



Leonard Cohen: Agency of Yes

By Harvey Kubernik © 2017

Canadian songwriter and poet/novelist Leonard Cohen waived a physical goodbye at age 82 on November 7, 2016, just after the release of his 14th album, the uncompromising and urgent *You Want It Darker*.

In December 2016 I was invited to guest deejay on Los Angeles radio station The Sound 100.3 FM Classic Rock KWSD *My Turn* program. KWSD is Southern California's classic rock station with over 1.3 million listeners.

The broadcast aired in January 2017. The studio overlooked the street in the mid-Wilshire district area where Leonard lived in a duplex. I dedicated "Hallelujah" to him.

It was my audio service of sitting shiva for Leonard.

November 7th will be the one year *yahrzeit* of his death.

My 2014 critically acclaimed book on him, *Everybody Knows* is now published in America, England, Russia, France, Germany, China and two different editions in Canada. It's recently been published in paperback edition by Omnibus Press in the U.K.

I've also been cited and quoted, and my archives utilized in three earlier books on Cohen by authors Ira Nadel, Anthony Reynolds and Sylvie Simmons. I recorded with Leonard in 1976 and '77 (handclaps and percussion) on his Phil Spector-produced *Death of a Ladies Man* album.

Long before the current century Leonard Cohen retail and media renaissance, an interview I conducted with Leonard in 1975 for *Melody Maker* is now published again in the spring 2017 first collection of essays on Cohen in the U.K. by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in the book *Spirituality and Desire in Leonard Cohen's Songs and Poems: Visions from the Tower of Song*, edited by Peter Billingham.

So, I thought it was appropriate to write and assemble a multi-voice narrative memoir tribute to Cohen and examine the 50th anniversary of his debut album, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, released in December 1967.

This is the unedited 14,000 word text.

A 5,000 word excerpt is scheduled to be the next cover story on Leonard in *Record Collector News* magazine on October 27th. It's the October and November issue that will eventually be exhibited online at www.recordcollectornews.com.

Jim Kaplan who publishes the periodical out of Burbank, California is a devoted Leonard Cohen and Frank Zappa fan and supported display of a long form unedited version of my work.

This past July, I did a lecture and Q. and A. audience session at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's Author Series in Cleveland, Ohio, to promote my *1967 A Complete Rock Music History of the Summer of Love* (Sterling Publishing) and my Cohen *Everybody Knows* book, it felt logical to remind the world once again of Leonard's legacy and *Songs of Leonard Cohen*. In 2008 Cohen was inducted into the prestigious facility by Lou Reed.

On the third floor level of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame there is an interactive area where visitors can listen to Cohen's entire discography.

At the April 2017 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony and television broadcast during the In Memoriam segment opened with the lyrics to Cohen's "Tower of Song," and "Boogie Street" which aired throughout the remainder of the salute.

Over the last decade the museum has had several Cohen items on exhibit, including handwritten lyrics to “First We Take Manhattan,” “Democracy,” “If It Be Your Will,” the handwritten score to “Hallelujah” and handwritten set list to Cohen’s landmark appearance on the *Austin City Limits* TV series.

At the 2016 televised Emmy Awards program Tori Kelly performed “Hallelujah” on screen for the In Memoriam tribute.

During October 2017, nine books will be receiving the Canadian Jewish Literary Award for 2017. One title chosen is *Les Révolutions de Leonard Cohen* (Presses de l’Université du Québec), a collection of essays in French edited by academics Chantal Ringuet and Gerard Rabinovitch, presents his work as the soul of the Jewish world deeply rooted in Quebec culture.

This past August at the 2017 MTV Video Music Awards, actor and musician, Jared Leto, of 30 Seconds to Mars, remembered the late Chris Cornell, former lead singer of Soundgarden, and the late Chester Bennington, former lead singer of Linkin Park, who both died by suicide during the summer of 2017. Leto mentioned that Chester Bennington sang a cover of “Hallelujah” at Cornell’s funeral.

During August I was the guest speaker at the Stephen Wise Temple in Bel-Air, California celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Summer of Love. The Shabbat service was followed by a concert featuring music from 1967 performed by the Stephen Wise clergy and musicians, including vocalists Freda “Band of Gold” Payne, and Florence LaRue of the wonderful 5th Dimension. I helped narrate the stage program culled from my *1967* book.

Around rehearsals and after the event I must have answered a dozen questions as well about *Leonard Cohen Everybody Knows*. The Rabbi and Cantors had the book.

My 50 year relationship to Leonard Cohen’s words and music literally flashed in front of me

It was in December 1967 when I first discovered Leonard Cohen in California on Pasadena-based KPPC-FM when a late-night deejay spun an advance copy of *Songs of Leonard Cohen* and spotlighted “Suzanne.”

In 1966 Cohen published his fourth poetry collection, *Parasites of Heaven*, which contains the blueprints for his future songs “Suzanne” and “Avalanche.”

During a September 20, 1986 interview on BBC radio, Cohen commented on the history of “Suzanne.”

Leonard Cohen: The writing of ‘Suzanne,’ like all my songs, took a long time. I wrote most of it in Montreal-all of it in Montreal- over the space of, perhaps, four or five months. I had many, many verses to it. Sometimes the song would go off on a tangent, and you’ll have perfectly respectable verses, but that have led you away from the original feel of the song. So,

it's a matter of coming back. It's a very painful process because you have to throw away a lot of good stuff. To come back, and to get those three verses of 'Suzanne,' that took me quite a long time."

In June 2017 I was a guest interview on *The Frame*, music and arts program on KPCC-FM from Pasadena, California who did a segment on my *1967 A Complete Rock Music History of the Summer of Love* book. The host, John Horn, ended our conversation spinning Cohen's "Suzanne."

At U2's June 23rd Toronto show, Bono acknowledged Cohen singing a verse of "Suzanne" during their performance of "Bad" while adding, "[Leonard Cohen] is an addiction I'm not ready to give up"

By 2017, 2,600 covers of the song have been recorded of Leonard's tune, including Noel Harrison, Jack Jones, the Sandpipers, Nina Simone, Roberta Flack, Neil Diamond, Spanky & Our Gang, Harry Belafonte, Joan Baez, Gary McFarland, Aretha Franklin, Tangerine Dream, Francoise Hardy, Diane Reeves, Peter Gabriel, Pearls Before Swine, and Nana Mouskouri.

Canada celebrated their 150th birthday year on July 1st. That day marked the sesquicentennial of Canadian Confederation, the merger of the four original provinces-Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick that formed a new nation.

To celebrate Apple Music compiled a collection of the 150 most iconic Canadian songs and Cohen's "Hallelujah" tops the list.

On August 19, 2017, Rufus Wainwright appeared at John Anson Ford Amphitheatre in Los Angeles, and his set list showcased Cohen's "Sisters of Mercy," "Suzanne," and an encore of "So Long, Marianne," and "Hallelujah."

The following night, Wainwright presented his only U.S. performance of *Northern Stars*, an evening of work by Cohen, Joni Mitchell, and Neil Young in Los Angeles at the Music Center.

Larry LeBlanc: For 50 years, over 14 albums, 9 volumes of poetry, and two novels, Leonard Cohen-- poet, novelist, troubadour, songwriter, spiritual tourist, social provocateur, and ladies' man---has shared his romantic vision.

It's been good honest work.

A major writer of the English language, Leonard-- inducted into the Juno Hall of Fame in 1991-- gives importance and dignity to songwriting. His songs are discussed, analyzed, agonized over and made love to the world over.

They have been recorded by acts as diverse as Rufus Wainwright, Jeff Buckley, Sting, Elton John, Jennifer Warnes, Billy Joel, Willie Nelson, R.E.M, and the Neville Brothers.

"Songwriting is very compelling," Leonard once remarked. "One of the reasons it's so compelling is that there is a financial pay-off -and I have many dependents-and secondly, it does get you out of the room."

"Leonard has written of love: random love and hate; slaves and masters; saints seduced by the evil and sordidness of lechery; as well as war, slaughter and The harsh light of the existential furnace. And a real Suzanne-but not (in this case) a lover-- did take Leonard to her place by the river (the St. Lawrence) and did feed him tea and oranges (actually, orange-flavoured Constant Comment).

"Of course, his language, the clarity, daring, and passion of his imagery, and the open-hearted approach to his life has touched and inspired fans, writers and musicians the world over.

"I would not know how high to jump or how far I was falling without Leonard Cohen," says U2's Bono. 'His songs are conversations I have been trying to have all of my life with some of the same people... Jesus Christ, Judas Iscariot, Yahweh, all the women in the world, Buddha.'

"Canada first met Leonard as a brooding young poet of the 1960s—'flourishing dark and magnificent as Othello' -- to quote the self-penned blurb on the jacket of his 1966 novel *The Favourite Game*. His first book of poetry *Let's Compare Mythologies* was published in 1956, while he was still an undergraduate at McGill University in Montreal. It was followed by *The Spice Box Of Earth* in 1961 that catapulted him to international literary fame.

"In 1968, with the release of the anthology "Selected Poems: 1956-1968," Cohen was awarded the Governor-General's Award, Canada's highest literary distinction. He declined the honour, stating 'The poems themselves forbid it, absolutely.' In 2003, however, he agreed to accept the Companion of the Order of Canada, our country's highest civil honor for achievement in the arts.

