

# Records



Leonard Cohen, singer/songwriter

Cohen himself has expressed dislike for the album although he thinks it may represent some sort of artistic landmark.

## DEATH OF A LADIES MAN

Leonard Cohen  
Songs by Spector & Cohen  
Produced by Phil Spector  
(Warner Brothers Records)

Leonard Cohen is known for writing bitter-sweet tunes with sometimes insightful, sometimes amusing lyrics, which he renders in a plain but appealingly plaintive voice. Too bad you can barely hear either one on *Death of a Ladies Man*, the new album on which he shares equal billing with his producer, the legendary Phil Spector. A generous gesture on his part, perhaps, but don't forget that half the credit carries half the blame, and Leonard is able to claim that once Phil got hold of the tapes, the entire project was out of his control.

Spector, of course, made his mark as well as his first million in the early '60s as the Boy Wonder who produced groups like the Ronettes and the Crystals. It was then that he introduced his famous "Wall of Sound" technique that blended voices, brass, violins, guitars, drums and glock-

enspiels into one melodious swell of noise. But with the advent of British Rock, Spector found himself squeezed out of a steady job and forced to resort to the occasional free-lance assignment, most notably the Beatles' "Long and Winding Road" and the first couple of John Lennon albums. However, while Phil may have been sufficiently awed while in the presence of the ex-Beatle to give him a share in the mixing, Cohen exerted no such influence.

The result is a weird clash of music at odds with itself. Cohen is either drowned out by the excessive orchestration, or else dogged insistently by the use of instrumental frills where a lone voice would have served as well, if not better. Breathless is the best way to describe the relentless accompaniment, which, unlike the sparse arrangements on Cohen's previous records, doesn't pause for a minute. The beat never lets up to allow for the moment of silence that was obviously intended by the author.

Perhaps realizing his predicament once Spector got into the studio, Cohen has included more than the usual amount of "throwaway" numbers that serve primarily as one-shot jokes. Among these are "Memories" (which employs a cumbersome musical crescendo leading up to the ludicrous hook line, "won't you let me see your naked body?") and "Don't Go Home With Your Hard-On" which is probably saying enough right there. Cohen is joined on this particular cut by Allen Ginsberg and Bob Dylan, who can't be heard above the din any more

than he can.

A few of the other songs are bearable, and the title tune itself is almost good, except that it practically begs for a simpler arrangement. Cohen himself has expressed dislike for the album although he thinks it may represent some sort of artistic landmark. (Something on a par with smell-o-vision, perhaps?).

A lot of famous names lent their talent to help him out on this record, but like they say, with friends like that...

—P. Hertel

P. Hertel reviews films and music for IN THESE TIMES.

## A WORKING MAN CAN'T GET NOWHERE TODAY

Merle Haggard  
(Capitol Records)

## AIN'T IT SOMETHIN'

James Talley  
(Capitol Records)

In the era of the good time sound, the appearance of an album with real social lyrics is good news. When two show-up, it calls for a celebration.

James Talley and Merle Haggard both sing about what Woody Guthrie called "the plain thoughts of plain people." They write honestly about real, day-to-day joys and heartaches of working people. Talley is a virtual unknown while Haggard is king of the country hill. Both have recently released socially conscious albums, for which neither is likely to get the attention he deserves.

Merle Haggard's *Working Man Can't Get Nowhere Today* is the best C&W album of the year. Lyr-

ically, it's one of the most significant albums of the decade. Here is an accepted superstar saying loud and clear that things just don't work in the system.

*I owe every dime I make to every soul I know*

*The higher up I reach the further down I go*

*This old broken heart of mine is all I got to show.*

To be sure, Haggard offers no solutions, and no one will confuse him with Karl Marx. But then Karl never had the backing of Norm Hamlet on pedal steel and the impeccable Roy Nichols on guitar. Led by this duo, the Strangers show why they're the tightest back-up band in the business.

The rest of the disc is a foray into the best white country blues of the last 40 years, including:

- a moving tribute to the late Lefty Frizzell, an early Haggard influence;
- "Blues for Dixie";
- a rendition of "Moanin'"

that's so crisp you'll think you're listening to the Hank Williams original.

Some people will consider this album an attempt at some sort of country chic. It's not and hasn't had an easy time getting on the AM charts. They remember Haggard as the author of "Okie from Muskogee" and "Fightin' Side of Me," and forget that Merle Haggard was also writing songs like the inter-racial love story, "Irma Jackson" and "Tearin' the Labor Camps Down." He is a very complex, easily misunderstood human being, who refuses to be pigeon-holed.

