-makers from 40 years



Bob Dylan in concert, 1966



RFK's campaign, 1968



The Beatles' first U.S. concert, 1964

ago, Scherman's photography captured scenes from a pivotal era with emotion and intelligence. Whether it is an image of Bobby Kennedy in a sea of supporters or Sammy Davis, Jr., peering into the camera, viewers get a visceral experience of the precise moment Scherman chose to release the shutter.

At another Dylan concert, this time at the Washington Coliseum, Scherman pushed past backstage security to fire off a few frames. The next day, he marched into Columbia Records and showed his images to one of the art directors. One of the images featured a near silhouette of Dylan, haloed in a spotlight. "That's the cover of Dylan's next album," the art director declared. The image became the cover of *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits*, for which Scherman earned a Grammy Award for Best Album Cover Photography in 1967.

But by 1971, Scherman had disappeared from prominence. Divorced and disillusioned with his life and the path on which the United States was headed, he turned down offers to cover the Vietnam War and work for *Playboy*. Instead, he went to England, and he ended up herding sheep in Wales for years. He returned to the *Life* offices once in the early 1980s to solicit work, but the industry had changed. "They wanted to see my work," he says, "and I told them all my work was in their magazine. But that didn't matter." The master of taking images that others used for promotion hadn't promoted himself enough. "I thought I had left a bigger footprint," he says about the rejection.

Scherman moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where he

opened a bar, shot products for catalogs, and worked on two photo projects—one documented Highway 11 and the other featured a series of photographs documenting the pervasiveness of Elvis Presley throughout all aspects of American society. When a long-term relationship ended, memories of his parents' Cape Cod vacations brought him here in 2000.

Scherman says he wants the recognition of his peers. With the help of Bob Korn, and Meri and Dave Hartford, the owners of Artworks! Gallery in Orleans, Scherman, now 71, may just get it. The three have established the Rowland Scherman Project to promote his work to galleries and museums. Korn says the curators of four Smithsonian-affiliated museums were blown away. "They were amazed that his work has gone unnoticed for all these years."

These days, Scherman shoots portraits on the Cape. "In retrospect, portraits are what I've always done," he says. "It's what I can do. After a lifetime of doing it, it's become second nature to me." He laughs after saying that the work he used to do with one camera and natural light is now done with five assistants and a truckload of lights.

Lately, he's been talking to camera clubs and other groups about his work. Members of the generation who remember when Scherman's scenes were fresh are often overwhelmed. "People see my work and many of them start crying," he says. "They say, 'This is the story of my life.'"

To view Rowland Scherman's works and get information on purchasing prints, visit www.rowlandscherman.com.