

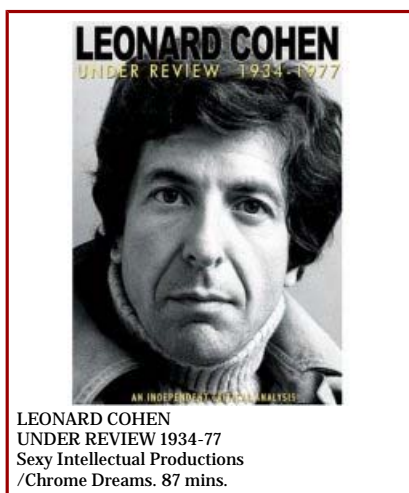


Issue #07 - June 2007

DVD

## SOUND & VISION – LEONARD COHEN AND MOTT THE HOOPLE UNDER REVIEW

Al Kaufman and Philip Nutman put two new UNDER REVIEW documentaries under review.



**L**eonard Cohen is a smart, sophisticated intellectual who also happens to be one of the greatest poets and songwriters of our time. He is a deeply spiritual and secretive man, and little is known about him.

After watching the horridly low-budget LEONARD COHEN UNDER REVIEW 1934-1977, the only new thing learned about Mr. Cohen is that he is smart enough to have nothing to do with such an amateur production.

While the documentary claims to begin with Cohen's birth in 1934, within the first two minutes they have moved up to his first book of poetry in college. One could find out more about Cohen's childhood by perusing Wikipedia.

The video then goes through Cohen's first five albums, while Cohen biographers and music critics critique them. That's it in a nutshell. If a critic talks about a particularly important song, such as "Suzanne," "Sisters of Mercy" or "Bird on a Wire," snippets of the songs are played over cheesy backgrounds of sun-dappled oceans, blue skies or rising flames.

Little insight into what drove Cohen to write these songs is given. Ron Cornelius, who served as band leader for the SONGS OF LOVE AND HATE album and toured with Cohen, says all the musicians were like a family, but offers no stories to substantiate this claim.

There's no meat here, just a bunch of music geeks offering up their takes on the inevitable Cohen/Dylan comparisons, the beauty of Cohen's lyrics and to what extent he was able to use his voice and musicianship to make his lyrics work. None of it (including the casual mentions of his brief affair with Janis Joplin and his dabbling in Scientology) is anything any casual Leonard Cohen fan (if there is such a thing) wouldn't already know.

Holes equivalent to Jesus' missing years also abound. In one line, the narrator states that Cohen "stepped off the musical stage in 1975 and did not return until 1977." What happened during that intervening time is never mentioned.

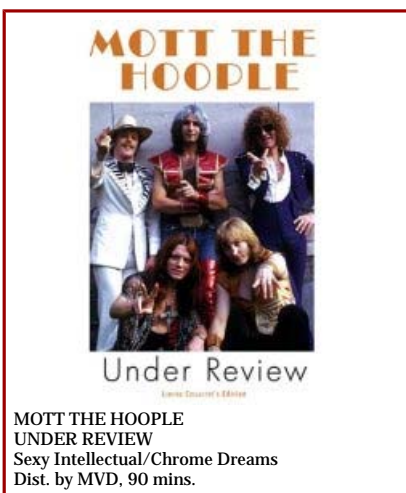
The film includes some early footage of Cohen from Canadian television as well as from the BBC's Julie Felix Show, but these live performances are never shown for more than about 15 seconds, or just enough to make the viewer wish for more performance pieces and less verbal masturbation from the supposed experts.

The film ends after discussing Cohen's worst album, DEATH OF A LADIES MAN. Again, people mention that Cohen and producer Phil Spector, both control freaks in the studio, did not get along. They also briefly mention that Spector had been drinking. But, come on. Do you mean to say they couldn't find one person willing to tell a story of an all-out brawl between the two, or even a small disagreement? Rumors of Spector pulling a gun on Cohen are found everywhere except in this film. Where is the gossip? Where is the titillation?

And why end the documentary on such a low point? Cohen's late '80s and early '90s releases, most notably I'M YOUR MAN and THE FUTURE, demonstrated a strong resurgence of his talents and US popularity. They are both masterful works that deserve mention.

In 2006, Lian Lunson released the documentary, LEONARD COHEN: I'M YOUR MAN. In it, Cohen reminisces about being holed up in the Chelsea Hotel (where he wrote his debut album) and other high and low points of his life. This is interspersed with fans from Nick Drake to U2 waxing eloquently about Cohen's influence on them, as well as their cover versions of Cohen classics. It is a wonderful film that only makes UNDER REVIEW 1934-1977 seem all the more unnecessary.