"Yet, it is apparent that there's no measure in Canada's culture to absolutely gauge Leonard Cohen. His staggering command of several genres places him alongside traditional giants of each while his ability to amalgamate art and popular culture has made him an icon of popular culture.

"Born in Montreal Sept. 21, 1934, Leonard is the son of an engineer who owned a clothing concern, and who died when Leonard was nine. A great-grandfather was the first Zionist in Canada; a grandfather was a Hebrew scholar; and a great uncle was Chief Rabbi of Canada.

"Leonard still calls himself a Montrealer though he is a man forever on the move. He has lived in New York, London, Nashville, Los Angeles, and on the

Greek Island of Hydra. From 1994-1999, he lived at the Zen Center on Mount Baldy in California, and was ordained as a Zen monk and given the Dharma name of Jikan (Silent One).

“‘For the writing of books, you have to be in one place,’ he said in 1988. ‘You tend to gather things around you when you write a novel. You need a woman in your life. It's nice to have some kids around, 'cause there's always food. It's nice to have a place that's clean and orderly. I had those things, and then I decided to be a songwriter.’

“He was raised in Westmount with a governess and chauffeur, and attended public schools. He graduated from McGill University with insignificant standing. He dropped out of a Master's program at Columbia University in New York. He also worked as an elevator operator in New York but was dismissed because he wanted to run the elevator attired in civilian clothes.

“Leonard was touched as a child by the music he heard in the synagogue. The first singers he listened to with genuine pleasure were the American folksingers Pete Seeger, and Josh White and American country stars George Jones, and Johnny Cash that he heard on radio station WWVA in Wheeling, West Virginia. And he once thought of Elvis Presley as the first American singer of genius.

“Leonard started playing guitar at summer camp in 1950. He wasn't attracted to the instrument so much as for a musical reason. He used it as a courting tool. But he also thought one day he'd become a singer, however. He used to stand and sing in front of the mirror to see how he looked.

“At McGill University, he began writing poetry, and formed the country and western trio, The Buckskin Boys. He also worked in a nightclub above Dunn's deli called Birdland. He'd read poems or improvise them while Maury Kaye and his bebop group played.

“After he dropped out of a Master's program at Columbia University in New York Leonard obtained a grant, and was able to travel through Europe. He eventually settled on Hydra, staying on and off for seven years. He wrote two more collections of poetry, *Flowers For Hitler* (1964) and *Parasites of Heaven* (1966) there; and the novels, *The Favorite Game* (1963), and *Beautiful Losers* (1966).

“As he finished *Beautiful Losers*, he realized he was full of music (if only because he'd written the book to the accompaniment of the American Armed Forces radio service). He decided to go to Nashville, and become a country songwriter. On his way there, he met Toronto-born manager Mary Martin who persuaded him to stay in New York.

“Leonard was soon swept into a circle of folk musicians hanging out at the Chelsea Hotel including Phil Ochs, Judy Collins, Tim Buckley, and Buffy Sainte-Marie. When he heard Bob Dylan, he knew he didn't need to journey any further. ‘It wasn't his originality which first impressed me, but his familiarity,’ Leonard recalls. ‘He was like a person out of my books.’

“In March 1966, Leonard made his public debut as a singer at a poetry reading at the New York YMHA. He sang ‘Suzanne’ and ‘The Stranger Song.’ Later that year, he toured western Canadian colleges, doing readings and singing.

“In 1967, Leonard played 15-20 concerts, including the Newport Folk Festival where he stole the audience cheers from established stars with the Mariposa Folk Festival in Toronto; and two concerts with Judy Collins who recorded ‘Suzanne’ and ‘Dress Rehearsal Rag’ on her 1966 album, *In My Life*.

“A few months after Newport, Columbia Records released his debut album, *The Songs of Leonard Cohen*. It had such signature Cohen songs as ‘Suzanne,’ ‘Hey, That’s No Way To Say Goodbye,’ ‘So Long, Marianne,’ and ‘Sisters of Mercy.’”

“By the summer of 1967, some of Cohen’s poetry collections had made their way to book and underground head shops in America, and hipper university professors assigned *Beautiful Losers* in modern literature classes,” offered Dr. James Cushing of the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo English and Literature department.

“Remember, he did not make this LP until he was 33 years old. Like Howlin’ Wolf, who first recorded at age 41, Leonard Cohen was not an adult offering supervision, but an adult giving us permission. In 1967 I heard Cohen on KPPC-FM in Southern California.”

I was on the UCLA campus in Westwood, California when Cohen appeared in 1970 at Royce Hall. Michelle Phillips of the Mamas & the Papas was one of Cohen’s singers that evening.

I later attended a 1974 spell-binding Cohen date in downtown Los Angeles at the Dorothy-Chandler Pavilion. He must have done four encores. Leonard turned to the musicians, grabbed a book from his pocket and started to read poetry while the band vamped behind him.

I hadn’t seen anything like that since a Doors’ concert in November of 1968 at the Inglewood Forum when Jim Morrison stopped the action, in front of 17, 505 fans, asking an audience member for a cigarette and proceeded to preview passages from his upcoming *The Lords and New Creatures* poetry book.

I was rather stunned when Cohen invited everyone in the audience backstage to say hello. I introduced myself to Leonard in a hall way, ‘can we do an interview the next time you play L.A? I’m trying to be a music journalist and I have to pay the rent.’ He replied, “That would be fine my friend.”

In December 1974, a Columbia Records publicist arranged an interview with Leonard at the Continental Hyatt House in Hollywood. Cohen was in the midst of a multi-night engagement at Doug Weston’s Troubadour in West Hollywood. One evening I was there with Justin Pierce and

Sharon Weiss, later to become Leonard's publicist during 1988-1993. Bob Dylan and Phil Spector sat at a table next to us.

The following afternoon I conducted my first interview with Leonard Cohen for *Melody Maker*.

"In the early days I was trained as a poet by reading in English, poets like Lorca and Brecht, and by the invigorating exchange between other writers in Montreal at the time," reflected Leonard.

"My tunes often deal with a moral crisis. I often feel myself a part of such a crisis and try to relate it in song. There's a line in a poem I wrote that sums this up perfectly: 'My betrayals are so fresh they still come with explanations.' As far as the use of Biblical characters in such tunes as 'Story Of Issac,' and 'Joan Of Arc,' it was not a matter of choice. These are the books that were placed in my hand when I was developing my literary tastes."

In 1956 Leonard Cohen heard Jack Kerouac read at a jazz club in New York City. At the time Cohen was a 22 year old graduate student at Columbia who had just published his initial collection of poems *Let Us Compare Mythologies* which had won the McGill University Literary Award. After the event, Cohen attended a party at Allen Ginsberg's apartment.

In 1976 Leonard and I went to an Allen Ginsberg poetry reading at the Troubadour. The club's doorman, my pal Paul Body, took our tickets and we later hung out at the Chateau Marmont.

I did a music and lyric interview with Leonard published in *Melody Maker* about his 1976 LP *Leonard Cohen's Greatest Hits*.

"I was against the idea at first. But I don't quite remember why I was convinced of it. There's a new generation of listeners who don't know a lot of the work. I picked the songs and had total artistic control.

"I designed the package and I insisted the lyrics be included, and there are notes on the songs. It's 12 songs, close to 50 minutes.

"I'm very interested in documentation and often feel that I want to produce a whole body of work that will cover a wide range of topics and themes," explained Leonard.

In 1997 I interviewed Allen Ginsberg for *HITS* magazine. In our dialogue, I asked AG about recording, archiving and the merger of poetry and music. Like Bob Dylan and Cohen, Ginsberg had been signed to a record deal by John Hammond.

“We wrote, and we were in the tradition of William Carlos Williams’ spoken vernacular, comprehensible common language that anyone could understand, coming from Whitman through William Carlos Williams through be-bop. We were built for it. I can talk. I’m an old ham.

“It happens every 100 or 150 years. It did in the days of Wordsworth, who in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, suggested that poets begin writing in the words and diction of men of intelligence, or talk to each other intelligently, instead of imitating another century’s literary style.

“So, I think what happened is that we followed an older tradition, a lineage, of the modernists of the turn of the century continued their work into idiomatic talk and musical cadences and returned poetry back to its original sources and actual communication between people.

“Elvin Jones has a very interesting attitude. He feels that he’s not there to beat out the vocalist. He’s there to put a floor under them. He’s there to support and encourage, and give a place for the vocal to come in, not to compete with the vocal, but to provide a ground for it.

“Well, it widens it into a slightly different trip, but the words are pretty stable, and they mean what they mean, so there is no problem. The interesting thing is adjusting the rhythmic pattern and the intonation to the musician’s idea of what there is there.”

During 1976 and ’77 I was at the recording and mixing sessions for the Cohen’s *Death of a Ladies Man* album produced by Phil Spector as the food runner, and provided percussion and hand clapped on several tracks done at Gold Star and MCA/Whitney Studios. Leonard handed me my first and only shot of Jose Cuervo tequila one evening sitting behind the console. Ginsberg and Bob Dylan appear on the disc.

In a 1978 interview for *Phonograph Record Magazine* around the release of the Spector/Cohen *Death of a Ladies Man*, Leonard and I discussed his album in a house I seem to remember was in Brentwood, California. Lost love, personal chaos, doubt, romantic dilemma, alienation and lust are present in strong force.

