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Michael Giltz
Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: October 15, 2010 07:46 PM

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DVDs: Leonard Cohen-Palooza! (And More)

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I've been a fan of singer-songwriter (and poet) Leonard Cohen ever since Jennifer Warnes introduced me to his music with her classic album Famous Blue Raincoat. Then came one of his most popular albums, *I'm Your Man* -- witty, urbane, sexy and moving -- and I was hooked for good. That meant going back to his earlier albums like *Songs Of Leonard Cohen*, waiting impatiently for new ones (what? he's in a monastery? do they have a recording studio?) and winning over friends to his work, one by one, like a disciple. Strangely, I've never seen him in concert, but thanks to three new DVDs, I have a chance to experience him live and through the perspective of his fellow artists.

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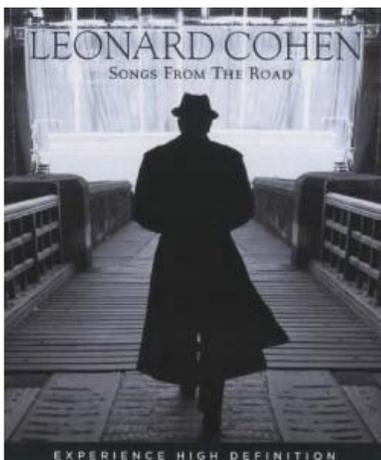
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TONY PALMER'S CLASSIC FILM

LEONARD COHEN BIRD ON A WIRE



BIRD ON A WIRE (15 pounds; TMC) -- At the moment, this DVD is available via director Tony Palmer's website. It's a lost treasure from the early 70s documenting Leonard Cohen on tour. For some strange reason, Cohen wasn't happy with it, had people reedit it (he'd paid for the film) and it promptly disappeared. Now Palmer has restored the movie, which he rightly terms an "impression" of what happened on the tour. It combines concert footage, backstage insanity, home movies and more to create a rather fascinating glimpse of a man overwhelmed by suddenly being treated like a rock star. (The main image I took away was Cohen stepping back every once in a while bemused by the circus around him.) And it captures the oh so earnest tenor of the times beautifully. Cohen invites fans to swarm towards the stage and then chastises security for freaking out. Later, he thanks the "friend" who convinced him to sign away publishing rights to "Suzanne" because -- Cohen insists -- it wouldn't be right to make money off a song like that, a song that was such a gift and a privilege to compose. Palmer is one of the great documentary filmmakers when it comes to music and opera, such as his landmark story of popular music, *All You Need Is Love* from the Seventies. Here's another gem to his credit. [Go here to see the DVDs Palmer has available from his catalog.](#)



SONGS FROM THE ROAD (\$24.98 BluRay or \$17.98 CD/DVD; Sony Legacy) -- Oh how times have changed. Cohen has grown from thanking someone for pushing him into a bad publishing deal to having to push himself out onto the road to make some money after another so-called friend bilked him out of funds and left Cohen broke. But out of this sad circumstance came a heartening world tour in which Cohen played and sang with more assurance to more fans than ever before. This concert picks and chooses the best performances (12 in all) from the entire tour, so a song from 2008 at the O2 Arena in London is followed by another one year later in San Jose, California. It all flows smoothly because of a relative lack of unnecessary editing (by today's standards) and the eternal presence of Cohen and that voice and those lyrics. Perhaps the biggest change is how his public persona has evolved so gracefully. A man who has spent so many decades showered with praise might understandably be even more solemn and serious and full of himself. Instead, Cohen is revealed as puckish, self-deprecating and generous of heart time and again. The result is a fine keepsake from probably the last tour of this magnitude he'll ever take.

PHOTOS: Raven-Symone's Dramatic Weight Loss

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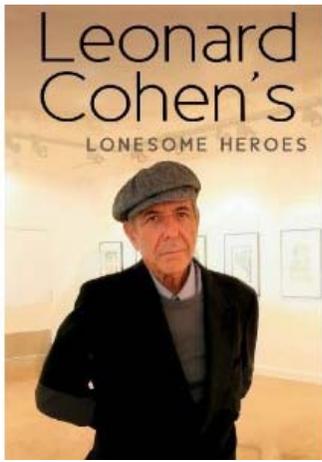
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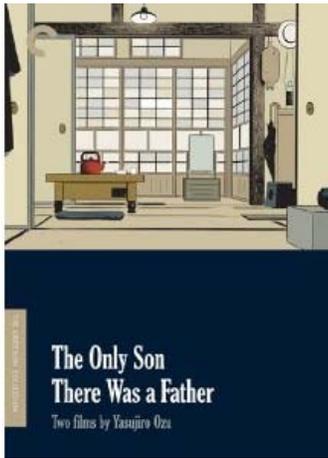
William and Kate's Love Story



