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Winnipeg Free Press

September 28, 2010

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MUSIC

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

New Music / LEONARD COHEN

By: Staff Writer

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LEONARD COHEN/ BIRD ON A WIRE (CONVEYER CANADA)

LEONARD COHEN/ SONGS FROM THE ROAD (SONY MUSIC)

Taken together, these two projects offer a fascinating comparison of an artist at the birth of his renown and at the peak of his fame.

The first is a DVD of a 95-minute film which the celebrated British music documentarian Tony Palmer made of Cohen's European tour in the spring of 1972. The second is a 12-song live album cherry-picked from dates in the U.S., Canada and Europe during Cohen's landmark tour of 2008-'09.

The Cohen whom Palmer followed in 1972 had already released three brilliant albums, but at 37 he was better regarded in Europe than in North America. Despite the idolatry shown him (especially by women) both onstage and off, he appears insecure and painfully modest about his talent.

In one segment, he and his bandmates (including the great producer Bob Johnston, who played organ on the tour) agonize over whether they should return their fans' money because their concert sound system proved inaudible.

Fast forward 36 years, and technology has improved to the point where Cohen's live shows, including the one in Winnipeg in April, 2009, are marvels of sonic purity, and the man himself, his voice a couple of registers deeper, but his graciousness intact, occupies a top rung in the tower of song.