

LEONARD COHEN

YOU WANT IT DARKER

ALBUM LAUNCH EVENT AT THE OFFICIAL RESIDENCE OF CANADA

LOS ANGELES, CA, USA

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Friends, thanks so much. Some of you have come a long, long way, and I appreciate it. Some of you have driven across Los Angeles. It takes about the same time. Thank you for that too.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Hello.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Chris, thanks for doing this. Appreciate it.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Oh, it's my honor to be here, Leonard.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** You have been so kind to me and so many artists over the years. And on behalf of myself and all those people you have put into the spotlight, I really appreciate it and offer my gratitude.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Thank you, Leonard. Thank you. Thank you for a beautiful album. It's a stunning work, don't you think?

I think the first thing, how are you feeling?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** I said I was ready to die recently, and I think I was exaggerating. One is given to self-dramatization from time to time. I intend to live forever.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** I was so moved when I first heard the album. And it astonishes me that--I mean, most songwriters can't carry their powers past their 20s, and here you are on your 82nd birthday dropping a single and then an album thereafter that is as good or better than anything you've ever done. And I wonder, how have you been able to retain the consistency of quality all these years?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** I don't know. I think that any songwriter--and I think that Bob Dylan knows this more than all of us, you don't write the songs anyhow. So, if you're lucky, you can keep the vehicle healthy and responsive over the years.

If you're lucky, your own intentions have very little to do with this. You can keep the body as well-oiled and receptive as possible, but whether you're actually going to be able to go for the long haul is really not your own choice.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** One of the other things that I thought was really cool about this project is that you were able to work with your son and--.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** --Yes, my son. Well, my son and my daughter. Where is my daughter? My son and my daughter have

both been an incredibly sustaining force, especially through this recent bad patch.

So, I've been blessed and grateful for their company and for their assistance. Adam is a great singer-songwriter in his own right. To have his microscopic attention to my work was a great--really a great privilege.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Adam, I wonder if you could speak to the importance of this project as it relates to your relationship with your father.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** I won't punish you.

**Mr. Adam Cohen:** I was speaking with my wife earlier this afternoon, and she said, "You know, in a way it seems as though your whole life was leading up to a certain preparedness to work on this record." And I knew that what she meant was not my so-called career, but dinners, standing by the side of the stage watching my father work at five, six, seven years old.

But I think more than anything, it's having the privileged vantage point that we all have in this audience, of having listened to his work throughout the years, and the tireless success with which he injects transcendent value into his work and how those of us on the sidelines--who pretend to do the same thing, the same line of work, marvel.

And so, for me to have had the privilege and finally the little capacity to be able to help not only an artist of this

magnitude but who happens to be my father was one of the more outstanding things that's ever happened to my little life. Of course, as my father says, also just being in my father's company was one of the things I also cherish the most; moving, moving, powerful stuff for me.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** We're actually not that tight a family [laughter], but I've expressed my gratitude to my son many times. And his career is far from undistinguished, and it was a great privilege to have someone of this skill bringing this album to conclusion.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** One of the things that--Adam, you and I talked earlier today, and the fact that you--one of the most instrumental parts of being a producer on this album was knowing what Leonard didn't want and kind of having a fast track to the things that you know that he cares for. And I wonder if you could speak to those things, the things that you know he's going to like.

**Mr. Adam Cohen:** I think that was my chief advantage, maybe my only advantage, other than the patience my father showed me on many occasions when I was being microscopic, which is one of my trademarks.

**Mr. Adam Cohen:** Yeah, I mean, the character of the record was very much established by the great Pat Leonard's work.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** And the record didn't start with you--

**Mr. Adam Cohen:** --Oh, no--.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --As producer--.

**Mr. Adam Cohen:** --No, the record didn't start with me at all.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Yeah.

**Mr. Adam Cohen:** The record started long before me.

And the great advantage that I had over everybody else toiling with these great, great pieces of melody, of lyric, of song, were that they had to traverse an unknown, whereas I really had a sense of familiarity with what my father hates, years and years of hearing what he hates in music.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** It's a long list [laughter].