There's No Viral Video Like 'Home'



LEONARD COHEN'S LONESOME HEROES (\$19.95; Chrome Dreams) -- But I haven't mentioned the songs, really, have I? Let's leave that to the experts. Lonesome Heroes is a dry academic sort of documentary that celebrates the music of Leonard Cohen. Singer Judy Collins and Anthony DeCurtis of Rolling Stone are joined by biographers, critics, academics, and even a Buddhist monk to discuss their love of songs like "Hallelujah," "Chelsea Hotel," "Waiting For The Miracle" and what it all means and why he's important and so on. You do get some rare footage but it's strictly for the hardcore fan who simply has to have it all and does want nearly 2 hours devoted to parsing Cohen's lyrics. Me, I'd rather spin Various Positions and practice my performance of "Famous Blue Raincoat" for my next karaoke outing.



THE ONLY SON/THERE WAS A FATHER (\$39.95; Criterion) -- I remember many years ago reading that in Japan, Akira Kurosawa was not as beloved as Westerners might imagine, that other more "Japanese" directors than Kurosawa were ranked higher. I assumed this was just sour grapes, the desire to take down a notch someone beloved by others. A prophet in his own town, etc. Who could be better than Kurosawa? Then I began seeing the films of Yasujiro Ozu. First came the late period masterpieces. Then early silent films. And now I'm filling in the middle, such as these two heartbreakers -- one about a mother who gives up everything for her son (1936) and the other about a father so wrapped up in his son he ends up driving the kid away (1942). Criterion presents them with its usual care, from the lovely packaging with illustrations by Adrian Tomine to new video interviews with scholars and very informative liner notes. Another must-have from Criterion.



Michelle Williams on Keeping Heath's Memory Alive

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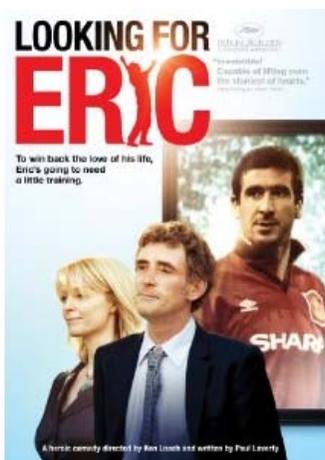


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HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES



MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 VOLUME XIX (\$69.97; Shout) -- I pity the poor MST3K fan. They may think they've got all the witty commentary on bad movies they could possibly need. Isn't 18 volumes enough? But then Shout offers them a very cool Gypsy figurine, panel discussions from fan conventions, mini-posters and of course four bad movies with goofy jokes thrown in. So yes, maybe you don't have to own *Robot Monster*, *Bride Of The Monster*, *Devil Doll* and *Devil Fish*. But you will, won't you? Just make sure you take Gypsy to work so your significant other doesn't know you bought this one too.



LOOKING FOR ERIC (\$24.98; IFC) -- You don't expect a heartfelt comic film from Ken Loach (whose Palme d'Or winner "The Wind That Shakes The Barley" was one of my favorites of the year and far more typically serious). I don't know famed football/soccer player Eric Cantona from Adam. (Pele, I know. Ronaldo, I know. Cantona? An Italian best known for his stellar work with Manchester United? Not a clue.) He's obviously an icon, first and foremost for his play of course but also for his elliptical sayings in interviews and press conferences. But this film isn't about Cantona. It's about Eric Bishop, an aging father of three kids (from, perhaps, two marriages and an affair -- that's a little murky) who realizes he panicked and blew it with the only woman he ever loved. His mates from the post office where he works help him out. And one, a self-help book enthusiast, begins the film with a hilarious scene where each man is asked to take on the persona of someone they admire and want to be like -- the middle aged men choose Frank Sinatra, Nelson Mandela and the like while Eric says immediately Eric Cantona and they all murmur approval. That plus a little pot smoking leads to the moment where Eric is sitting in his bedroom when the real Cantona suddenly appears to offer his manly, eccentric advice. Eric takes courage from Cantona's promptings and makes radical changes: getting rid of the surfeit of televisions in the house, doing a spot of exercise and trying not to panic when around his first and best wife. Now like most people in the US, Cantona means nothing to me. The US equivalent would be Mickey Mantle or (to choose a living person) maybe Dennis Rodman or Roger Clemens before he was exposed as a cheat. But you get it immediately. The movie shows numerous beautiful, legendary goals that Cantona scored and it doesn't take long to buy into his natural charisma, wacky sayings (often lifted directly from quotes Cantona has made in the past, apparently) and inspirational powers. It's like a comic spin on *Field of Dreams*, with a lot more marijuana. Their scenes together are the heart of the film, which is also special because it combines such a typical feel-good comedy with the gritty realism Ken Loach is known for. The finale may be a tad too feel good for what could have been a great film, but it remains great fun. It came and went in the US, perhaps because it was centered around a footballer we didn't know. But that's a shame; idol