"And don't forget humor," Cohen added.

He further stressed, "I worship women," and suspects that, "Everybody will now know that within this serene Buddhist interior, there beats an adolescent heart.

“Working with Phil, I’ve found that some of his musical treatments are very...foreign to me. I mean, I’ve rarely worked in a live room that contains 25 musicians – including two drummers, three bassists, and six guitars.

"This is the most autobiographical album of my career. The words are in a tender, rather than a harsh setting, but there's still a lot of bitterness, negativity, and disappointment in them. I wish at times there was a little more space for the personality of the story-teller to emerge, but, in general, the tone of the album is very overt, totally open.”

In our 1978 dialogue, Leonard talked about Los Angeles. He was starting to find his regional nosh spots and markets that stocked humus, feta cheese and fresh challah.

A native of Montreal, who has spent much of his time in recent years in the South of France and in other European hideaways, he recently moved to Southern California himself.

"I like it. It's so desperate here that it's really not bad at all. And, besides, this is the only city in the world where I've ever written a song while sitting in a driveway in a parked car."

In 2013 I was over at drummer Jim Keltner's home and we reminisced about Cohen and Spector in the recording studio.

"On the Cohen sessions I went into Gold Star and after a while, sitting behind my drums, at one point was wondering where Leonard might be," recalled Jim. "I was looking to the front, having been set up in the middle of this huge band. Phil always liked that kind of set up. It certainly worked for him many times.

"As I was messing with my drums, I saw a hand come up near my hi-hat cymbal on my left side. I looked and this hand was holding a tooth pick with a smoked oyster at the end. I looked further around and it was Leonard. I had never seen him before but I instinctively knew that it was him. Dressed immaculately. He had a suit on. He was a dashing cat in those days. A sophisticated type of dude. And that just sealed the deal when he handed me that smoked oyster. And then he handed me one of those little tiny paper cups with some Chivas Regal scotch. I thought, 'This is really friggin' cool.' We all got a little tipsy but not smashed.

"Hal Blaine and I had a ball playing double drums on the Cohen sessions. Don Randi was there as well. I played in his trio at Sherry's, a jazz club on Sunset. I loved playing with Don.

"After Cohen's *Death of a Ladies Man* dates, I continued working with Phil at Gold Star on the Ramones' *End of the Century* album, and the Paley Brothers. By 1979 I joined up with Bob Dylan for recording and touring.

"I wish I could have played more with Leonard. I have always played to the vocal- that breaks the session drummer rule- but that's always what I've done. I love hearing a provocative lyric in my headphones. The greatest part of that for me is that sometimes I can get real emotional and even cry. Later, I met Leonard's son Adam and played on one of his albums."

During 1979, Leonard, then KROQ-FM deejay Rodney Bingenheimer, photographer Brad Elterman and I went to the Starwood music club in West Hollywood and saw Devo play.

During the very early eighties I went to a couple of recording sessions Leonard did with engineer and producer Henry Lewy at Kitchen Sync studios in Hollywood who had worked with Leonard on *Recent Songs*. I was producing spoken word albums in an adjacent room with Daniel Weizmann, Ray Manzarek and Chris Darrow.

A former Southern California deejay, Lewy was impressed when I mentioned his jazz program on KNOB-FM, *The Housewife's Helper* in the early sixties and not his production work with Joni Mitchell. Lewy nodded, Cohen smiled. We ate at Café Figaro on Santa Monica Blvd.

Leonard and I subsequently discussed the possibility of a live poetry reading album with his manager/lawyer to be cut at McCabe's Guitar Shop in Santa Monica where John Chelew and I had produced Allen Ginsberg with bassist Don Was, John Trudell, Jello Biafra, and Michael McClure & Ray Manzarek shows. I had earlier produced some readings in Hollywood at the Lhasa Club with Nick Cave and Jim Carroll at Club Lingerie.

Sometime in the eighties, I saw Leonard one night at Canter's Delicatessen. We were both ordering some food to go at the counter. A newly shorn Cohen volunteered he was going into retreat at the Mt. Baldy Zen Center 60 miles away from Los Angeles.

Why?

"I shaved my head for a woman."

This response is from the same mensch who once advised Justin Pierce and I in a 1974 limo ride with him to the Canadian Embassy in Los Angeles when I asked at age twenty two about going steady with girls, and his cautious answer was, "relationships are complicated."

During a late eighties or maybe nineties home interview visit, Leonard made tea and we chatted in the kitchen. I watched as he operated a fax machine to receive review proofs of his books and make notes about impending album artwork. Potential European concert dates were listed on the thin shiny sheets. What did the word international division mean on the Columbia Records letterhead?

I was grateful for this coveted ringside seat at his revealing literary expedition but had no idea that Leonard's gracious gesture would somehow aid the journey ahead of me for my own then unimagined book endeavors.

In 1989 Cohen and (Was not Was), Don Was's group with David Weiss, appeared together on a Sunday night television show *Night Music*, hosted by David Sanborn and Jools Holland.

"Ken Nordine and Sonny Rollins were also on the program," Don Was told me in a 2017 interview. "Our singers did 'Who By Fire,' with Leonard and Sonny and we all played 'I Can't Turn You Loose' as the finale. I became quite friendly with Leonard and we started hanging out in Los Angeles. David and I asked him to sing on a track for Was Not Was' 1990 release, *Are You Okay?*"

"It was a recitative piece called 'Elvis' Rolls Royce.' The track was kind of a quiet storm thing and Leonard was meant to do his best Barry White impression. He provided a perfect blend of irony, humor and gravitas. It was a flawless reading of the song and an act of supreme generosity on Leonard's part.

“Around the same time as that session, Leonard called me up and said, ‘You’re friends with Iggy Pop. Right?’ ‘Yeah.’ ‘I want to meet him. Will you bring him over to my house?’

“So a couple of days later I picked Iggy up and drove over to Leonard’s place. And Leonard pulled out this classified advertisement from *The Guardian* in San Francisco. It was in the personal classifieds. It said, ‘Single white female, thirtyish nice looking. At least I think so. Looking for a man with the benign nobility of Leonard Cohen and the raw severity of Iggy Pop.’

“So Leonard wanted Iggy to come over so that both of them could answer the ad together. (laughs). Leonard was good with the calligraphy. So he crafted this beautiful response and they both signed it. And Leonard said, ‘Iggy, put your phone number down.’ ‘Hey-I don’t want this person to have my phone number!’ And Leonard said, ‘Well I’m putting my number down-I’m gonna fuck this girl.’ I took a Polaroid of the two of them sitting in Leonard’s kitchen that we included with the note. And they responded to her classified ad. That is how Leonard knows Iggy.

“I played on Adam Cohen’s *Like a Man* and *We Go Home* albums.”

Around 1992, I encountered Leonard Cohen, Allen Ginsberg, Iggy Pop, producer Don Was and engineer Ed Cherney at Canter’s. It was after a McCabe’s gig I helped arrange, where Allen read and bassist Don performed, who actually took an instrument off the wall onto the stage.

In July 1993, Leonard’s publicist, Sharon Weiss invited me to attend Leonard’s *Future* tour at the Wiltern Theater. I remember walking around the lobby in ’93 then, and even thinking about it now, how cool that this folksinger-songwriter-poet-novelist-character could literally drive his car, he once owned a Nissan Pathfinder, down his home block, turn right on Wilshire Blvd. and schlep only two miles to the venue. Leonard delivered a stellar performance in a schmuck-free environment. I marveled at the devotion of the crowd. Who were all these Leonard Cohen kvelling fans and worshippers?

Sharon Weiss: I set up Leonard’s visit to KCRW-FM and their *Morning Becomes Eclectic* show and drove him to it. I got him onto KUT-FM at the University of Austin. He did the TV show *Austin City Limits* which was done on Halloween, which is kind of unfortunate, ‘cause they’ve re-aired it about a hundred times and there are people in costume and there is never any explanation of why that is. But it was shot on Halloween night of 1988. And, I took him to VH-1 to do an interview in New York. I went around New York with him to do interviews. I have very pleasant memories of working with Leonard. He could be extremely silly and fun.

“I know this guy with a real droll and dry sense of humor. I mean, he would leave me funny messages on my answering machine and bring me smoked meat from Montreal. I remember he had been hocking me a chinik about smoked meat in Montreal and bagels, and he had been in Montreal.

“I came home one night from work and it was Leonard. And he says, ‘I just got home. I brought you something.’ I went over and he brought me a vacuum packed box of smoked meat and a bag of Montreal bagels from the Main Deli. And I had to agree that the bagels are different and better than any bagel that I had had before. And the smoked meat was heaven. Two Jews nosing. (laughs).

“Subsequently, when we did the tour in 1988 it ended in Canada. He gave me as a gift a plane ticket to Montreal to see him perform in his hometown.”

Cohen and I sat together in 1999 at a Tom Waits’ concert at the Wiltern Theater in Los Angeles. Waits had written a 1983 poem, *Bad Directions*, with my name in the first line. Before the show Leonard gave me some well-needed and succinct encouragement about perseverance and writing: “Don’t complain.”

But at that moment I still thought I needed to have *The Energy of Slaves* to somehow get a book published.

