

Music: December 3, 2010

<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/review?oid=1121765>

DVDs

By Austin Powell

Leonard Cohen

Lonesome Heroes (Pride DVD)

Leonard Cohen

Bird on a Wire (The Machat Company)

More a roundtable discussion than proper documentary, the near-two-hour *Lonesome Heroes* features scholars and critics examining the influences that shaped Montreal's prophetic poet songwriter. Aside from the obvious (Dylan, the Beat movement, early C&W), the film also focuses on Belgian singer Jacques Brel, the egoist eroticism of contemporary Irving Layton, and Spanish elegist Federico García Lorca, the latter cut with footage of Leonard Cohen performing his homage to the Spanish poet, "Take This Waltz," on *Austin City Limits* in the late Eighties. The insight from Kigen, a Buddhist monk and Cohen's mentor at the Mount Baldy Centre, proves particularly enlightening, but not even bonus commentary from Judy Collins can adequately prepare one for *Bird on a Wire*. Originally released in 1974, then lost, this tour concert documentary detailing Cohen's 20-city European tour of two years earlier was pieced back together by producer Tony Palmer from 294 cans of film rediscovered last year. The 105-minute film's as haphazard as the tour itself, which featured producer/organist Bob Johnston (see "First We Take Berlin," Nov. 16, 2007) and was plagued with so many sound issues that Cohen personally refunded fans from his own wallet at one stop and improvised a tune about a broken speaker at another. Delivering an imagistic and at times voyeuristic impression of Cohen's life on the road, *Bird on a Wire* offers remarkably insightful interviews with its subject, who encounters flirtatious women at every turn and reads his poetry from *The Energy of Slaves*, alone at a desk and through a haze of cigarette smoke, a scene beautifully captured in sepia tones. "Success is survival," Cohen tells a reporter. Consider this reclaimed treasure the ultimate testament to just that.

(Lonesome Heroes) ★★

(Bird on a Wire) ★★★★★

Copyright © 2010 Austin Chronicle Corporation. All rights reserved.