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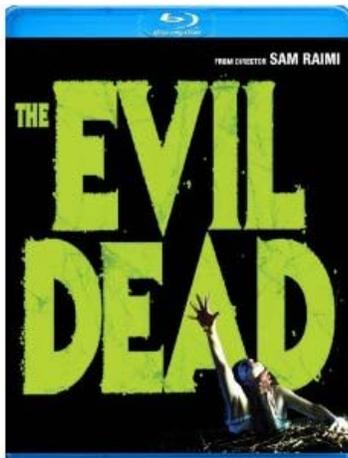
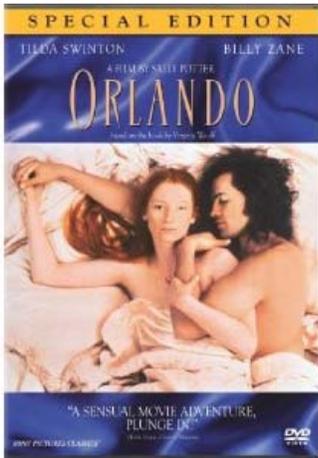








worship and straight talk are universal.



FORBIDDEN PLANET (\$24.98; Warner Bros.)

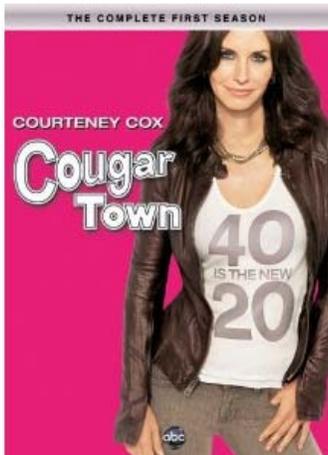
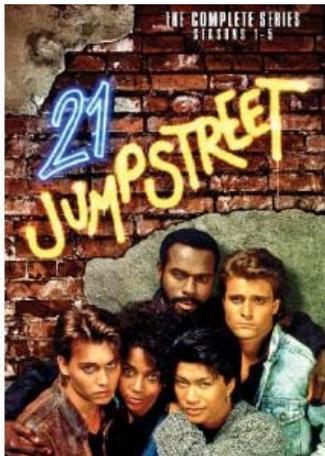
ORLANDO (\$19.94; Sony)

THE EVIL DEAD (\$29.97; Anchor Bay) -- Three gems in new editions. Forbidden Planet is the template for serious sci-fi, thanks to a plot lifted from Shakespeare and the smarts to not make that seem silly, even with Robby the Robot around. Great extras include a second Robby the Robot film called The Invisible Boy, an episode of the TV show The Thin Man called "Robot Client" (guess who appears), a good TCM documentary on sci-fi and more. Plus, it looks great. In Orlando, Tilda Swinton just seems like she's come from another planet. But in reality, she's just a gender-fluid heroine for a new age and Swinton is so deliciously good you just roll with this high concept. Virginia Woolf's novel isn't as much fun and surely it seemed impossible to turn into a film anyway until Swinton came along. Modest extras include some commentary by director Sally Potter and while i have no earlier version to compare it looks fine but doesn't knock me out. (Perhaps that's why there's no BluRay.) The Evil Dead is a movie I haven't paid enough attention to since the classic Evil Dead 2 always beckons. But it's a great gross-out original made with passion and pennies with new commentary from director Sam Raimi and star Bruce Campbell. The limited edition bonus disc with all sorts of extras really was a limited edition and seems to be sold

out. On the plus side, you can find the single disc BluRay on sale for \$10.



LEGENDS OF THE CANYON (\$19.98; Image) -- An amiable excuse for photographer Henry Diltz to capture a lost era when Laurel Canyon in California seemed like the center of the rock universe, encompassing Crosby, Stills & Nash; Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, the Mamas & The Pappas, the Byrds and more. The era is timeless and so is the music -- though most of it won't be heard here or only in brief snatches. Basically, this is a ramshackle gathering of random footage interspersed with anecdotes, mostly centering around CSN, who are also present in front of the camera, along with Van Dyke Parks. Strictly for hippies and those who can't get enough of that time.