Leonard mentioned Hatikvah Music International on Fairfax Avenue. He had frequented the store and bought some cantorial music. I gave him the room information. It opened in 1948 as Norty’s record shop, where I got some of my first LP’s in 1963. Songwriter Jerry Leiber worked the counter at Norty’s as a teenager while at Fairfax High School, before he met Mike Stoller. During the fifties, another Fairfax alum, trumpet player Herb Alpert on his wedding and bar mitzvah circuit bookings displayed flyers and business cards on the premises.

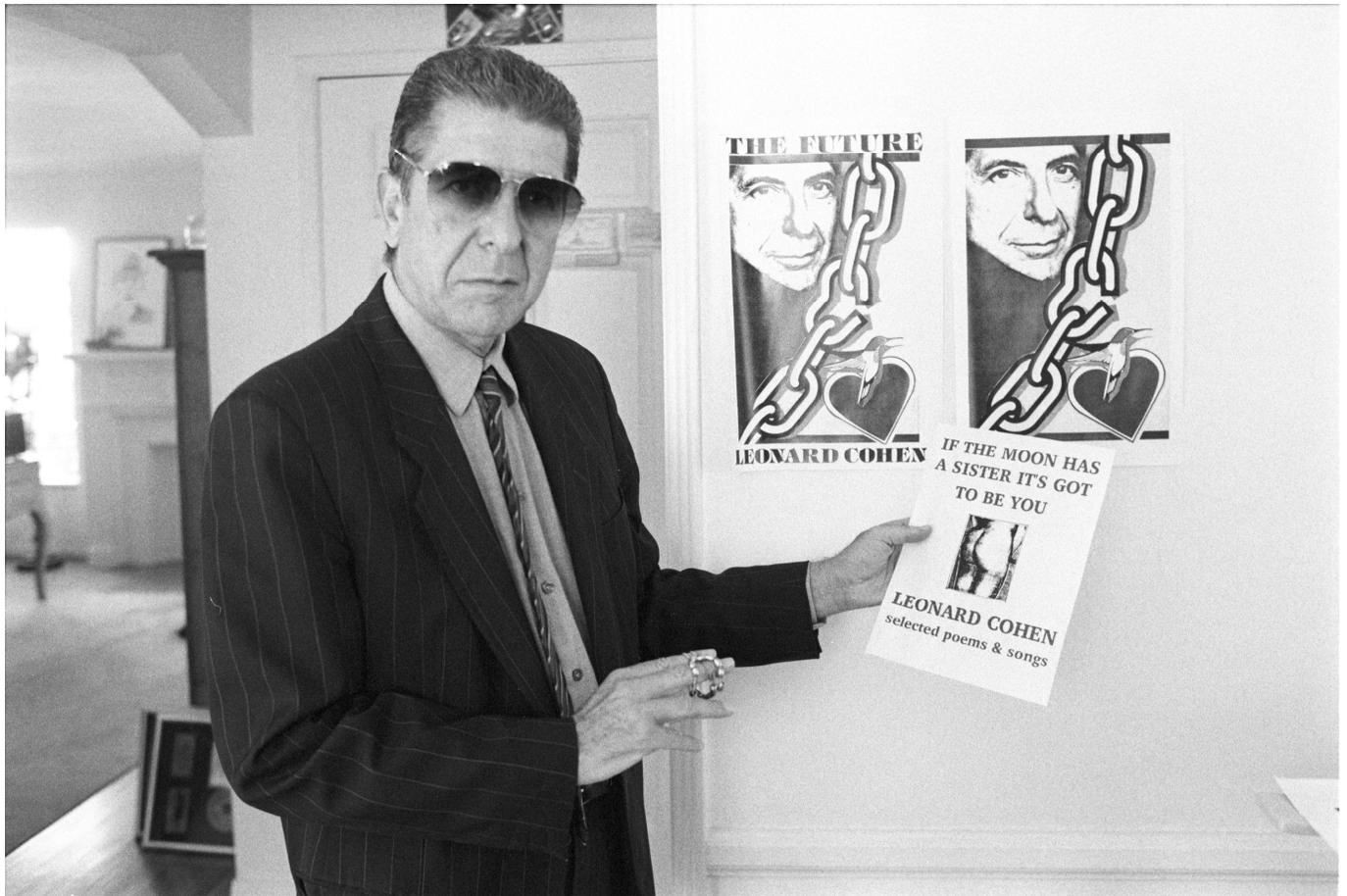
I provided him a tutorial about the west coast office staff of his domestic Columbia Records label, explained the new Americana FM radio format and suggested recording studios, restaurants and markets in his neighborhood that he might need to discover which would flavor his career.

Cohen touted Greenblatt’s Delicatessen on Sunset Blvd. where he liked to get food to go and I supplied the history of it. Groucho Marx, Lenny Bruce, Marlon Brando, Janis Joplin, Peter Lorre, Bing Crosby, Elvis Presley, and Bobby Darin had ordered.

I also mentioned some of the literary and musician clientele of Musso & Frank Grill on Hollywood Blvd. where William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Buck Henry, Gore Vidal, Chris Darrow, Denny Bruce, Barney Kessel, Howard Roberts, Don Randi, Jim Keltner, Jack Nitzsche and Keith Richards have dined.

Cohen avidly recommended the Main Deli Steak House in Montreal for smoked meat and bagels as well as a Japanese restaurant near Olympic Blvd. and Fairfax Ave. I knew it when it was a House of Pies shop. He was a vegetarian for a while in the sixties.

I ran into filmmaker Curtis Hanson who was prepping his movie *Wonder Boys* based on Michael Chabon’s book. He was licensing Cohen’s “Waiting for a Miracle” from *The Future* for the soundtrack.



Hanson had been a Cohenhead since 1967.

“His first album. I’ve been a fan since his debut,” enthused Curtis later in our 2000 interview.

“‘Waiting for a Miracle’ expresses where Grady’s character is heading during the party scene in which it plays. It’s the turn around. Grady is not going to be waiting anymore. He’s gonna do something. The miracle is gonna happen.”

This century Cohen and I connected a couple of times at the restaurants Village Pizzeria and Le Petit Greek in Larchmont Village. I would see him on occasion at Canter’s Delicatessen and he would always come over say a quick hello to my friends in a booth, sometimes a collection of poets, professors, shayna maidels, journalists, actors, former punk rockers, record business casualties, drummers and hippies.

Leonard attended Hotel Café shows in Hollywood by his son Adam in 2011, and Sharon Robinson in 2013.

In 2006 I wrote the liner notes to the first-ever compact disc of *Kaddish Allen Ginsberg Reads Kaddish A 20th Century American Ecstatic American Narrative Poem* and mailed it to Leonard in 2013.

Sometime in 2014 I was in Larchmont Village and bumped into author/activist Lonn Friend who had just glimpsed Leonard on the street.

“He was walking the Farmer's Market with his Asian lady friend,” Lonn beamed. “I was standing next to my friend Krista's exotic cheese stand. I noticed him instantly. For the past two hours I'd been walking the market, directing stranger's eyes skyward at the white line festival taking place in the sky. It was a heavy day of chemtrails. I walked right up to Leonard Cohen and said, ‘Hello, Sir. It's an honor to meet you. So, what do you think of that?’ He looked up, paused, and said, ‘Well, at least they're not dropping bombs.’”

The very last 2014 visual I have of Cohen, looking like a cross between Dustin Hoffman and John Cassavetes, was sticking his hand across a table at Canter's and offering a firm grip.

I turned to scene-maker Rodney Bingenheimer who mused, “We recorded on one of his albums...”

I then devoured the whole plate of dill pickles as Leonard cashed out at the register.

Over the past decade I queried several associates, friends, deejays, professors, record company presidents, writers, poets, engineers, Cohen's AEG/Goldenvoice North America booking agent, and musicians about the work and ongoing artistic impact of Leonard Cohen.

Andrew Loog Oldham: Leonard wrote songs because he had to, and because he wanted to get laid. Later he wrote songs because he wanted to get paid. That's when I decided he had something to say.

“In 1988 with *I'm Your Man* he put the sex into electronic music with wit and verve and he still turned corners with his songs. Goodbye baby and amen with thanks for all you gave us in that exampled, dignified, laconic way.”

Dr. James Cushing: In 2016, those of us lucky enough to have seen Cohen in concert became even luckier, but sadder, as lucky people often are. It was a dark year, filled with farewells. Leonard Cohen's exit was neither the most shocking nor the most painful. His body was old and full of days. His songs had long been varying the theme of Farewell, and in his last tours, every concert felt like a valediction. But in 2017, his absence (for me, anyway) has become an empty space as large as the ones Bowie or Prince left behind. *You Want It Darker*, which illuminates that empty space, is actually much in the same spirit of Bowie's *Blackstar*: a sublime farewell, but from a different tradition. Only Cohen could fuse an authentic Jewish melancholy with the elaborate merriment of European art-song and the ghost-whisper cleanliness of digital synthesizers.

“Cohen’s career now enters its fourth phase, *After the End* — the phase that Cohen’s colleagues Allen Ginsberg, Irving Layton, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin have been in for decades. Is there “previously unreleased material,” written, recorded, and/or filmed? Let us hope so. Let us also hope that university literature departments will devote more attention to Cohen’s poems and novels especially 1966’s *Beautiful Losers*. For me, this lyrical dream-novel of friendship and loss outdoes Kerouac’s *On the Road* for its joy, compassion, and vivid sense of the sacred.”

