

## LEONARD COHEN: still Unifying Hearts

Exclusive for SPIRIT - A SMILE IN THE STORM: "Music is the emotional life of most people" Leonard Cohen (1935 - 2016)



Leonard Cohen in Perth (Australien). Foto von Greg Ross für SPIRIT - EIN LÄCHELN IM STURM [www.spirit-fanzine.de](http://www.spirit-fanzine.de)

It is a rare musical talent that not only endures, but like a fine red wine, gets even better with age. Cohen's voice has long been a paradox, a baritone that could never compare to the rich soaring majesty of a Scott Walker, Cohen's early voice was nasally and reedy, but at the same time, riveting and hypnotic. In one song, he wrote . "your words do not compel me ." but they did and they do. Aided with an abundance of cigarettes and whiskey, in equal measure, over time, that reedy whine became the commanding grave, gravelly voice of a God.

With lyrics and poems that drove deep into the heart of love, lust, war, lies and life, the words became the songs, the songs became the words and the songs became cogent sermons that speak to people all over the world.

Leonard came into my life in late 1967 / early 1968, I was a 16yr old boy in Auckland, New Zealand. At that stage still blown away by Dylan's magnificent Highway 61 Revisited, nothing had prepared me for that, not even the Stones, Scott Walker was taking those of us who wanted on a glorious journey through Jacques Brel's work and the Moody Blues were laying down beautiful symphonic rock albums, musically, it couldn't get any better . or so I thought!

Then one night, New Zealand's pirate radio station Radio Hauraki, played Leonard Cohen's Suzanne. I was as stunned as when I first heard Dylan's LIKE A ROLLING STONE.

It's often said a picture paints a thousand words, but here was someone who could paint vivid pictures with a few spare, carefully chosen words.

Elvis would leave the building, Scott Walker would give it all away, the Stones decided to do Ground Hog for eternity and Dylan became erratic, but Cohen just got better. Looking back, his work has been the soundtrack for my life for the last 50 years, two years ago, his songs, true to his Unified Hearts symbol, led me to marriage.

The chances of Ann and I ever meeting had to have been almost zero - I bought my first Leonard Cohen album almost a decade before she was born. Home in the German hamlet of Warendorf, her mother would often play Cohen albums, but it wasn't until Ann was a visiting student at Oxford during the early 21st century, that her love of Leonard Cohen blossomed. There is a Cohenesque humour to her awakening. Another visiting German student, perhaps following Leonard Cohen's own student maxim that words hopefully lead to the heart of women, gave her a copied tape of Cohen's music. She later found out that he gave all the girls he wanted to date a copy, which rather diminished the cool, intellectual aura he'd strived to establish. She dropped him, but kept the tape, cementing Leonard Cohen as the soundtrack to her life too.



Intensiv wie immer: Leonard Cohen in Perth (Foto: Greg Ross für SPIRIT - EIN LÄCHELN IM STURM [www.spirit-fanzine.de](http://www.spirit-fanzine.de))

By 2009, she was living in Münster, studying for her doctorate and like so many across the world, she was ecstatic, as Cohen had unexpectedly started touring, something nobody had expected (by then he was 75) and reviewers were raving about his three hour plus performances. An avid member of the Leonard Cohen Forum website, she noticed a review I had written of the Perth concert and contacted me.

A love of each other grew to match our mutual love of Leonard Cohen and we travelled around the world, attending his concerts in Dublin, Berlin and Perth. We eventually married in Perth just before Christmas 2014. Our wedding song was Cohen's DANCE ME TO THE END OF LOVE and our cake decorated with his Unified Hearts symbol.

The Perth concert in November 2013 has very special significance for us - fellow Forum members from France and Holland flew out to see the concert and we were able to take a very close friend who was dying of breast cancer to see what would be her last concert event. And although Ann had met Leonard before, I had not has the opportunity. The Gods smiled on us and we met briefly with him, where he graciously signed books and also a photograph I'd taken of him performing in Perth some four years previously. However we were shocked at how frail and unwell Leonard appeared, as we took our leave, we both agreed that the touring had to stop, for whatever reason or reasons, our man was obviously not well. Perhaps, in this personal narrative, it's appropriate that Leonard's final concert was in Auckland (NZ), for that is where my love of his work and the man himself first began.



Signed by Leonard Cohen (Archive Ross/[www.spirit-fanzine.de](http://www.spirit-fanzine.de))

Every two years, the Leonard Cohen Forum meets in a city somewhere in the world, to celebrate Cohen, this year, in mid August, the event was held in Amsterdam, those of us attending were very fortunate, in that Leonard had decided we should have a preview of his new album YOU WANT IT DARKER, three months before it was released - how many other artists can anyone think of would accord their fans such respect?

The tone of the album was indeed dark, I immediately thought of David Bowie's LAZARUS, it was brilliant, but harrowing and obviously a swan song, though I chose not to voice the thought to Ann, or anybody else, we were all over the Moon that our man had released a new album.

And so we find ourselves in late November, Leonard has moved on. I have no doubt he is debating scriptures with his God and music with other Rock Gods, no doubt with an ample supply of Johnny Walker and Château Latour wine. Ann still struggles with his passing, I think it was a merciful blessing and take my hat off to Cohen in sheer joy and gratitude for the work he has left for generations to come. The Forum has new members joining daily, the next biennial meet-up is in Budapest in 2018, every other year, we unofficially meet in Hydra, Leonard's beloved Greek island home in the 1960s.

I suspect the legend will grow to almost mythological proportions over time, our world will not see the likes of our Jewish Buddhist monk again, but as he wrote so presciently:

But you'll be hearing from me baby, long after I'm gone  
I'll be speaking to you sweetly  
From a window in the Tower of Song

[Deutsche Version / German version](#)

Greg Ross for SPIRIT - EIN LÄCHELN IM STURM [www.spirit-ein-laecheln-im-sturm.de](http://www.spirit-ein-laecheln-im-sturm.de) / [www.spirit-fanzine.com](http://www.spirit-fanzine.com) / [www.spirit-fanzine.de](http://www.spirit-fanzine.de) (November 24, 2016)



Just married: The Australian team of SPIRIT - A SMILE IN THE STORM [www.spirit-fanzine.de](http://www.spirit-fanzine.de): Gregg Ross & Dr. Ann-Kristin Aschenbrenner Ross (photo:; Archive Ross)