



SONGS OF LEONARD COHEN

The remarkable thing about Leonard Cohen is that one need only mention his name, not the work in question (poem, novel, or now, song) and the reaction is unhesitating and extreme — idolatry or condemnation. The former seems due to an ever-expanding, though undercover, Cohen-cult that devotedly follows the career of that romantic ex-Montrealer and McGill alumnus through his first book of poems *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and his first published novel *The Favorite Game*, his life and loves at Hydra, Greece, to his commercially-successful second novel, *Beautiful Losers*, his several books of poetry, sensing signs of a movement towards singing since Judy Collins and others were recording his songs. The less favorably enthusiastic but equally vociferous group complain about his soppy sentimentality, his pseudo-profundity, and his anal romanticism. Buried beneath the invectives and laudations are a fairly interesting first novel, a tedious but sometimes brilliant second novel, some mediocre poetry, some less mediocre, rather sensitive, perhaps beautiful poetry, and now a record album of ten songs sung by the master himself.

Poems to music

A song may be either vocal music or a poem set to music, neither mode being necessarily inferior. In the case of this new album, titled simply "Songs of Leonard Cohen", the second definition seems more applicable. (Four of the songs appear in his most recent book of poems, *Parasites of Heaven*.) In a time when the non-printed word is considered to be more palatable, this album of melodic poetry ought to be quite popular. The lyrics or words are of uneven

merit while the music is wholly agreeable, though nondescript. And the coupling of words and melody is harmonious enough. Some songs are outstanding for a near-exquisite beauty, songs such as the popular "Suzanne" or "Sisters of Mercy" or the Dylan-like, rather odd "One of us cannot be Wrong". But the whole album merges together in a smooth, tender,

by Eleanor ZORNBERG

almost monotonous sound. Leonard Cohen has a sad drooping voice (to match his sad drooping eyes) which is remarkably soothing.

The themes of the songs are consistent: love and love and man (I) and women (you) and love. And coru comitanly loneliness and suffering and a confrontation with a sort of reality.

The age of lust is giving birth
But both the parents ask the nurse
To tell them fairy tales on both
[sides of the glass

Now the infant with his cord
Is hauled in like a kite
Yes, one eye filled with blueprints
And one eye filled with night.

There is much religious material (Jesus, Joseph, crucifix, lamb, angel, holy, etc.) incorporated for its associational value since love, sex, and religion are usually put together. There is also a questionably strong autobiographical element. Cohen has a kind of sex appeal (permeating all his work) that might liken him to an English Aznavour, but while the sexy Charles can only say "Isabelle Isabelle ha ha (or is it 'hon hon'?) Isabelle", Cohen presents us with provocative images.

Cohen's guitar-work is rather mundane, with conventional strumming. His arrangements — after you recover from the shock finding a female chorus echoing "oohs" — is actually quite effective, with diverse orchestral and blues band bits. Apparently Cohen complained that the arrangements made the songs no longer his, so he expressed some witty doubts about it on the enclosed lyrics sheet: "The songs and the arrangements were introduced. They felt some affection for one another but because of a blood feud, they were forbidden to marry. Nevertheless, the arrangements wished to throw a party. The songs preferred to retreat behind a veil of satire."

Romantic-poetic

Ultimately an album such as this is going to depend on individual taste and preference — I like it. People who like Cohen will love it; people who like folk-romantic-poetic songs should like it. In its genre, there is little that is as intimately lovely as the favorite "Suzanne":

*Suzanne takes you down
to her place near the river
You can hear the boats
/go by
You can spend the night
/beside her
And you know that she's
/half crazy
But that's why you want
/to be there*

*And she feeds you tea and
/oranges
That come all the way
/from China
And just when you mean
/to tell her
That you have no love to
/give her
Then she gets you on her
/wave length
And she lets the river
/answer
That you've always been
/her lover
And you want to travel
/with her
And you want to travel
/blind
And you know that she
/will trust you
For you've touched her
perfect body with your
/mind.*

And it seems strangely appropriate that the last sound we hear from Cohen (at the end of the final song on side two) is an endearing wail.

Sir
rief
An
ng-
An
ited
by
e to
Sir
l for
up a
t of
tatus

where
ed to
ch —
mbar-
Que-
smile
or too
n the
ars on
ingual-
ry sa-
have
n their

ualism
e floor;
quest of
which
ir chan-
e union
ants had
anguage
McGill's
was ac-
session,
ng ques-
Are they
ow?"

ent yes.

French-
in UGEQ,
congress-
s year at
s congress
a two lan-
ne agenda
it through
failed to
ity to even

QUEBEC

, Sir Geor-
e the show
ng for the
in English
the primary
ow the Eng-
participate
the develop-
ety." A half-
silence gave
. The motion

page 13)