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Leonard Cohen Live in London (review)

Robert D. Terrio

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Leonard Cohen Live in London. DVD. Recorded Live in Concert at the O₂ Arena, London, England (July 17, 2008). [S.I.]: Sony BMG Music Entertainment, 2009, 2008. 88697405039. \$18.98.

"It's been a long time since I've stood on a stage in London . . . was about, uh, 14 or 15 years ago, I was 60 years old . . . just a kid with a crazy dream (laughs) . . . since then, I've taken a lot of Prozac, Paxil, Wellbutrin, Effexor, Ritalin . . . I've also, uh, studied deeply in the philosophies and the religions, but cheerfulness kept breaking through (more laughs)."

With these words, Leonard Cohen sets the tone for his London concert with humorous acknowledgment of the low points in his life, and uplifting hope for those issues he has worked through over many years. Perhaps this is most clear in his lyric "Anthem" where he clearly juxtaposes positive energy with negative:

"Ring the bells that still can ring,
forget your perfect offering,
there is a crack in everything;
that's how the light gets in."

It is difficult to approach Leonard Cohen's art without understanding at least some aspects of his personal life. His recent tour schedule, at the age of seventy-five, has largely been for financial reasons. As Cohen retreated to a Zen monastery for five years, his business manager absconded with nearly all of his money. Although the courts sided with Cohen in a 9.5 million dollar lawsuit, it is not known if or when he will see any of that money. So Cohen resorted to "turning tricks" as he refers to it: perform for money. Regardless of his mis-

fortunes, there is never self pity or mawkish sentimentality exhibited in the twenty-six song set on this DVD. Quite the contrary: he champions positive messages throughout this program, and he seems to nurture an amicable reconciliation with the sad, depressing songs he composed during the 1970s. While the songs are no less sad or depressing, Cohen seems to have assimilated the severity of his lyrics with genuine reverence for his audience, his band, and his life. Cohen's vocal limitations are many, but it is the charisma with which he delivers his songs that is the attractor. "Hallelujah" is the only song where Cohen's voice ventures out of its very limited range. But this isn't a DVD about singing; it's a DVD about stories, people, places, things, experiences. And, while his vocal limitations for singing are evident, they all seem to fade when he recites his poetry, as when he speaks "A Thousand Kisses Deep."

Cohen remains a gentleman through and through, and has since given up unpredictable behaviors, formerly fueled by the consumption of three bottles of wine before a performance. His genuine acknowledgement of the audience has kept his songs alive for many years, and continues to handle his emergence back on "Boogie Street" as he would say, with dignity, grace, and deep appreciation of his audience.

ROBERT D. TERRIO

Westminster Choir College of Rider University

Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention in the '60s. DVD. New Malden, Surrey UK: Sexy Intellectual, 2008. SIDVD545. \$19.95.

In 1965, bass player Roy Estrada invited his friend Frank Zappa to join his R&B group, the Soul Giants. A short time after joining, Zappa convinced his new band mates Estrada, drummer Jimmy Carl Black, and singer Ray Collins to devote themselves instead to his own outrageous, irreverent, unpredictable, flat-out weird music. He promised them wealth and fame. The Soul Giants were game, and so began the Mothers of Invention.

Four years and a few added band members later, the Mothers of Invention had staked out their own piece of turf in the music world, owing as much to the band's chemistry, daring, theatrics and musicianship as it did to Zappa's leadership, drive and creativity. The Mothers played sold-out shows to a rabid following. And then Zappa broke up the band.

He continued performing for another two decades, up to his death of prostate