It would be nice to say that Merle has turned left. That's not the case, as the albums finale clearly demonstrates. In the sure-to-be-misunderstood "White Boy," he returns to convenient scapegoats like welfare and asserts that "if you want to get ahead, you gotta hump and git it."

Contradictory? Probably. But

also an honest reflection of the nature of much of the American working class. If you want to find out where much of Middle America is at, this album is as good a place as any to start.

*Ain't It Somethin'* is James Talley's fourth album. As in his earlier classic, *Tryin' Like the Devil*, which was a milestone in the fusion of social lyrics with high quality Nashville music, Talley sings about people's problems in a way that hasn't been matched since Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger teamed up about 40 years ago.

While the lyrics are not as overtly political as in *Devil*, Talley's populist message rings true, particularly in his songs about the ill-fated plutonium workers from "Richland, Washington" and in a touching, tragic paean to the "Poets of the West Virginia Mines."

As always, Talley is backed by some of the finest musicians in Nashville today, including Josh Graves on dobro, Johnny Gimble on fiddle and mandolin, and the omnipresent Charlie McCoy on harmonica.

Talley's commercial appeal has not yet matched his artistic ability. After dismal sales on his first three albums—largely the fault of poor promotion—Capitol apparently decided to change his image. Judging from the album, they hadn't agreed on a new identity when they went into production. The result is a musical grab-bag. There are several country songs (of which half are country blues, half country rock) and a couple of folk tunes. The rest is brassy, bleached soul. Individually these songs are fine; collectively they create a blurred image.

Let's hope the next time out, the producers and the promo people can get it together and get Talley the commercial success so long overdue.

—Sheldon Sunness

Sheldon Sunness is a free-lance writer in New York.

## CLASSIFIED

WHAT'S YOUR LINE GRAPHICS is the 4-woman TYPESETTING COLLECTIVE of the San Francisco Printing Cooperative. We exist to provide the progressive community and political movement with good quality, affordable typesetting for everything from books to letterheads. Call or write for an estimate and brochure: 964 Valencia, S.F., CA 94110, (415) 647-8053. (Commercial rates 45% higher.)

A CALENDAR OF CASES 1978: Sacco-Vanzetti, Scottsboro Boys, Wounded Knee, American Concentration Camps, others. Photos, art by Shahn. Refregier. Wall hanging. \$5.75. Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, #5, Box 673, Berkeley, CA 94701.

HELP WANTED: Distributors needed for Albuquerque, Boston, Detroit, Milwaukee, Syracuse & San Diego areas for IN THESE TIMES to make weekly deliveries to bookstores and other outlets. Person should have transportation and commitment to make the paper a success in your area 'cause we can't offer you much. Contact Nick Rabkin, In These Times, 1509 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60622.

STUDENTS—Help build the socialist movement on your campus this fall. Become a campus distributor of IN THESE TIMES. Pay 20¢ per copy and keep 20¢ more. It won't pay your tuition, but it won't hurt. Write ITT Circulation Dept., 1509 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60622.

1978 GUARDIAN CALENDAR—Beautifully illustrated radical history calendar highlights important dates of people's struggles in the U.S. and around the world. \$3.50 each. (\$2 each on orders of 10 or more). Write Guardian, Dept. 1, 33 W. 17th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10011.

SOUTHERN AFRICA monthly magazine covering the struggle for liberation. Current news, political and economic background. Individual \$8; institutional \$18/yr. 156 Fifth Ave., Rm 707T, NY NY 10010.

CLASS STRUGGLE AND LATIN AMERICA: For a comprehensive analysis read LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES. Recent issues on Peru; Women; Dependency; Puerto Rico. \$12 year; \$3.50 current issue. P.O. Box 792, Riverside, CA 92502.

FOR RENT—4th floor of IN THESE TIMES office building. Ideal for studio or offices. 7 rooms. \$200 includes utilities. 1509 N. Milwaukee Ave. Chicago. Call (312) 489-4444. 9 am-5 pm.

HEALTH ACTIVISTS' DIGEST—News and analysis of health issues of critical importance to health activists. \$2.25 for three issues a year. NAM health Commission, 19920 Lichfield, Detroit, MI 48221.

CLASSIFIED RATES:  
\$.15 per word.  
10% Prepaid Discount.



# How to Exceed in Show Business



Francois Truffaut

Continued from page 24

Guide, some Cubans-in-Miami weeklies, a number of Canadian papers, and one man who was identified as a free lance.

