

THE VILLAGE TRIP

**A New Annual Festival Celebrating the History and Heritage of
Greenwich Village**

OPENING RECEPTION IN THE VILLAGE TRIP LOUNGE

**An exhibition of work by celebrated music photographer David Gahr and rare Greenwich
Village memorabilia from the collection of archivist Mitch Blank
Music by David Amram, The Village Trip Artist-in-Residence
Washington Square Hotel, Thursday September 27, at 6.30pm**

David Gahr (1922-2008) was destined for a career as an economics journalist but he got lost in music, opting to remain in New York City, at Sam Goody's celebrated record store, because a staff job on *New Republic* would have meant moving to Washington DC, a prospect he found "a bit boring." From his perch behind the counter, Gahr made sure to photograph the customers he recognised as musicians, quickly building up a portfolio. He turned professional in 1958 when Moses Asch, founder of Folkways Records – "that splendid, cantankerous guru of our time" - commissioned him to photograph such figures as Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston and Pete Seeger. He went on to capture now-iconic images of the great American bluesmen - Big Bill Broonzy, Lightnin' Hopkins, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and Howlin' Wolf, musicians who were key influences on so many 1960s rock musicians. Gahr was soon the foremost photographer of the Greenwich Village jazz and folk scenes, chronicling the early years of musicians whose work would come to define the 1960s, among them Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, Odetta, Joan Baez, Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell and Patti Smith. He photographed Bob Dylan's celebrated 1963 Newport Folk Festival debut and captured the legendary moment in 1965 when he went electric.

Gahr's memorable album covers include Bruce Springsteen's *The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle*, Eric Clapton's *461 Ocean Boulevard*, and Dylan's *Love and Theft*, as well as many Folkways albums. His portrait of Janis Joplin was featured in the 1988 United States Postal Service's USA Forever stamp series.

In addition to musicians, Gahr also photographed writers and artists, among them Arthur Miller, John Cheever and Truman Capote, Jasper Johns, Georgia O'Keeffe and Salvador Dali. For over a decade, he worked with writer and critic Robert Hughes at *Time Magazine*. His books include *Bruce Springsteen: From Asbury Park, to Born to Run to Born in the USA* with

Maureen Orth; and *The Face of Folk Music* with Robert Shelton, now a rare collectors' item which documented a world he effectively lived in.

Gahr, whose images are inevitably more recognisable than his name, believed that "communication between photographer and the photographed is emotional and rarely verbal, although I often ask a probing question to elicit a moment of thought in a person's eye. What an individual selects to surround himself with or hang on his walls is revealing: the dichotomies can be devastating and/or enlightening."

The exhibition of David Gahr's work is made possible by his long-time friend, now his executor, Joel Siegel, lawyer and jazz pianist. More information [here](#).

Mitch Blank is in some ways the spirit of Greenwich Village past, but he makes it all seem very present. His West Village apartment is crammed with books, newspapers and magazines; CDs, vinyl, reel-to-reels, cassettes and DATs; posters, musical instruments and innumerable artefacts, including a crate of (empty) milk bottles, liberated from the Woodstock Festival, plus a collection of baseballs signed by actors and musicians. Infinity on trial, you might say. He lives a stone's throw from the fabled White Horse Tavern, whose bar was devoid of memorabilia until Mitch fixed it up.

Mitch is a legend in the Dylan world, a man afflicted with "the sad disease" of collecting who comes from "a family of diseased collectors." For his father, it was stamps. "I come from a family with no money so whatever was given to me was all I had." One thing he was given was a 1950s transistor radio with an earpiece, a device that was "more important than the internet" because you could "take the soundtrack of your life everywhere."

He grew up in Brooklyn and Queens and his first experience of live music was the rock 'n' roll shows at the Paramount and Brooklyn Fox. An uncle, an Off-Off Broadway actor, introduced him to the Village and Mitch came whenever he could afford the fare. He was a regular at the Bitter End and practically lived at the Fillmore – "three bands for a buck-50." The first life-changing gig was at the Westbury Theater, Long Island, a circular stage with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, the Fugs, Allen Ginsberg and the Blues Project. It was 1966.

He took a teaching degree at New Paltz, so-called Berkeley of the east and a way-station *en route* to Woodstock, where Mitch worked behind the scenes. After college, he spent a couple of years on the road. When he returned home, he began collecting the kind of things you can't keep in a knapsack, "creating my own world. I've gathered stuff that has affected my life. Everything I have means something to me."

As part of "the community of international maniacs who invented Dylanology back in the 1960s," he's got a great deal of Dylan in his collection. But there's much besides, not least all those artists whose lives and work intersect and butt up against Dylan's own. For many collectors, "some of them cooking on other planets," possession is all, but Mitch isn't like that. Rather he's happy to share, to lend material for exhibitions, "to try to connect the dots," a friend to both artists and collectors searching for that which is still hidden. "I guess I'm sort of a midwife to collectors," he muses. He's also a guardian of wider Greenwich Village heritage. In the credits to his Dylan documentary *No Direction Home*, Martin Scorsese identifies Mitch as "hypnotist collector."

For many years, his day job was at Getty Images, a position that fit nicely with his private passions and helped burnish his contacts. Retirement didn't suit, and when the opportunity arose Mitch accepted the position of Associate Archivist at the Bob Dylan Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "You gotta serve somebody," he jokes, alluding to the opening track of Dylan's Christian trilogy.

The Village Trip is a sponsored project of Fractured Atlas, a non-profit arts service organisation. Fractured Atlas will receive grants for the charitable purposes of The Village Trip, provide oversight to ensure grants are used in accordance with grant agreements, and provide reports as required by the grantor. Contributions for the charitable purposes of The Village Trip must be made payable to Fractured Atlas and are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

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