**Mr. Adam Cohen:** To be able to circumnavigate those things, bypass them, and to be able to propose directions and shapes and sounds that I--by osmosis and by proxy and by listening I knew would be more potentially acceptable--that was the advantage.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Yeah.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** You already mentioned Bob Dylan. There is a wonderful New Yorker article that just came out this week, by the way, that you should definitely read by David Remnick. And in the article, David spoke to Dylan, who had some really wonderful things to say about you.

And he actually spoke about something that most people don't really talk about when they talk about your work, and that was the music itself. And, did you see what he had to say--?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** --Yes--.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --About you--?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** --I did.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Yeah.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** It was very generous and very kind.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Yeah. I wondered if you would want to comment on what he said there.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Well, I won't comment on what he said, but I will comment on his receiving the Nobel Prize, which to me is like pinning a medal on Mount Everest for being the highest mountain.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** What happened, Leonard? I mean, did you not get the forms filled out in time? How come...?

The thing that you hear first when you hear this album--as you all did hear it tonight, the very first thing that you hear are these incredibly rich and moving vocals. Now, this was a really inspired choice, and I want to ask you about the choir that is featured on the album. From my understanding, they come from a synagogue that is--.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** --Yes--.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --In Montreal.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Yes. Well, perhaps Gideon could speak to that.

**Cantor Gideon Zelermyer:** If you want me to.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** He's right here.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Oh, I didn't--I'm sorry, I'd never met you before, so I--.

**Cantor Gideon Zelermyer:** --It's a pleasure.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Gideon and--.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --Wait a minute. You guys haven't met yet?

**Cantor Gideon Zelermyer:** No.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** No.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Okay.

**Cantor Gideon Zelermyer:** Nice to meet you.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Gideon was the soloist that you hear on the first song, You Want It Darker. And the choir appears on the first song and on--the other song is called--.

**Mr. Adam Cohen:** --It Seemed The Better Way.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --It Seemed The Better Way. Thank you. Yeah. Yeah.

**Cantor Gideon Zelermyer:** Do you want me to stand?

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --Stand, please.

How did you get the call?

**Cantor Gideon Zelermyer:** It's nice to finally meet you.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** How did you get the call?

**Cantor Gideon Zelermyer:** How did I get the call? Leonard and I have corresponded for the last number of years. And I have been the cantor of Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal for--this is my 13th High Holidays that I survived, passing Yom Kippur yesterday.

And Leonard is a household source of intense pride for our community. His great-grandfather, after whom he's named and who he signs off his e-mails to me, Eliezer, was a past president of our community, as was his grandfather. And I've met many of his--members of his family over the years, and they thought that I might want to be in touch. And I didn't quite know how to make that happen spontaneously other than to wish him a happy New Year a few years back, and we've gone on from there.

And sometime in November, Leonard sent me an e-mail and said, "Wonder how you'd feel about corresponding and collaborating on my new album." And, I shouted all sorts of things that no member of the cloth should ever shout, and then I said--I wrote back and said, "Hallelujah, I'm your man."

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Nice.

**Cantor Gideon Zelermyer:** And from there, Adam and I took it and ran. And together with Howard Bilerman, who's here from Montreal, who is the proprietor of Hotel2Tango, one of the



finest studios in our town, we brought the choir in and made it happen.

And one of the most wonderful exchanges that we've had over the last number of months was when we were recording samples for the first song on the pulpit in the sanctuary of Shaar Hashomayim. And I snapped a picture and sent it to Adam and to Leonard, and they wrote back. And Leonard in particular wrote back and said how many fond memories you have to that room, and how many meaningful occasions in your life and in the lives of your family have happened there.

So, for us to take part in this, a small part in this, is really an honor and a privilege. And I thank you for reaching out.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Thanks so much, Gideon.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Should we go to the questions in the audience?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Sure.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** We have questions from journalists from around the world. And we're going to start with Dan Cairns from the UK with The Sunday Times.

