

Cultural Daily

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Boogie Street: Leonard Cohen Revisited

Guy Zimmerman · Wednesday, August 31st, 2011

I remember lying around in the living room of the house on West 3rd Street in Lexington, Kentucky where the phonograph, the record player, commanded the space below the windows that looked out toward the holly tree. I remember the album covers stacked beside the speakers – 12×5 by the Rolling Stones, The Beatles' *Abbey Road*, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* and many others that were only slightly less emblematic of that era. Set apart a little in my memories is the album cover with, on the b-side, the picture of the naked woman engulfed in flames. Dark haired and voluptuous, the woman raised her eyes toward heaven, transfixing my ten year old imagination with her beauty, her nakedness, and with the mystery of the broken chains that hung from her wrists. When I turned the album cover over I could contemplate the face of the singer, a close shot, the focus a little soft, of a man with dark hair and liquid, sensual eyes that made a strong impression, I could tell, on my older sister. The songs on the record seemed almost old-fashioned, the lush imagery salvaged from melodrama by the singer's precise phrasing – the way his voice relaxed into its own depths and broke a little, not taking things too seriously but never ironic in its sincerity either. On the one hand there was the sense that these songs were offerings, confessions that moved as far as they could in the direction of prayers, and on the other hand they made no such extravagant claims and were content to remain ordinary ballads with catchy melodies – no big deal.

Thirty years later, in 2001, the singer's new CD arrived, a Christmas gift I think, from my older sister probably. *Ten New Songs* it was called. I listened to it once or twice but it didn't grab me. I thought the singer-songwriter – Leonard Cohen – had lost his edge...

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