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A 20-Year-Old Bob Dylan Shows Off His Effortless Cool in Revealing Photography Show

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Today he may be a Nobel Prize Laureate, but back in 1961, Bob Dylan was just 20 years old, a kid from Duluth, Minnesota, who had arrived in New York City with a guitar and a dream. Freelance photographer Ted Russell got a call from Columbia Records, who had just signed the young folk singer, and then spent two days shooting the musician, not knowing that Dylan was on the brink of global fame.

Those images, along with photographs taken during interviews with LIFE in 1963 and '64, are now on view at New York's Steven Kasher Gallery in "Ted Russell: Bob Dylan NYC 1961–1964."

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Despite a lack of knowledge about or interest in folk music, Russell went to an early Dylan gig, snapping photographs of his performance at Gerde's Folk City in Greenwich Village. Two days later, he took more photographs at the West Fourth Street apartment Dylan shared with his then-girlfriend, Suze Rotolo.

"I wanted to do an essay on the trials and tribulations of an up-and-coming folk singer trying to make it in the big city," Russell told the New York Times.

Even though the Times had just favorably reviewed Dylan, Russell was unable to get his photographs published: LIFE and the Saturday Evening Post both passed. The images, a snapshot into the earliest days of the career of one of the 20 century's most iconic musicians, remained unseen for some 30 years. The current exhibition marks their first time on view in New York.

Although he met Dylan two more times, after the musician's rise to fame, Russell was more focused on getting his shot than in getting to know the young star. "I can't tell you anything about him, really," he admitted. "If you gave me a million dollars right now, I couldn't remember one word that was between us."

The photographs, also published in the 2015 Rizzoli book *Ted Russell: Bob Dylan NYC 1961–1964*, speak for themselves. "Dylan is adolescent, smooth, relaxed," notes the gallery statement of the 1961 images. "He pretends to be unaware of the camera, but clearly basks in its gaze."

"Ted Russell: Bob Dylan NYC 1961–1964" is on view at Steven Kasher Gallery, 515 West 26th Street, New York, April 20–June 3, 2017. Gallery hours are Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.