**Mr. Dan Cairns:** I've always wondered which came first? Do you think--your regimen of kind of aesthetic purity and clearing away the extraneous, do you think that was an unconscious

laying--clearing the path to be a writer, or was that a response to being a writer?

I've always been curious, with you, whether the stripping away of kind of material things and wardrobe--having to fuss over a wardrobe, just sticking with something in order to write, whether that came first, or whether it was a response to decluttering so you could write. Does that make any sense?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Nothing in this racket makes any sense to me, to tell you the truth. I've often said if I knew where the good songs came from I'd go there more often.

Everybody has a kind of magical system. You're a writer yourself. Everyone has a kind of magical system that they employ in the hopes that this will open up the channels. My mind was always very cluttered, so I took great pains to simplify my environment, because if my environment were half as cluttered as my mind I wouldn't be able to make it from room to room.

So, I can't really give you--it's a good question, but I can't really give you a coherent answer because --this system has just worked for me. Even though I've had to sweat over every word, it's just my style. Some people, it comes faster. Some people, it comes slower.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Suzanne Boyd from Zoomer Magazine in Canada.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Hi.

**Ms. Suzanne Boyd:** Hi.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** You can stand.

**Ms. Suzanne Boyd:** Oh, I'm a little tongue-tied to be here; so moved by what we just heard. I've listened to it back many times.

And with you two sitting together, I just wondered--you touched on this a bit. And I just wondered, how did these profound themes that are so well distilled in this album amplify your relationship as father and son, because they talk about a legacy and things that are in the past and things that are to come. So, how did that change the dynamic between you, if in fact it did?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Things--if you're lucky, things deepen between members in a family. If you're not lucky, they don't. If you're unlucky, they deteriorate.

I've been lucky. I have close relationships with my few friends and my family members and my grandkids, so, so far so good. I hope it continues to deepen. I have every faith that it will.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Stijn Tormans -from Focus Knack in Belgium.

**Mr. Stijn Tormans:** Yes. The album cover, it's very special. Has it a deeper meaning, the cover? Because I see the cigarette and so--?

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --Yeah, I thought you quit smoking.

**Mr. Stijn Tormans:** Yeah.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Some guys you just can't trust.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** I've got a question also about the cover. The hummingbird came back. The hummingbird was on Recent Songs and it's on The Future, and the hummingbird's on the back of this one.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Yeah.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Does that have any significance?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Always loved those little creatures. Always feel blessed when they appear nearby. There's a magical quality to them.

I finally put one in a song. I'd written a lot of songs with hummingbirds in them. Sharon [Robinson], do you remember one called "Hummingbird Hill"? None of them ever came to anything, but I did write a few lines the last couple of--last month. It went like this.

"Listen to the hummingbird whose wings you cannot see.

Listen to the hummingbird, don't listen to me.

Listen to the butterfly whose days but number three.

Listen to the butterfly, don't listen to me.

Listen to the mind of God, which doesn't need to be.

Listen to the mind of God, don't listen to me." [Applause]

So, I would say the hummingbird really deserves the royalties on that one.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Is that going to turn up on the next album?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** God willing.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Vanessa Guimond from Le Journal in Quebec.

**Ms. Vanessa Guimond:** I spoke with Patrick Leonard a little bit earlier, and he told me that the last song on the record might be like a preview of what could be next, because when you released your last record you said that you already had some songs for the next ones. And I was wondering, is that the case? Can we expect another more orchestral album from you?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Well, I would like to work with Pat in any capacity. I would love to hear his versions. He is such a magnificent composer.

I don't think there is anybody working today with those kind of skills that could translate one of my tunes into that really beautiful chamber music. So, yes, I hope we can come up with something orchestral with some spoken material. And I also, God willing, hope that perhaps another record of songs also might emerge, but one never knows.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Paul Zollo, American Songwriter (USA).