Tosh Berman: Strange enough I know very little of Leonard Cohen's work. I have heard his classic albums -especially the first one, but never actually owned the damn album! Without a doubt a great songwriter, etc but never had the full on passion for his work (yet). Working at Book Soup, his books were always in demand. At the time I was working at the Soup we always had to keep his novel *Beautiful Losers* in stock as well as a collection of his lyrics and poetry. There is really not that many artists like him that is out there making music or touring.

“There used to be a coffee shop/diner at the strip mall on Santa Monica and La Brea, and I totally forgot the name of the place, but it was reported to be David Lynch's favorite coffee shop. Anyway I remember having a late breakfast one day there, and noticing a very beautiful woman at the counter, and she was with Cohen. It stayed in my mind because I thought ‘why is this beautiful young girl with this much older man?’ Then at that moment I recognized Leonard and thought ‘of course!’”

Leonard Cohen has never been a stranger to music. As early as 1954, he was playing country music at square dances in a group called the Buckskin Boys.

In an interview I published in *Melody Maker* in 1975, jointly conducted with writer Justin Pierce, Cohen told us at the Continental Hyatt House on Sunset Strip, “I don’t have any reservations about anything I do. I always played music. When I was 17, I was in a country music group called the Buckskin Boys. Writing songs came later, after music. I put my guitar away for a few years, but I always made up songs. I never wanted my work to get too far away from music. Ezra Pound said something very interesting, ‘When poetry strays too far from music, it atrophies. When music strays too far from the dance it atrophies.’”

“I came to New York and was unaware of what was going on at the time,” Cohen told me in 1975. “I had never heard of Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan, Judy Collins or any of these people, and I was delighted, overwhelmed and surprised to discover this very frantic musical activity.”

Mary Martin connected Cohen to Columbia Records A&R man John Hammond, who telephoned Cohen to meet and hear songs at the Chelsea Hotel, after they met for lunch.

Hammond had become further aware of his abilities from Judy Collins' recent cover version of "Suzanne."

"Hammond was extremely hospitable and decent," affirmed Leonard in our *Melody Maker* conversation. "He took me out for lunch at a place called White's on 23rd Street. It was a very pleasant lunch, and he said, 'Let's go back to your hotel room, and maybe you can play me some songs.'"

"So he sat in a chair and I played him a dozen songs. He seemed happy and said that he had to consult with his colleagues but that he'd like to offer me a contract."

In a September 20, 1986 BBC radio interview, Hammond recalled his first meeting with Cohen.

John Hammond: So, I listened to this guy, and he's got a hypnotic effect. He plays acoustic guitar, of course; and he is a real poet; and he's a very sensitive guy.

"I thought he was enchanting...because that's the only word you can use! He was not like anything I've ever heard before. I just feel that I always want a true original, if I can find one, because there are not many in the world; and the young man set his own rules, and he was a really first-class poet, which is most important."

Like Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Aretha Franklin and Bob Dylan before him, Leonard Cohen was about to join Hammond at Columbia Records, who received the approval from new label head Clive Davis to sign him to a recording agreement.

In May, *Songs of Leonard Cohen* began in Studio E. on East Fifty-Second Street with Hammond himself at the helm. He brought with him the noted jazz bassist, Willie Ruff, a veteran of stints with Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and Count Basie, to provide ballast to Cohen's twitchy guitar musings. Jimmy Lovelace is the drummer on "So Long, Marianne."

John Simon: John Hammond, (also a class act), would schedule a session then cancel and reschedule a month late – which drove Leonard crazy, staying at the Chelsea Hotel. So they assigned him to me. We went to my folks' house in Connecticut (they were away), to go over material. Leonard stayed up all night going through my dad's library. I slept. He didn't. He was a man, while the other rock acts I worked with were boys. He was an established poet. Real bright and clever with words. And he had that finger-picking triplet style that was very impressive. Sort of a classical technique.

“I’m proud of the experimentation I did use wordless women’s voices instead of instruments, mostly Nancy Priddy, my girlfriend at the time. About the chorus in ‘So Long, Marianne,’ I guess it was the logical step to try adding words after we’d done the wordless thing. I’m an arranger not an engineer.

“The engineer, Fred Catero, with an A – a wonderful guy. I mixed my first hit with Fred, the Cyrkle’s ‘Red Rubber Ball.’ Then, Fred, talented as he was, moved up to being a recording engineer. Smoked a long-stem pipe at times, walked to work in the New York winter in a tee shirt.”

Fred Catero: “We did the Cohen session in Columbia’s smallest studio. Maybe 20 X 40 at the most. I came into the room. Incense or candles were burning. Nobody was there. Just a chair and a huge mirror in the corner of the room. A stand up dressing room mirror. 5 feet by three feet. ‘What is this about?’

“We’re waiting and finally Leonard comes in with his guitar. We were introduced by Hammond. I go into the studio. Two Neumann mikes. One for the guitar which I aimed at an angle down, so it’s not picking up too much voice, and then the vocal mike, not in front of him, almost where the same mike is for the guitar is facing upward. ‘Cause they tend to look down anyway as they play.

“I’m adjusting the mike, and Leonard is very quiet and then said in a quiet voice. ‘See that mirror?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘I want it in front of me.’ ‘OK. What’s the mirror for?’ ‘Well, let me tell you.’ He leans forward and whispers, ‘When I’m playing sometimes I get lost in my music. And then a line to recite will come and all I do is look up and see where I am.’ I’ll never forget that.”

On October 27th, near the end of his recording sessions, Leonard Cohen headed over to Steve Paul’s The Scene at 301 W. 46th Street in New York to monitor Nico who was headlining, promoting her new album, *Chelsea Girls*. Opening was the West Coast-based, Kaleidoscope, making their New York debut.

Chris Darrow: The Scene was a very trendy hang out below street level, basement club that gave a Parisian, Left Bank vibe to the place. The host for the club was Tiny Tim, who announced all the acts and would play a song or two as well. We were opening for Nico, who I had met in LA, and she was playing as a solo act.... just her and a Hammond B3 organ.

“The opening night was very crowded and Frank Zappa and members of the Mothers of Invention showed up to show their support. There were very few west coast groups that had played in the east yet, and we ‘long haired hippies’ were the antithesis of the New York vibe at the time. During the week I had a chance to get close to Tiny Tim, who I liked very much.

“That night Leonard Cohen came up to me in the bar light. He was the palest guy I had ever seen he almost seemed to glow. He was wearing a black leather suit coat and carrying a black leather briefcase. He loved our band and was wondering if we would be interested in playing on his forthcoming album. I didn’t know who he was at the time and told him to talk with our managers who were at the bar.

“The next day, Solomon Feldhouse, David Lindley, Chester Crill, and I were in his apartment, trying to play some of his songs. He was having trouble finding musicians that could play his stuff. Since he wasn’t a great guitar player. His guitar playing was minimal at best it was hard for some people to figure his music out.

TONIGHT THRU SUN. OCT. 22
CARNIVAL CONNECTION DAVID CLAYTON THOMAS
& THE PHOENIX

OCT. 23 THRU OCT. 29 — DOUBLE LOUBLE BILL
DIRECT FROM **NICO** **"The MOON GODDESS"**
WHEREVER. . . **Danny Fields, P. R. Dir.**
SPIRITUAL DEBUT **Elektra Records.**
(She records for Verve.)

Direct From Calif.
N.Y. Debut.
"A marvelous & important
group." Jac Helzman, Pres,
Elektra Records.
(They record for Epic.)

KALEIDOSCOPE

TINY TIM Tonight through Infinity

Come Thanksgiving, you will observe the holiday at The Scene in appreciation of the earth debut of the very genuine "Blood, Sweat and Tears" of Al Keeper and Steve Katz's new group. Bobby Colombi is more than just a drummer. Jim Fielder will remain free forever. And the rest will come blow their horns.

The Greasy Spoon is a private club on 46th St. & 8th Ave. and is open till 4 A.M. every night. It holds 30 members, serves greasy food at cheap prices, has a juke box with all handwritten listings, a Greek (Gus) in the kitchen, an artist (Carl) at the door, disgusting floors, design research curtains and lonely but mostly greasy people like you and me, kissing invisibly. Too bad you're not a member.

Steve Paul's **301 West 46th St.**
THE SCENE **JU 2-5760**

“Cohen gave us the impression that he was having trouble finding the right sounds for a few of his compositions. He seemed happy when we were able to come up with some solutions to his musical needs.

“The producer Bob Johnston was there. I ended up playing my rare, 1950’s Premier Bass and my 1921, Gibson F-4 mandolin on ‘So Long, Marianne’ and bass on ‘Teachers.’ The slow build of ‘So Long, Marianne’ is one of the secrets of its success and, at 5:39 seconds long, it has a hypnotic, repetitive groove that sustains itself through the entire song. The twin, acoustic guitars, playing two separate time signatures, creates a smooth bed for the lyrics to lie on. The mandolin part comes in at just over 3 minutes and knocks the song up a notch and adds a different tonality that is not expected. The memorable chorus gets slightly more powerful each time it repeats and brings the song all together at the climax.

“‘Teachers’ is a darker, minor key song, that uses one of Solomon’s middle eastern instruments, the Caz, and Chester and David’s twin fiddles, to give it a very exotic, international flavor. Once again, there is a rather insistent rhythmic feel to the song, which counters perfectly with the ethnic sounds.