What everyone of these 150 members of the free press got for his/her time and trouble was:

- first class air fare to New York and back
- two nights in a hotel room, at \$50 plus per diem,
- all the food and drink he/she could "reasonably" consume,
- a press kit in the form of a handsome brief case containing a GE tape recorder and six cassettes,
- souvenir paperweight with ball-point pen,
- an expense account to cover out-of-pocket "incidentals."

Unfortunately, those who tried out their tape recorder before leaving the "hospitality suite" discovered that they didn't work. Most of the cassettes had been "safeguarded against erasure" and would not record until scotch tape was pasted over the safeguard slots, and most of the batteries were either dead or so close to it that they only lasted through 15 minutes of the press conference for which they had—presumably—been provided.

There was a good deal of chest-swell-ing at that conference on the subject of

the technological achievements of western civilization as evidenced by the "production values" of CE3K (as it is called by the initiate). The boasts will not be quoted verbatim because the tape recorders, even those with brand new batteries, had a range of about half the average distance to the speakers' platform. And the pen in the souvenir paperweight didn't work very well either.

The effect of all this largesse on the audience that filled the Ziegfeld Theater for the screening of *Close Encounters* can only be deduced from the behavior of individual members of the press corps and an examination of what they wrote when they got home.

The college and countercultural editors seemed adversely affected, at least on the first day and evening. They did a good deal of frowning and muttering to each other while waiting for elevators or service in the bar, and showed up for the theater in belligerently informal attire.

Older and more cynical characters simply wallowed in the trough, testing the elasticity of the term "reasonable." One man confessed at breakfast that he and his wife had eaten (and drunk) \$70 worth of dinner and been so afflicted by their own gluttony that they could hardly sit through the film.

But no one got up and walked out. Applause was positive, but nothing like as loud as the sound that preceded it. And all the talk one heard as one struggled toward the exits was about what had happened to Columbia's stock when *New York* magazine printed a panning on the basis of a sneak preview in Dallas.

The next morning came the real hype: the televised press conference, presenting a panel of personalities:

- the film's two leading actresses;
- the four-year-old actor whose fate provides the principal suspense of the scenario;
- the highly-publicized writer/director, Steven Spielberg (*Jaws*);
- the two producers, Michael and Julia Phillips (no longer Mr. and Mrs.);
- Douglass Trumbull, director of special effects, also billed as "the next Walt Disney";
- and Dr. J. Allen Hynek, professor of astronomy at Northwestern University and head of the Center for the Study of UFOs.

They were all agreeable, modest, sincere and personable. Most took the occasion to say how much they admired some-one—usually Spielberg. (He admired

Trumbull.) And all (except the four-year-old) spoke reverently of the "privilege" of having been associated with this tremendous "breakthrough."

Even before Dr. Hynek came on with his hard facts routine, it was clear that CE3K is not to be treated as science fiction. Such a visitation from outer space is—in Spielberg's phrase—"something that may already have taken place" without our being informed of it. (The heavy in the film is the Army, which is suppressing the truth we all have a right to know.)

Melinda Dillon, who plays the mother of the child temporarily kidnapped for observation by the "aliens," confessed to having had what she now realized was an "encounter," long before she was cast in the role. It obviously affected her. "The first time I saw the mother ship when we were shooting," she said breathily, "it was like I was seeing God."

And producer Julia Phillips admitted to having "this fantasy where we were 'planted' to make this film to get the world ready for something like it to happen."

Not to believe in the face of these fervent testimonials seemed positively boorish. But a few brave hold-outs tried to entrap Spielberg or Hynek with trick questions like "where did you get the idea for materializing your aliens?"

Spielberg was hoping for that one. He explained that they had got all the details for everything relating to the UFOs from "actual reports." Blinding light had already been used in 2001, and he felt the audience needed something more, "something humanoid that people could relate to.... What we've got is like a police composite photograph, combining the salient features of a whole bunch of different descriptions.

Dr. Hynek stepped in to confirm that "Steven has done his homework." There is nothing in the film that has not been reported, including the aliens' recessed ears, precognition on the part of selected earthlings, and sunburn on the face and neck of those who are exposed to close encounters.

What all this has cost can't be computed as yet. There are still some subsidiary promotions to finance—like toys, T-shirts, and a *Close Encounter* perfume, as well as all the display advertising and TV for each local opening.

But assuming no cost overrun on an \$8 million dollar budget, what is Columbia getting for what it has paid for?

The answer is that exposure to the

World Press Premiere treatment seems to have left the same sort of sunburn as a swooping space ship.