Hey, Paul.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Paul did one--.

**Mr. Paul Zollo:** --Hi, Chris--.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** --Of the best interviews I've ever done--.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --Yes--.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** --Many years ago. I really appreciate that, Paul. I don't know if I've let you know that.

**Mr. Paul Zollo:** Thank you. You just did, and that's a great honor. Thank you, Leonard.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** It's true. And it turns up in a book, Cohen On Cohen, which--or at least part of it does, right?

**Mr. Paul Zollo:** That's right.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Yeah. It's a wonderful interview.

**Mr. Paul Zollo:** Thank you.

Well, Leonard, you made your famous joke, "If I knew where the great songs came from I'd go there more often." You've been doing this for a long time now, writing songs. You probably have more wisdom than a lot of us. Any more idea of where those good songs came from? And do you have to spend a lot--many of your songs took years, as we famously know. Did that happen on this album as well?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Yeah, the fact that my songs take a long time to write is no guarantee of their excellence. It's just the way--it just takes a long time for me. I'm very slow.

And it comes, kind of, by dribbles and drops. Some people are graced with a flow. Some people are graced with something less than a flow. I'm one of those.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Ayala Or El - from Yedioth Acharonot in Israel.

**Ms. Ayala Or El:** Hello.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Hi.

**Ms. Ayala Or El:** I have so many questions to ask you, but because I have only one question I'm going to ask you about your performance in Israel. You've performed several times in Israel. Was it especially moving for you as a Jewish man to perform in Israel?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Well, there's a deep tribal aspect to my own nature. So, when I'm in contact with those deep resources, of course I feel a very special kind of nourishment. So, it is different. It is different because it arises from very deep wells of affiliation.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Pablo Ximénez de Sandoval from El Pais in Spain.

**Mr. Pablo Ximénez de Sandoval:** Good evening.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Good evening.

**Mr. Pablo Ximénez de Sandoval:** Well, there are several religious references in the record, which is not uncommon. I wanted to ask you what's the importance of religion in your life at this stage of your life. Has it increased, decreased? Is it different?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** I've never thought of myself as a religious person. I don't have any spiritual strategy. I kind of limp along like so many of us do in these realms. Occasionally I've felt the grace of another presence in my life, but I can't build any kind of spiritual structure on that.

So, I feel that this is a vocabulary that I grew up with. This biblical landscape is very familiar to me, and it's natural that I use those landmarks as references. Once they were universal references and everybody understood and knew them and located them. That's no longer the case today, but it is still my landscape. I try to make those references. I try to make sure that they're not too obscure. But outside of that, I can't--I dare not claim anything in the spiritual realm for my own.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** Ms. Akemi Nakamura from Rockin On Magazine in Japan.

**Ms. Akemi Nakamura:** Hi.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Hello.



**Ms. Akemi Nakamura:** Thank you very much for such a powerful, moving album. One of the lyrics--one of the most moving lyrics is when you sing "I'm ready, my Lord." Can you describe the moment when you came up with the lyrics and melody, or inspiration?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** I don't really know the genesis, the origin. That--Hineni, that declaration of readiness no matter what the outcome, that's a part of everyone's soul. We all are motivated by deep impulses and deep appetites to serve, even though we may not be able to locate that which we are willing to serve.

So, this is just a part of my nature, and I think everybody else's nature, to offer oneself at the moment, at the critical moment when the emergency becomes articulate. It's only when the emergency becomes articulate that we can locate that willingness to serve.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** --That's getting too heavy. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** How do I follow that up?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** No, strike that or--.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** --Leonard, we want to thank you for being here. And we love you.

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Thanks so much, friends.

**Mr. Chris Douridas:** We have to wrap it up. Is there anything you want to say in closing?

**Mr. Leonard Cohen:** Just thanks for coming, friends, and I really appreciate it. And I really appreciated your standing up when I came into the room. And I hope we can do this again. I intend to stick around until I'm 120. [Applause].