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TONY PALMER'S CLASSIC FILM

LEONARD COHEN

BIRD ON A WIRE



Bird On a Wire DVD

Studio: MVD Visual
Aug 17, 2010 | [WEB EXCLUSIVE](#)

By Hays Davis



A concert film begins with the plug being pulled on the show due to the singer's encouragement for the crowd to move closer. This might sound like standard rock-flick stuff until you consider that the singer was Leonard Cohen in 1972.

Bird on a Wire, which follows Cohen's European tour during that year, was originally released to theaters in a limited run in 1974 and promptly disappeared. Thanks to the discovery of 294 rusted film cans in a Hollywood warehouse and some help from digital technology, director Tony Palmer was able to rebuild a cohesive whole that is very close to the original version.

With Cohen now decades into his career, it's somewhat jarring to see this much early footage of the

singer/songwriter/poet/author. Conscious of the fact that a camera was following him regularly throughout this 20 city trek, Cohen occasionally feels the pressure of filming (giving up on an attempt to pick up a lady backstage), but never breaks from the personality that takes shape over the course of these 90 minutes. Gentle and soft-spoken, he is also direct and opinionated in his backstage interactions and interviews.

Live performances include such early classics as "Suzanne," "Sisters of Mercy," "Famous Blue Raincoat," and "So Long, Marianne," with a band that includes backup singer Jennifer Warnes and famed Dylan producer Bob Johnston on organ. The concert segments are often interesting for their unpredictability, ranging from the effects of equipment problems to the amusing manifestations of Cohen's varying moods. However, the behind-the-scenes footage is often the most intriguing: the singer handing his own cash back to audience members after a show rife with sound problems; Cohen in tears backstage at the final show and having to be coaxed to return to the stage. And then there's Leonard Cohen the persona, reading poetry aloud about a woman's breasts and then turning in his hotel chair toward a plume of cigarette smoke that is presumably drifting from the off-camera lips of his pen's subject. (www.leonardcohen.com)

Author rating: **7**/10

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