

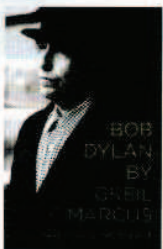


### RAT GIRL: A MEMOIR

BY KRISTEN HERSH (PENGUIN) ★ ★ ★ ★

When Kristin Hersh was 18 years old, she attended an oceanside university by day, and played gritty clubs with her band Throwing Muses by night. The daughter of eccentric hippies was also intermittently homeless, diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and, around the same time her band was offered a record deal, Hersh discovered she was pregnant.

You could say 1985 was nothing short of nightmarish for the gifted indie rocker, but her vivid descriptions and humorous, stream-of-consciousness delivery make this memoir a hypnotic read. With keen insight into Hersh's bizarre songwriting process – the songs she heard went from being “floaty angels” to “devils... that grab your face and shout at it” – and a colorful cast of characters, including actress Betty Hutton, “monochromatic Mark,” and all the painters and junkies she meets along the way, *Rat Girl* feels like a Faulkner novel set in New England. And Hersh's poetic song lyrics appear in the text at relevant moments to heighten the surreal journey for any longtime fan. – LISA HEFFERNAN



### BOB DYLAN BY GREIL MARCUS

(PUBLIC AFFAIRS) ★ ★ ★ ½

Since the mid-1960s, critic Greil Marcus's busy free-associative mind has manufactured the sort of voluptuous overstatement that defined the *Village Voice*'s style in the 1990s and even influenced the post-millennial *Pitchfork* review. This collection includes every Dylan-centric piece that Marcus penned from 1968 to the present. Marcus's early reviews in San Francisco-era *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* suggest the

archetypal baby-boomer Bobophile: shouldering Dylan with the responsibility not only for the revolutionary promise of the 1960s but also for its failure – brought on by Dylan's more personal (and less activist) lyrical statements of the 1970s. Eventually, Marcus takes a more forgiving stance: In the '90s, he seems merely grateful that Dylan is still functional. Thankfully Marcus's occasional lightning flashes of nerdy brilliance tend to cancel out his more nebulous attempts at producing meaning. Marcus doesn't simply tell you what he thinks about Dylan; he tells you what *you* think about Dylan. – MICHAEL SANDLIN

### LEONARD COHEN BIRD ON A WIRE

(MVD ENTERTAINMENT GROUP) ★ ★ ★ ★

SONGS FROM THE ROAD

(COLUMBIA/LEGACY) ★ ★ ★ ½

If you liked *Don't Look Back*, you'll love this: A true testament to a legend's artistry, director Tony Palmer's (200 *Motels*) *Bird On A Wire* is an

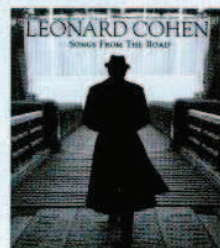
utterly essential addition to any Leonard Cohenophile's collection.

Last year, having found and painstakingly restored original footage long thought lost in the sands of time, Palmer has now finished this intimate depiction of Cohen nearly four decades after starting it. The shockingly candid film takes you on a backstage journey with Cohen, his band, handlers and hangers-on, as they trek from Ireland to Israel on a 20-date tour in 1972.

While riding shotgun with Cohen & Co., you witness the songwriter reading poetry, uncontrollably wooing women, swimming in the nude, eating acid on his way to the stage and other road-worn indulgences. But that's not what makes this such a compelling rock doc. Of course, there are the 17 spellbinding performances of outright Cohen classics like “Avalanche,” “Chelsea Hotel” and “Famous Blue Raincoat” – each as bone-chilling and hauntingly serene as their original recordings, if not more. But, those aren't what most compel the viewer either. What makes *Bird On A Wire* so engrossing is the way it captures Cohen's growing unease and anxiety while he was ascending to the peak of his popularity.

As the tour progresses through malfunctioning sound systems, unruly audiences and bumbling interviewers, Cohen struggles to come to grips with the gravity of his own success. It's a struggle that increasingly finds its way to the stage, plaguing some performances and yielding sheer brilliance in others – culminating in Jerusalem, where Cohen has a mid-show meltdown. Claiming he “can't fake it,” he retreats to his dressing room, deathly afraid to return to the stage, beyond which thousands of fans feverishly wait. He's eventually talked off the ledge and persuaded to finish the show, which he does with a stunning rendition of “So Long, Marianne” that ends with him in tears.

At 73, Cohen seems a little more well-adjusted on *Songs From The Road*, a more traditional tour souvenir. It's a live CD/DVD combo featuring 12 performances, culled from his acclaimed 2009 world tour. If you saw him play in the flesh, here's a chance to relive a dozen memories. And if you're still kicking yourself for not pulling off a diamond heist to get enough money for tickets, here's a glimpse into what you missed. On those terms it's well done, but *Songs* doesn't offer the revelatory riches and fascinating insights into Leonard Cohen, the man, that dominate *Bird On A Wire*. Still, despite a misplaced alto solo here and there, the 2009 performances – taken from locales as widespread as Tel Aviv and Coachella – show Cohen crooning in the moments of vocal tenderness and well-aged beauty that made his high-ticket prices worth every last penny. – ADAM GOLD



LEONARD COHEN  
BIRD ON A WIRE



“The Cure for What Ails Your Song”  
QUALITY DEMOS & MASTER PRODUCTION

the  
**Song Doctor**<sup>®</sup>  
DR. ZACK VAN ARSDALE

• Specializing in Lyric & Melody Therapy • Low album rate for 10 songs or more • Plugging Services • Poems to Music

Dr. Zack Van Arsdale, 615-662-0323

6921 Somerset Farms Circle, Nashville, TN 37221

zackvanarsdale@hotmail.com • www.songdoctor.net

Dr. Zack's songs recorded by: Joan Baez, Jerry Lee Lewis, Waylon Jennings (3 cuts), Marty Robbins, James Garner (Rockford Files), Jesse Colter, Dr. Hook's Ray Sawyer, “The Guiding Light” (soap opera), Cornelius Brothers and Sister Rose, Dennis Hopper's biography on A&E/HBO and songs in 3 major feature films.

