

★ **Leonard Cohen: The Man Who Saw the Angels Fall****Christophe Lebold**

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Christophe Lebold's biography of one of popular music's greatest songwriters is outstanding, grounding its subject in the historical times that formed him and his art.

Following Leonard Cohen from his childhood in Canada through to his years as a promising young poet and novelist, the book reveals his emergence as a live musician in the late 1960s. It does so without a reportorial overcast, telling the story in the form of an epic odyssey, with each time and place contained with an eye toward adventure. For example, Cohen's time living and writing in the Chelsea Hotel earns an extended comparison to Dante's *Divine Comedy*: his journeying between floors, and the various artists who come and go, turn the hotel into a way station of inspiration and chance encounters. Snippets of Cohen's life and relationships that later came up in songs are treated like symbolic and meaningful breadcrumbs, including the loss of his blue raincoat, his famous dalliance with Janis Joplin, and the letters sent to his muse, Marianne, in Greece.

The book ties many of the themes reflected in Cohen's life and writing to the events of his early years, including his love of women, his Judaism, his mother's battle with depression, and his fascination with Zen and Catholic symbolism. Lebold combines his own conversations with the artist, extensive research, and myriad references to Cohen's poems, songs, and literary touchpoints together to form a cohesive whole. "At the heart of it" all is the story of "an undercover poet who tried to revive mass culture and rock music with the art of King David."

Leonard Cohen is a literary masterpiece—the seminal, comprehensive biography of a multitalented man who wrote more than his share of literary masterpieces himself.

JEFF FLEISCHER (September / October 2024)

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