“There were no credits on the ensuing record, so not many people are aware of our inclusion in it. We were on Epic Records, a division of Columbia, so I could never figure out why we weren’t listed.”

(Additional Kaleidoscope and Cohen pairings are “Sisters of Mercy,” “Winter Lady” and “The Stranger Song,” and were all later heard in director Robert Altman’s film, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*).

In one of our *Melody Maker* interviews, Cohen revealed the back story about his songs later surfacing in Altman’s movie.

Leonard Cohen: Robert Altman actually built the film around my music. The music was already written, and when he heard it he wanted to ask me to let him use it. I was in Nashville at the time and had just gone to the movies to see a film called. *Brewster McCloud*.

"I thought it was a fine movie. That night I was in the studio and received a call from Hollywood. It was from Bob Altman saying he would like to use my music in a film. Quite honestly, I said, 'I don't know your work, could you tell me some of the films you've done?' He said *MASH*, and I said that's fine, I understand that's quite popular, but I'm really not familiar with it. Then he said there was a film I've probably never seen called *Brewster McCloud*. I told him I just came out of the movie and thought it was an extraordinary film, use any music of mine."

From mid-May to the end of November in 1967, Cohen had done 25 tunes with Hammond and John Simon and some sessions with Bob Johnston in three Columbia studio rooms.

"My first producer was John Hammond and I didn't know the ropes at all," admitted Leonard in our 1976 interview. "We recorded some numbers, and then his wife got sick and he became ill. Then I switched producers to John Simon, whom John Hammond suggested.

"I put the tracks down with guitar and voice, and used a bass sometimes. Simon took them and worked on them, and he presented me with the finished record, but I felt there were some eccentricities in his arrangements that I objected to. John Simon was great, and much greater than I understood at the time."

John Simon: I saw Leonard 15 years later in the lobby of The Algonquin Hotel. An amicable meeting."

Cohen was very grateful for the instrumental input from Kaleidoscope and recorded in his journal of the time, "The Kaleidoscope delivered me. Stu [Eisen], Solomon, David, Chester, Chris, John. May I bless them as they have blessed me."

In 1967, Clive Davis also became president of Columbia Records. Davis, a lawyer, had been an administrative vice president and general manager of the Columbia Records Group.

Clive Davis: I was really just getting my feet wet. I was in the business side of it for a year. I was working with Andy Williams, the young Barbra Streisand and Bob Dylan, and signed Donovan to Epic in 1966. I was observing. When you get a title of President, before you start making active moves, you sort of appraise the situation. Columbia at the time was prominent in the field of classical music and Broadway, middle of the road music, coming out of the Mitch Miller era, with artists like Tony Bennett, Streisand, and Andy Williams, among others. I was seeing the business change.

“There was certainly some evidence of rock ‘n’ roll, clearly the Beatles had arrived, (Elvis) Presley. The only rock that Columbia was in was more of Bob Dylan as a writer, with some of his hits being popularized by Peter, Paul & Mary, and the Byrds.

“I was seeing music change, but I was waiting for the A&R staff to lead into these changes that were showing evidence in becoming important in music.

“In June I really came to the Monterey International Pop Festival not knowing what to expect, but seeing a revolution before my eyes. I was very aware that contemporary music was changing. The success of the artists I signed at Monterey gave me confidence that I had good ears. It gave me the confidence to trust my own instincts.”

Al Kooper: By late 1967 I was a staff producer at Columbia Records. Leonard Cohen, signed by John Hammond, and then John Simon is the producer and they walked into this new climate at the Columbia label. John did the Blood, Sweat & Tears album. That LP and Cohen’s first record also share the same engineer, Fred Catero.

“As far as Columbia Records in England, they understood what was being done from the label in America in 1967 and ’68. Simon & Garfunkel’s *Bookends*, Dylan’s *John Wesley Harding*, *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, the BS&T *Child Is the Father to The Man* album that I signed single-handedly to the label by Clive Davis. They called it ‘The ‘Rock Machine.’ That was a result mostly of the English music press and not the domestic label. The label had a real grasp on the music that was being made. FM radio was a factor.”

Fred Catero: Leonard Cohen came to the Columbia label from John Hammond and also on the heels of the June 1967 Monterey International Pop Festival. The arrival of FM radio in 1967 didn’t change Columbia Records but the demographics of FM radio changed the label and who was listening. Because FM is ideal for high fidelity. It was much more clearer so you could hear the subtleties of his voice.

“We as a human organism rely a lot on the subtleties and FM was able to transmit that. Especially if you were listening on head phones or a good system. Whereas AM was limited in its ability to transmit that feel. And, at the time, an older group. Cohen wouldn’t have worked being introduced on AM radio in 1966 or ’67.”

Songs of Leonard Cohen shipped to the record racks and bins the last week of 1967. “Suzanne” garnered the initial radio airplay. It quickly became a staple on the FM dial and always remained in Cohen’s stage repertoire.

Dr. James Cushing: Willie Ruff’s bass provides a chamber jazz aspect to the production of *The Songs of Leonard Cohen* album. Ruff, as one-half of the Mitchell-Ruff Duo, was used to the idea of creating a whole presentation with very sparse instrumentation – bass and piano. The players must listen to each other’s every gesture and play together to serve the music. The debut Cohen album exemplifies non-egocentric collaboration. The whole group creates a single organic sound, not a hierarchy with the singer being ‘backed up’ by other musicians.

“At the same time, this quiet and revealing recording lands in the middle of the psychedelic world, in post ‘Summer of Love’ culture. Members of the Kaleidoscope perform on several tracks. So, we have psychedelic roots-based folk-rockers joining with a jazz master to enhance the intimate vision Cohen was seeking. Or the vision that found him.

“Speaking of intimate visions, I have to insist that the first Cohen LP is one of the absolute best, most *effective* boy-girl make-out records of the late sixties, totally equivalent to Marvin Gaye’s *Let’s Get It On* from a few years later. As a radio DJ for over a third of a century, I still get lovers requesting cuts from those two albums.”

Peter Lewis: I first got turned on to Leonard Cohen in New York. It must have been 68’ or 69’ when my marriage was falling apart. We [Moby Grape] were playing the Fillmore East or Village Theatre. When the set was over I remember meeting Linda Eastman backstage. She was there with her camera to take pictures of the band.

“I think she saw how downright lonely I was. She was one of those rare creatures you meet sometimes in life who just “knows” what to do and took pity on me. When we got to her apartment that night she went to her turntable and put on Leonard’s first record. Of course ‘Susanne,’ ‘That’s No Way to Say Goodbye’ etc. came to me like the soundtrack of my life at the time.

“Later, Bob Johnson produced our last album for Columbia *Truly Fine Citizen*, in Nashville. When the record was finished he asked me if I wanted to stay after the others went home. He said he liked my voice and wanted to introduce me to Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, and Leonard Cohen.

“Why did I go home with the others and not take my shot at the time? It may have been some crazy idea that Many Grape wasn’t finished yet.

“Anyway, I never stopped listening to and admiring Leonard Cohen. He was the first artist I became fully conscious of, after Dylan, who could make the music fit the lyrics in a way that seemed already familiar. Anyway it all started that night at Linda’s. Leonard’s songs sounded to me like I’d heard them before in a dream, even as I sat there listening to them for the first time.”

Marina Muhlfriedel: Although I had heard the album before, this is my first true contemplation of the *Songs of Leonard Cohen*. I am alone, sprawled on the floor of the library in my parents’ home in West Los Angeles. A sketchbook of drawings and poems I nearly always have on hand is beside me. I close my eyes as the songs play again and again and I sink into a world of street-weary strangers and seducers, of shadowy alleyways and perfumed boudoirs that double as sacred shrines. I mull them like secrets. In my own small way, I vow to always pray for the angels and to someday offer Chinese tea and oranges to a melancholy lover. And I sense that melancholy, angels, love, loss and passion are but intersecting creases on Leonard Cohen’s palm as he moves through a world that’s unfathomably bigger and more interesting than my own.

“His depth, his wisdom and implied sacraments transport me. He is at once a psalmist and a love-ravaged romantic. I am envious of the women he pines for. I am jealous of his perfect words. The songs are slow and authoritative, nary a wasted syllable or indulgent frivolity. In my sketchbook, I try to hone one of my adolescent poems to emulate Cohen’s precision. Believing, in some abstruse way, the gravel-voiced poet is my teacher—a loner with a guitar and an elixir of dreams at a train station on the outskirts of town. I cross out a few words turn the album over again and close my eyes.”

Dr. Robert Inchausti: His LP comes out at the tail end of 1967. And the picture of Joan of Arc in the back was incredibly compelling. And for some reason that really spoke to me and many others as well. And also in my conversations with my friends, Cohen seemed older than the other rock guys. He seemed like somebody you could grow up and be like. And have women and be a mystic and hang with real hip people. He was a rock guy not a folkie. As a counter culture figure and he always seemed to be at some point that was near the center of the whole thing. That was kind of religious and mystic that seemed more true to me than the political. His debut album and the *Beautiful Losers* book was like that was the coda of the turn to the mystic.

“Again, the double consciousness was evident. He never spoke like a guru or anything. It was always with this incredible humor irony. In Cohen’s music I heard the future calling me to a very cool, very deep, and very sensual experimental life.”