—Al Kaufman



**R**ecently, Mott The Hoople came up in conversation with Greg, a twentysomething who prides himself on his knowledge of music, particularly '70's rock. While sweating it out at the gym, Greg admitted he'd never heard of the British rockers, who had a massive following on their native shores and made a substantial dent into the American scene in the pre-disco years of that decade, but now seem to be an unknown quantity to a generation of rockers weaned on Nirvana and anything after. Which goes to prove there's an audience out there for this generally useful and entertaining entry in the erratic UNDER REVIEW series.

The Mott story began in 1969 when a band named Silence from Hereford in the west of England auditioned for producer Guy Stevens and Island Records. Stevens saw their potential, but didn't groove on the vocalist, Stan Tippens. A realist, Tippens took a step backwards and one Ian Hunter became the front man for the group, renamed Mott The Hoople by Stevens after an obscure 1967 novel. Mott toured the UK endlessly, and their dynamic presence and powerful stage act soon gained them a live following few bands achieve (think early U2-level adoration). But Mott couldn't shift albums to save their lives, and after four poor-selling discs they split up in March 1972.

Enter David Bowie. A long-time fan, the Thin White Duke persuaded them to reform and gave them his song "All The Young Dudes." Under Bowie's influence, the band became more flamboyant and were labeled "Glam" by the press, a description that never truly fit The Hoople, but one they played with on the altar of fame. Both the song and the album of the same title were major hits, with "Dudes" reaching #37 on the Billboard charts, and the song became something of a gay anthem, a situation the aggressively hetro band had a tough time dealing with.

The follow-up album, 1973's MOTT, is considered their masterpiece and it, too,

was a major hit in the UK (in the US, it's best known for the song "All The Way From Memphis," which was given further life when fan Martin Scorsese used it on the soundtrack of ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE [1975]), but the years of touring, the pressures of fame, and new directions in the music didn't sit well with all members of the band. Keyboardist Verden Allen quit because the band wouldn't play his songs, and he was shortly followed by Mick Ralphs, who then formed Bad Company. Ralphs was replaced by Ariel Bender (née Luther Grosvenor, formerly of Spooky Tooth and Stealers Wheel), and a live disc was recorded at shows in London and New York. Bender lasted just over a year before being replaced by Bowie's Spiders From Mars guitar hero, Mick Ronson. But instead of being the band's savior, Ronson bonded with Hunter, making Hunter realize he was tired of Mott, and the two quit to form the short-lived Hunter-Ronson Band. Meanwhile, the survivors of the then current line-up—Overend Watts, Dale Griffin and Morgan Fisher, who was Allen's replacement—added two other musicians and soldiered on under the name Mott, but the magic was gone. Mott ultimately faded away, transforming into British Lions before calling it a day in 1979.

Mott The Hoople is a seminal band of that era, and this review is not the place to examine their legacy. Unfortunately, that's one of the disc's failings. This is a good, solid introduction to an important group that Mott virgins will find fascinating, but like other Sexy Intellectual/Chrome dreams productions, especially the UNDER REVIEW series, the documentary is hampered by being unofficial and therefore short on actual interview material with key players such as Hunter and Ralphs. However, what sets it head and shoulders above the Leonard Cohen disc, for example, are the interviews with Mick Jones of The Clash, who is a huge Mott fan and followed them around as a teenager, and journalist Kris Needs, who was president of the Mott fan club as a teenager, too (his story about seeing the band underaged at a school dance and becoming friends with the musicians is priceless).

Other journalists weigh in with glowing, yet facile comments, but the extracts from Fisher's Super-8 home movies, shot while on tour in the US make the disc a must-see. As is often the case with these unofficial tributes/analyses, the live footage is just snippets of public domain material of varying quality that cry out for whole songs and remixed sound and remastered picture. That said, this UNDER REVIEW entry is worth having, and stands up to repeat viewings. 🇺🇸

—Philip Nutman



## Issue #07 - June / July 2007

Features	DVD	Music	Print
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Warren Zevon</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Anne Leibovitz</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Harry &amp; the Potters</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Poe Bug</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Three from Castellar</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">DVD Dementia</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">UR: Mott &amp; Cohen</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Lend Me Your Ears</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Piers' Passions</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Worst Used CDs</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Alice in Sunderland</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Summer Reading Staff Picks</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Kiss Me Like A Stranger</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Mysterious Benedict Society</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Foolishness of Not Being Afraid</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Write Your Novel</a></li> </ul>

[Editorial](#) | [Contributors](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

**Back Issues: [01](#) / [02](#) / [03](#) / [04](#) / [05](#) / [06](#) / [07](#)**

UATW! Copyright © 2007, Nut Man Productions, Inc

15637