Within hours of the exodus from the Americana Hotel ballroom, there were stories in major dailies on the reflection of the preview on Columbia's common stock. One story reported a special screening for Columbia's financial analysts who had emerged from the theater predicting that CE3K would make money, though not as much as *Star Wars*.

(One begins to wonder if the "security leak" that lead to the panning in *New York* was not part of the hype.)

Predictably, the more venal—or impressionable—members of the critics' circle wrote puff pieces designed to be quoted in display ads. One was "left tingling from head to foot." Another saw "the heavens brought down to earth." Still another congratulated Spielberg for having "the audience sitting with him in the lap of the universe, ready and waiting for new magic to fall into their lives."

But even the more sober journalists went looking for things to admire. Mostly they found them in the good intentions of the script vis-a-vis visitors from space, and in the brilliancy of the effects. Critics like Vincent Canby of the *New York Times*, who were not stunned into superlatives, took three-quarters of a page to say that they found it entertaining, though not as much fun as *Star Wars*. And Sunday supplement features proliferated like snakes cut from Medusa's head.

The interviewer from the Chicago *Tribune* asked Spielberg if he was "having as much fun now as he had when he was just getting started in the business." And Spielberg, who is 29 and shows his driver's license to prove it, replied that "it's always more fun to be a rising than a dawning star."

Hard-liners like *The Reader* (Chicago) did illustrated articles on the goodies bag. College editors consulted the heads of the physics and math departments on Dr. Hynek's credibility. The foreign press has noted the inclusion of a sequence filmed in India, which demonstrates that UFO sightings are not an exclusive privilege of the West.

And an independent socialist weekly devotes more than a page to proving that for better or worse you get, in the way of coverage, just about what you can afford to pay for. What more could Columbia Pictures ask?

—Janet Stevenson

## TELEVISION

### Over-Under is right on!

#### OVER-UNDER, SIDEWAYS-DOWN

Written by Peter Gessner and Eugene Corr

Directed by Eugene Corr and Steve Wax

With Robert Viharo and Sharon Goldman

"Visions," the PBS-TV series that created such a flap over funding last spring, is off to a good start with *Over-Under, Sideways-Down*. Although the film was made in 1975 (by Cine Manifest, an independent film collective based in San Francisco), times haven't changed enough since then to make this story of blue-collar angst any less significant.

The film looks at the life of Roy, a factory worker in California, who starts out fairly content with his family, job and position on a semi-pro baseball team. Roy gets along well with his fellow workers, even managing to sandwich a few laughs in between the relentless noise and pushing of the assembly line. But the bottom falls out of things when he gets fired for attempting to file a grievance on someone else's behalf with a corrupt shop steward.

He is out of work. His wife (who has already begun to bug

him by going back to school) gets a job to help support them. Roy's fantasies of being discovered by a pro ball scout suddenly seems foolish. He goes back to the factory to lend some half-hearted support to a wildcat strike that has broken out. But as he tells a former co-worker, he knows they can't possibly gain anything because "they (the bosses) own everything."

If Roy is beaten down by the system, his wife is even worse off since she is, in turn, beaten down by him. No working-class hero, Roy rants and raves bitterly when she "abandons" him and the children to find work, threatening his manhood and causing him to throw the furniture around. She endures the abuse because, as she confides to a friend, he needs her. The last straw is not long in coming. When Roy attempts to come back after running away from home, he finds the welcome mat has been pulled in. This time, his wife warns, things will be different.

Films about workers run the risk of easing into one stereotype or another, i.e., either they are noble beyond belief, or uncouth to the same extent. *Over-Under*,

*Sideways-Down* portrays common working-class situations in a style that is neither condescending nor glamorized. (A few "typical" lower-class details, e.g., middle-aged women in white-framed sunglasses and hotpants and knick-knacks of incredibly bad taste did find their way in.)

The principal characters are played by Robert Viharo and Sharon Goldman, who are so natural in the parts that they hardly seem to be acting. The script is well-written; the dialogue realistic without sounding corny; and the direction is low-key, but effective.

The slice of two persons' lives seen in *Over-Under, Sideways-Down* is a depressingly familiar, oft-repeated story for people who gradually come to realize, like Roy, that their "reasons for getting up every morning" has been a pretty flimsy one. In the film, as in real life, there is no readily apparent solution.

—P. Hertel  
P. Hertel reviews films regularly for IN THESE TIMES.

*Over-Under, Sideways-Down* is soon to be released as a feature film. IN THESE TIMES will print an interview with the film's two directors in the next issue.



Robert Viharo