Songwriting was a private art; performing and singing in concert, though, was a psychic trek into the heart of darkness.

By 1970 Leonard would eventually emerge as a highly competent singer, songwriter and story teller in concert situations. I asked Cohen in a 1976 *Melody Maker* conversation about his *Live Songs* LP and recent bookings as a memorable live attraction.

"I used to be petrified with the idea of going on the road and presenting my work," confessed Leonard. "I often felt that the risks of humiliation were too wide. But with the help of my last producer, Bob Johnston, I gained the self-confidence I felt was necessary.

"I liked the work he did with Dylan and we became good friends. Without his support I don't think I'd ever gain the courage to go and perform. He played harmonica, guitar and organ on tours with me. He's a great friend and a great support. We worked hard on the albums we did together.

"My music now is much more highly refined. When you are again in touch with yourself and you feel a certain sense of health, you feel somehow that the prison bars are lifted, and you start hearing new possibilities in your work.

The previous album *Live Songs* represented a very confused and directionless time. The thing I like about it is that it documents this phase very clearly."

Bob Johnston: I put his 1970 band together. I told Leonard I'd get him the best musicians in the world. And he replied, 'Bob. I don't want the best musicians in the world. I want friends of yours.' I said, 'Good enough.' I played organ and piano. For a while I acted as Leonard's manager after he asked me in Paris.

"What attracted me to Cohen and songs like 'Bird on a Wire?'"

"What attracts you to Leonardo Di Vinci or the painters? Leonard was the best I'd ever heard. And Dylan was the best I'd ever heard. And (Paul) Simon was the best I'd ever heard and Cash was the best I'd ever heard. And all those fuckin' people were the best I'd ever heard.

"I always ask the artist 'what do you want to do?' You get better performances when you make the artist comfortable. Dylan, Cash, Cohen were just wonderful people and they should be treated as such."

You want celluloid proof of Cohen's stage craft?

Over 47 ago on August 31, 1970, Leonard Cohen, then age 35, was ushered onstage during the Isle of Wight music festival on a small island off the southern coast of England.

He was billed with Miles Davis, Joni Mitchell, the Who, the Doors, the Moody Blues, Jethro Tull and Jimi Hendrix. The crowd, alas, had its own agenda, metastasizing into a heaving, barreling beast, crushing the gates and fences, rubeishing the prim seaside community.

The throng numbered 600,000 and Cohen was at the epicenter of the event which now had fire and smoke encroaching structures and equipment.

When Cohen and his band, including Bob Johnston and Charlie Daniels, finally took to the stage, it was two o'clock in the morning.

My brother Kenneth chronicled it in *Everybody Knows*.

Kenneth Kubernik: The punters, restless in the aftermath of Jimi Hendrix's incendiary performance, were instantly tamed by this unkempt, unprepossessing gentleman, adorned in pajama bottoms (he'd been having a kip backstage and barely answered the bell to perform). As poised as Caesar before his legions, Cohen took command of his 'Army' – his group's nickname – and held the half million attendees in thrall.

“Documentarian Murray Lerner captured it all on film. The resulting 2007 DVD – *Leonard Cohen Live at the Isle of Wight – 1970* – demonstrated his gift for conjuring magic out of mayhem. The oft-derided listless baritone voice, the plodding rhythms and the deathly pallor of the lyrics conspired to produce a hypnotic calm.”

Cohen's recital was taped by Columbia Records staff A&R producer and engineer Teo Macero who supervised the now heralded live audio recording.

Murray Lerner: I first heard Cohen as a literary character, a poet. And then in the late sixties a couple of his records on the radio. I heard his debut LP. He came out acoustic and walked out with guitar.

“I felt hypnotized. I felt his poetry was that way. I was really into poetry and that is what excited me about him. To put music to poetry was like hypnotic to me.

“There were also moments, banter, like when he told the audience before a number, how his father would take him to the circus as a child. He didn't like circuses, but he liked when a man would stand up and asking everyone to light a match so they could see each other in the darkness. ‘Can I ask of you to light a match so I can see where you all are?’

“But when he sang the lyrics of the songs they took over and he had ‘em in the palm of his hand. Even removing myself from being the director how this guy could walk out and do this in front of 600,000 people? It was remarkable. It was mesmerizing. And the banter was very much in tune with the spirit of the festival. And, more particularly what he said, you know. ‘We're still a weak nation and we need land. It will be our land one day.’ It was almost biblical.

“When he did ‘Suzanne’ he said, ‘Maybe this is good music to make love to.’ He’s very smart. He’s very shrewd. The other thing he was able to do, the talking, I think the audience was able to listen to him. They heard him and felt he was echoing something they felt. The audience and I were mesmerized. It was incredible and captivating. That night, Leonard was on some sort of mission. His band was called the Army.

“My film shows the roles of the background singers. Sure, Ray Charles and Raylettes, and the Cohen singers had beautiful skin. They were a balance to him up there and the fact I was jealous of the guy that this guy was able to get all these women. (laughs). And he’s up there very late at night, the morning, unshaven. The music is great.

“The Isle of Wight journey was worth it. That was the most exciting event I’ve ever been to. ‘Cause it was so all encompassing. And new. In terms of the possibility of the crowd killing us and always living on the edge of that precipice.

“And I was always thinking, in relationship to the performers, ‘What’s my role in what they are singing about? How do I fit into that?’ I change with each one as I am watching them. Like with the Moody Blues, I liked their music. It was different and interesting, and like Leonard Cohen, it had an undercurrent of mysticism to it.

“I thought the *Isle of Wight 1970* and the Cohen footage had touched the deep chord of people. I realized how deep it was and I was startled how prophetic it was. I was proud and excited at what I had done.”

Charlie Daniels: When we started doing shows with Leonard and when we did the songs things would be so quiet, people would be so in to what he was doing. They wouldn’t miss a lyric or a sound. You could have literally heard a pin drop. Reverence might be the wrong word but people were so in to what he was doing.

“I did learn from working with Johnston and Cohen that ‘less is more.’ And to go play music with a guy like Leonard Cohen, whose music was so fragile, you just stayed out of his way. That was basically what you wanted to do. The best way I know to describe it is that you listen to Leonard and his guitar.

“Wherever he was, wherever there was a part that you’d think that what you would do would interfere and you just stayed out of it. You didn’t try to embellish what he was doing. You just tried to fit in. And there was whole mind set to that. And after I got used to the mindset it went really well. That was the approach to it. It was relaxed. That was the thing about his music. It was so fragile. It was so ‘stay out of the way.’

“One thing that needs to be said about Bob Johnston and bringing people to town like Al Kooper, Bob Dylan and then Leonard Cohen. There was skepticism about Bob coming to

Nashville because he was taking the place of a legendary producer, Don Law, who was an institution in town.

“Here’s this guy Johnston from New York, who had been doing Simon & Garfunkel, Dylan, and Leonard Cohen, who were not really thought of as being country. But the first thing Bob did when he came to town was to do a number one song with Marty Robbins!

“And in ‘67 and ‘68 Bob produced the albums *John Wesley Harding* and *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*. Bob had gained credibility. He was also at the same time, bringing Dylan and Leonard Cohen into town who had never lived here.

“Dylan recorded in Nashville in 1966 for a while, but it was he’d come to town, do his stuff, and leave. Dylan happened to record in a studio in Nashville and worked in it. Forget that when Leonard came to Nashville. He lived out in the country for a while. He spoke a different way than everybody else around there did. But he had a great sense of communicating with people. I knew all the musicians on Leonard’s album.

“And, hassles with long hairs, prejudice, racism, didn’t exist in our world. Now it has not always been that way. I was raised in a very prejudice time.

“I mean I’m 76 years old and was raised in the South during the Jim Crow days. I never went to school with a black person or a Jewish person. I mean, it was not a place of my making. It was a place I had to live in. And I had to come to understand on my own what was going on and to get away from it. And to look back on it and say this is wrong. This is not right, you know.

“In the sixties everything was pretty much in the throes of a lot of upheaval. This was back in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s salad days, when he was going around, doing things that a lot of people didn’t understand it or didn’t get it. I was in Nashville when Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis.

“The thing was, when you’re goin’ in to make music that is a whole other thing,” Charlie emphasized.

“The Columbia Studio was union, and the thing about it was in Nashville, in the studios, you had to have the machines to be a certain distance away from the boards so the engineer could not work them both.

“But the thing I remember mostly about Studio A., the big studio, it was the new studio. The old studio, the Quonset hut was the legendary studio where the hits had been cut. Everybody wanted to work in that room. Nobody wanted to work in the big studio until Bob Johnston came to town and basically took it over. Nobody else wanted to be there. He worked with it, got engineers he enjoyed working with like Neil Wilburn, and he actually brought an engineer from New York with him when he first came down.

“With people like Cohen and Dylan...Most of the Nashville sessions, the country artists they would bring a demo in, they’d play the demo, you play it like the demo, you may change a key on it, but basically it’s gonna be the same thing, how they want the demo. So you’re playin’ pretty much inbounds.

“Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan were singers and songwriters. They write their songs, they weren’t coming in from a music publishing company. It was a lot different because there is no hurry.”

Elliott Lefko: I promoted all of Leonard's North American shows during 2008-2013. As a Canadian it was great to see America and learn about the different theatres across the country and get a feel for future tours by like-minded artists.

