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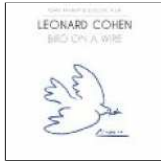
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Bird on a Wire
8/10

There are artists who evoke a feeling of nostalgia, as if they were born to be captured in sepia. But for all the myth making and eulogizing of his latter day career Leonard Cohen does not require this.

Captured here during his European tour of 1972 this is Cohen at his best – still moonlighting as an understated bard, there is something enchanting about the way in which Palmer documents events. The endearing image of the understated bard sits alongside the not so flattering, so this isn't Dylan in Don't Look Back by any means but at times Cohen inhabits a similar realm of aloofness



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In one clip he is offering fans a refund but as the tour wears on the affability fades. And while this is by no means a brattish show of artistry Cohen's warm tone of recent years fades somewhat.

It is undoubtedly the performances that bring Bird on a Wire to life. Beginning with an awe inspiring version of 'Suzanne' and weaving material from his early career between footage from the 32 date stint throughout the film manages to capture the tour, blemishes and all.

Elsewhere 'Famous Blue Raincoat' and 'So Long Marianne' are reeled off perfectly, complete with a wandering preamble and returned cuts. For the music alone this is a stunning film but there is more on offer than a simple soundtrack.

The truth is that here Cohen appears far from the image of refinement projected by his later years. While his intelligence and artistry is still very much prominent the well cut figure of his recent comeback is nowhere to be seen. His complexities and contradictions are highlighted here, perhaps not to the most embarrassing level but they are never the less on show.

As far as appeal goes it's a document of a degenerate time, not on the same lines as Dylan in Don't Look Back, but it's certainly not too far behind. A fascinating document of a poet losing his way.

Dir. Tony Palmer
Leonard Cohen
Isolde Films

Will Metcalfe

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