



On the Screen

# LEONARD COHEN BOMBS IN THE CITY OF PEACE

WORDS BY CHRIS WATERMAN

# LEONARD COHEN



Or so Leonard Cohen quips about his own musical epitaph sure to be in the next day's papers after he walks off stage during the last show of a 20-city European tour back in 1972. The fact that he and his band were barely into their set, and that while leaving the stage he says to the audience that he is going to "profoundly meditate in the dressing room....And if we can manage, we will be back", lends credence to the inevitable reviews. This is the smooth baritone-voiced enigma as seen in the documenting of that tour on the recently restored for DVD release *Bird On A Wire*.

"I wrote these songs to myself and to women several years ago, and it is a curious thing to be trapped in that original effort, because here I wanted to tell one person one thing, and now I am in the situation where I must repeat them like some parrot, chained to his stand night after night." Uneasy with the spotlight, one starts to understand why Cohen leaves such large gaps in his musical career (2010 is seeing his first tour in 15 years). Still, there are reasons why he is so revered, and with "Hallelujah", perhaps his most well-known and covered song, nowhere to be found or even mentioned in this concert film (seeing as it wasn't released until his *Various Positions* album in 1984), the viewer gets a chance to appreciate the depth of Cohen's writing and performance.

And what of that bombed show? Cohen and the concert goers manage to pull off a peace accord, if not having originally teetered toward conflict. First, he is adamant that the audience be refunded their money. Yet, the audience doesn't want their money back, and they have no intention of leaving. Back stage, Cohen paces in the dressing room. He smells some flowers, commandeers a razor for an impromptu shaving, smokes a cigarette, and finds humor in the situation. As he heads back toward the stage, he is met by the scene of his fans clapping in unison and singing a song to him. Still, that's no way to say goodbye, and the broken-down nightingale delivers the final song: "I'm not just interested in going from city to city to gather the applause of the people. It's only nourishing to me if I can do something to them."