“One of my favourite writers is Thomas Wolfe. When it came time to choose which cities for Leonard to play, a friend suggested Asheville North Carolina. The theatre there was the Thomas Wolfe Theatre.

“The concert turned out to be my favourite show. The theatre was an old wooden one with great acoustics and the audience was amazing. And the best thing was to get to go to the Thomas Wolfe House that afternoon and see where he lived and worked. Since that day I have sent so many artists to Asheville and it's always a great show.”

One Cohen live booking in California really made an impression on **Prof. David Kahn** of the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo English and Literature department.

Letter to L. Cohen,
April 3, 2009

I skulked out of poetry’s house at thirty-three.
At sixty-three I returned like a sneak-thief
because time could terrify me to staring silence.
And one April Shabat night you,
you seventy-five-year-old mensch, you,
you blissed out 7000 people for three hours, you,
with a nothing voice, a so-so growl, and a true voice isn’t always or often pretty,
wearing a narrow-brimmed, slouched fedora and a gangster's suit and
words that showed me that time is no more than a limp dick,
words that stiffen my arms and legs with bones of diamond and teach me that what I
thought I knew of hours and days is as nothing
to one word following another, certain as a path finding its way through a stubbled field,
sure as a night stream carving rock under a winter moon and gas-blue snow,
knowing now that years are no more than rocks knotted on a rope dangling in a still pool.
I pull them out one by one, each one another benediction.

The rope disappears in the pool, is slimy with algae, may slip away with the stones' weight, may fray and part
but I heave the heft and haul of years into my palms, hold each one in hand for its moment, sing to each cold rock, cradle it until it warms and breathes.

Sincerely,

D. Kann

Additional multi-instrumentalists, wordsmiths and producers also gifted me with their vivid memories of Cohen.

Sarah Kramer: It always felt like Leonard knew what he was giving. Like it came from a higher place and wasn't just in the moment, but for future moments within and beyond his lifetime. As if everything was a conscious gesture but with it, a deep connection or understanding, even within the joys and his wonderful sense of humor. Simple though, light not heavy.

"I recorded the trumpet part on Leonard's *Dear Heather* in his home studio out back. Leanne Ungar was the producer (and engineer). I admired her work on Laurie Anderson's *O Superman* as a kid, so it was exciting to get to work with her also. She was so warm and comfortable to work with, as was Leonard, and it was special for me that they dug my sound. I remember her saying it sounded so happy. I don't think I could've been any happier than recording with Leonard Cohen (but I knew what she meant)! He had already worked out a part on his keyboard that he wanted me to play, and I was really tucked in there in the mix, so it's not like there's anything super impressive in what I played, but still, I continue to feel honored in having been a part of that.

"I had recorded on another track of his a couple years later called 'Keep It On The Level,' with Ed Sanders engineering, but that version was never released. I still have the demo he gave me to work with of just him and his keyboard. Very raw. It's special to get that little window into his process. It had a New Orleans feel to it when I tracked on it. That song ended up on his latest album, *You Want It Darker*, as 'On The Level.' He totally reworked the song both musically and lyrically. His son Adam produced the album and it sounds beautiful. I especially love the sound of the synagogue choir in the mix of things.

"Leonard once told me that I was his trumpet player... but he never brought trumpet on the road, so again, I think it was more of a gesture, a kindness and generosity he knew he was giving to help me to believe in myself.

"Los Angeles is a tough town in many ways, and he made me feel less alone, even from a distance, as if he was always there. I'm forever grateful for that, for his friendship and kindness. I

still feel him here. That's the thing about living with integrity and treating everyone as if they matter, you give such an enormous gift, and he did that with everyone... those that knew him personally, as well as anyone who listens to his music or reads his writings. I think he was aware of this, and that we're all in this together.

“His faith, his rituals, from Zen practice to Shabbos, within his writing and in songs, as a person and as a friend, he was always fully present and didn't seem to waste any time or take anything for granted.”



Daniel Weizmann: *It's Father's Day and everybody's wounded: Urban Chaos in the Age of International Terrorism*

“With its sinister, anxious electronic pulse and way-over-the-top pronouncements, ‘First We Take Manhattan’ is Cohen's most contemporary song, a wild leap into modern times. Incredibly, he captured the spirit of our age circa 2014 way back when in 1987! Moreover, in its time, it was already a definite departure from the dark romance and slow-heartbeat solemn truths he's made his name on. The groove almost comes on like a TV cop show car-chase and, on first listen one can't

help but wonder if one is being put-on. This is Cohen?

“Then come the narrator, just as unreliable, an ideologically twisted despot or terrorist or just-plain kook, fueled by a bizarre combination of entitlement, rage, and spiritual purpose. "I'm guided by the beauty of our weapons," he sings, with that "straight-face" gravity that only Cohen can pull off. Whoever he is, he's a nut. And yet, at times, the narrator also does sound like the Cohen we know, the weary poet of post-Holocaust consciousness, struggling to find his sea legs in the Information Age soul tsunami. 'You see that line there moving through the station? I told you, I was one of those.'

“Finally, the song refuses to rest on a position, but, like the modern world, rants with conviction at us from all ends, keeps us in a state of suspension, via enervating switch-ups and clashing imagery – everything from the fashion biz to the plywood violin to the groceries. "Remember me?" the narrator confides, "I used to live for music." And he says that in a song, an astonishing real-time self-disavowal!

“Even more than Cohen's other gems, this track, originally recorded by Jennifer Warnes, has proven to be a great lyrical Rorschach test. The internet has plenty of interpretations that range from the bizarre to the brilliant. One talk backer described the song as 'globalization from the point of view of someone from the underdeveloped part of the world.' Others grasp at similar but disparate puzzle pieces: it's about mega-corporations, about hyper-capitalism, about foreign policy, expansionism, terrorism, about the blurring and unraveling of national identities, it's about the West German Red Army, it's about radical chic.

“Cohen himself tried to explain the song to Paul Zollo in the April 1993 issue of Song Talk. 'I felt for some time that the motivating energy, or the captivating energy, or the engrossing energy available to us today is the energy coming from the extremes. That's why we have Malcolm X. And somehow it's only these extremist positions that can compel our attention. And I find in my own mind that I have to resist these extremist positions when I find myself drifting into a mystical fascism in regards to myself. So this song, 'First We Take Manhattan', what is it? Is he serious? And who is we? And what is this constituency that he's addressing? Well, it's that constituency that shares this sense of titillation with extremist positions. I'd rather do that with an appetite for extremism than blow up a bus full of schoolchildren.'

“Decades later, with the world's appetite for extremism at a fever pitch, and the Twin Towers of Manhattan long-ago razed to the ground, 'First We Take Manhattan' is an almost frightening act of clairvoyance.”

Chris Darrow: I hadn't seen Leonard Cohen since the 1967 *Songs of Leonard Cohen* recording sessions 35 years earlier. In 2002 he had been cloistered at the Mt. Baldy Zen Center in Southern California, near my hometown of Claremont, so I knew he was hanging around my area.

“One day my father, Paul Darrow, was having an art opening in downtown Claremont, and I heard that Cohen was spotted sitting outside at a local Greek restaurant called Yiannis. I strolled over to where he and his female companion were drinking coffee and smoking at an outdoor table. His head was shaved and he was wearing a robe of a Buddhist monk.

“I said, ‘Remember me?’ He graciously replied, ‘Of course I do, you guys saved my album.’ And he went on to explain that our appearance at that time had allowed him to realize his vision and get the sound he was searching for.”

Leonard Cohen Black and White 1993 Photos by **Henry Diltz**, courtesy of **Henry Diltz**

*Kaleidoscope and Nico 1967 Scene advertisement courtesy of **Chris Darrow***

(Harvey Kubernik is the author of 12 books, including Leonard Cohen, *Everybody Knows*, and Neil Young, *Heart of Gold*. In April 2017, Sterling published Kubernik's *1967 A Complete Rock Music History of the Summer of Love*.

Harvey Kubernik's literary anthology *Inside Cave Hollywood: The Harvey Kubernik Music InnerViews and InterViews Collection, Vol. 1* will be published in late October 2017, by Cave Hollywood. There is a Cohen tribute chapter. Kubernik is also writing and assembling a multi-voice book on the Doors scheduled for publication last quarter 2017.

Over his 44 year music and pop culture journalism endeavors, Kubernik has been published domestically and internationally in *The Hollywood Press*, *The Los Angeles Free Press*, *Melody Maker*, *Crawdaddy!*, *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *MOJO*, *Shindig!*, *HITS*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Ugly Things*, and *Record Collector News* magazine.

Kubernik is a record producer, a radio, film, television and Internet interview subject and a former West Coast Director of 1978-1979 A&R for MCA Records. He has penned the liner notes to the CD releases of Carole King's *Tapestry*, Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish*, *The Elvis Presley '68 Comeback Special* and The Ramones' *End of the Century*. Kubernik serves as Contributing Editor of *Record Collector News* magazine and displays articles and essays on www.cavehollywood.com on a monthly basis.

In November 2006, Kubernik was invited to address audiotape preservation and archiving at special hearings called by The Library of Congress held in Hollywood, California).

During July, 2017, Harvey Kubernik was a guest speaker at The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame's Library & Archives Author Series in Cleveland, Ohio discussing his 2017 book *1967 A Complete Rock Music History of the Summer of Love*.