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21 JUMP STREET: COMPLETE SERIES (\$69.98; Mill Creek)

AMERICA: THE STORY OF US (\$49.95 BluRay and \$39.95 regular; A&E)

MONARCHY THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$79.99; Acorn)

DEXTER FOURTH SEASON (\$64.99 BluRay and \$49.99 regular; Showtime/Paramount)

COUGAR TOWN FIRST SEASON (\$39.99; ABC)

THE MIDDLE FIRST SEASON (\$44.98; ABC)

SONS OF ANARCHY SEASON TWO (\$69.99 BluRay or \$59.98 regular; FOX)

THE OFFICE SEASON SIX (\$69.98 BluRay or \$59.98 regular; Universal) -- What better way to say goodbye to TV icon Stephen J. Cannell than one of his most successful series? *21 Jump Street* launched Johnny Depp and made crime safe for teenagers again. It's at its most self-conscious best when tackling a "serious" issue in high school. Of course, if there were no serious issues, why would cops be undercover in the first place? The picture quality is minimal but the price is certainly right for all five seasons. *America: The Story Of Us* is a too simplistic look at our country's history, interrupted every five minutes by celebrities like Meryl Streep, Michael Douglas and Donald Trump because they're scared kids will get bored. In stark contrast is *Monarchy*, which takes an equally massive topic but with just serious intent and the right talking heads makes it fascinating. *Dexter* should have run out of steam long ago but apparently the life and loves of a serial killer is richer material than I imagined. *Cougar Town* and *The Middle* are overshadowed by Emmy winner *Modern Family*. But *The Middle* is consistent and *Cougar Town* has the best ensemble on a sitcom right now. Why it's not catching on is beyond me. *Sons Of Anarchy* is catching on and just renewed for a fourth season, so start catching up with this biker saga that should appeal to fans of *The Shield*. Finally, I'd be pleased if I could say that the sixth season of *The Office* was its last. Pam and Jim's wedding was the obvious finale and the show could have left with its head held high. Instead it's plugging along with at least one more season to go (number eight). Too bad.

Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of *Showbiz Sandbox*, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's [available free on iTunes](#). Visit [Michael Giltz at his website](#) and his [daily blog](#). Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called *Popsurfing* and also [available for free on iTunes](#). Link to him on [Netflix](#) and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.

NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week. Also, Michael Giltz freelances as a writer of DVD copy (the text that appears on the back of DVDs) for some titles released by IFC and other subsidiaries of MPI. It helps pay the rent, but does not obligate him in any way to speak positively or negatively of their titles.

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megan2c2b 05:54 PM on 10/20/2010

0 Fans

Letsgetreal, How wonderful that you were able to see Leonard perform in concert. Leonard Cohen's World Tour comes to an end December 12. Tell him what his concerts have meant to you. Please sign the Thank You card that will be presented to Leonard on December 12. Details at the Speaking Cohen website: <http://www.webheights.net/speakingcohen/card.html>

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letsgetreal 05:37 PM on 10/19/2010

1 Fans

and until last year, I thought I was the only one that had never seen Leonard Cohen in concert before. Got the opportunity last year and it was sublime, am eternally grateful to have had that experience. He was smooth, he was cool, and he still has the voice and the moves. Have worn out my Live in London CD. Once you've seen him, you want to see him again. Hope he comes back to tour the USA one more time, at least!

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DustinTime 03:22 PM on 10/18/2010

536 Fans



Giltz... can't you get less a frightening photo?

You look like a Westies mob enforcer.

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DogsRKool2 02:07 PM on 10/18/2010

47 Fans

Michael: I am so glad you wrote about L. Cohen. I quote his words to myself often in my daily life. Thank you for blogging on this. "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in...."

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bessielil 06:50 PM on 10/16/2010

42 Fans

Did you mean to leave out the DVD of I'm Your Man? You mentioned the album, but not the film of mostly covers. Some of the renditions will break your heart. Antony singing 'If it Be Your Will' and so much more

On the other hand, don't break my heart and not fix: TV icon Stephen J. [Cannell]]]

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Michael Giltz 01:07 PM on 10/18/2010



59 Fans



Hi Bessiel,

I enjoy the tribute film I'm Your Man a lot. This was just a rundown of three recent releases, not a career overview of every Cohen-related DVD. But absolutely, any Cohen fan should check that film out as well. I really Teddy Thompson and Martha Wainwright as well on that. Thanks for bringing it up.

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TAC 08:58 PM on 10/15/2010

188 Fans



He's one of the very best. Listening to his Bird On A Wire right now...

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