

## Bob Neuwirth – Bio

Bob Neuwirth was born near Akron, Ohio circa 1940's and grew up listening to the music of Hank Williams and The Stanley Brothers. He studied art at Boston Museum School, and as a sometime musician he performed at the city's folk clubs, mainly the legendary, Jim Rooney managed, Club 47. Stylistically at this time he was much influenced by the music of Rev. Gary Davis and Mississippi John Hurt. Having made the acquaintance of Joan Baez, he subsequently met Dylan. Dylan and Neuwirth discovered a number of shared interests, including perverse humour, which they can be seen practicing in P. A. Pennebaker's documentary **"Don't Look Back."** The latter film chronicled Dylan's 1965 UK tour for which Neuwirth was tour manager. He also appeared in the Dylan 1966 European tour documentary **"Eat The Document"** [1972], which featured The Hawks and the now famous shout of *"Judas."* Neuwirth went on to work behind the cameras with Pennebaker at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival. In Soho, New York he worked with the late Edie Sedgwick, a model/film star, at Andy Warhol's Factory.

In 1974, Neuwirth recorded his debut, self-titled solo album for David Geffen's Asylum label. Produced by the late Thomas Jefferson Kaye, the tracks included "Mercedes Benz" a song Neuwirth co-wrote with Janis Joplin and beat poet, Michael McClure. Neuwirth is credited with putting the band together for Dylan's 1975 Rolling Thunder Tour, for which he also acted as MC. Band members T-Bone Burnett, Steven Soles and Davis Mansfield went on to form the Alpha Band and record three albums. When Patti Smith first arrived in New York, Neuwirth was one of her early mentors. He also appeared in yet another of Bob Dylan's movies **"Renaldo And Clara"** [1978].

Fourteen years elapsed before Neuwirth's sophomore album **"Back To Front"** surfaced on the now defunct west coast label, Gold Castle. Produced by Soles, this twelve-track disc was reissued by Koch a decade later and included two previously unreleased tracks. Apart from members of the Alpha Band, the session players included Mickey Raphael [Willie Nelson], Bernie Leadon [Eagles] and Kenny Edwards [Bryndle, Stone Poneys, Ronstadt], plus Peter Case and Victoria Williams [at that time Case's wife]. Initially a nine song recording, **"99 Monkeys"** [1990], also a Soles production, saw two *new* tracks added when Koch reissued the disc at the end of that decade. Bob's 1988 set included a song titled "Akron," while the latter disc featured writing collaborations with Kris Kristofferson and Tom Russell. It has been claimed that the character portrayed in the Kristofferson song, "The Pilgrim : Chapter 33" was partly inspired by Neuwirth.

Teaming up with former Velvet Underground alumni, Welsh born John Cale, the duo penned the material for their co-produced recording **"Last Day On Earth."** The same year, Neuwirth produced the Vince Bell disc **"Phoenix"** which was released by the now defunct Austin label, Watermelon. A couple of years later, it was Watermelon that issued Bob's next solo album **"Look Up,"** a sixteen track set that was, according to the liner, *"a modern day field trip to visit friends wherever they happened to be."* Self-produced, it was recorded through the Fall of 1995 at locations in Austin, Nashville, Santa Monica, Paris [France, not Texas], Detroit and New York City.

Through the late nineties, Neuwirth became increasingly interested in Cuban music, a thought he voiced to a friend. He was later introduced to José Maria Vitier, who scored the Oscar-nominated Cuban film, **"Strawberries and Chocolate"** and authored the Cuban Mass, which was performed during the Pope's 1998 visit to the island. Attracted to Neuwirth's lyrics, Vitier's parents are noted poets, Jose suggested that they collaborate on a recording. Cuba's Institute of Music subsequently invited Neuwirth to Havana on a cultural visit, **"Havana Midnight"** credited to *Bob Neuwith arranged by José Maria Vitier*, was recorded in the space of a week. Initially released in Europe by Diesel Motor Records, the album was released in the States by Appleseed Recordings in May 2001.

Following the success of the **"O Brother, Where Art Thou?"** [2000] soundtrack, produced by T-Bone Burnett, Neuwirth was one of the producers of the D.A. Pennebaker concert documentary, **"Down From The Mountain"** [2000]. Filmed during May 2000 in Nashville at the Ryman Auditorium, when the contributing musicians - Alison Krauss and Union Station, Emmylou Harris, Patty Loveless, Ralph Stanley, the Del McCoury Band, Norman and Nancy Blake, Ricky Skaggs, the Nashville Bluegrass Band, the Whites and Jerry Douglas - took the show on the road across the States in the Spring and summer of 2001, Bob was MC. That year Bob also participated in the Harry Smith memorial concerts, with producer Hal Wilner, and undertook appearances in London and New York. Neuwith's compositions

have been recorded by Concrete Blonde, k. d. lang, Peter Case, Robert Earl Keen Jr., Kris Kristofferson and Tom Russell.

Bob Neuwirth - singer, songwriter, producer, performer, painter, poet and *all-round wheeler dealer*, is an elusive character who ardently seeks invisibility, while finding it necessary to be at the creative epi-centre of his art, whether it's a song, a film, or a completed canvas.

Discography : **“Bob Neuwirth”** [1974/2002] ; **“Back To The Front”** [1988/1998] ; **“99 Monkeys”** [1990/1999] ; **“Last Day On Earth”** with John Cale [1994] ; **“Look Up”** [1996] ; **“Havana Midnight”** with Jose Maria Vitier [1999] :

### **Arthur Wood**

Kerrville Kronikles 02/03

[850 words]